Diversity management in multicultural learning processes among adult immigrants in Norway

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Abstract

Learning plays an important role in the integration of newly arrived immigrants into the Norwegian society. One challenge in multicultural learning environments is how to discover and make use of diversity in multicultural groups. This is a theoretical article that present some challenges in multicultural learning processes identified in earlier research. Through a theoretical discussion, this paper discusses whether diversity management can have something to add into established adult learning perspectives when it comes to facilitating learning processes that value diversity. Some of the elements in the diversity management perspective seem to have something to add adult learning principles in terms of facilitating communication, enabling co-determination, valuing the learning potential that lies in diversity and create spaces for learning.

Introduction

Learning is one of several important catalysts in the work of integrating newly arrived adult immigrants into the Norwegian society (Berg 2018). The importance of learning the Norwegian language, as well as obtaining qualifications, knowledge, and expertise are emphasised. Such qualifications are intended to contribute to increased participation in work, social life and in the community. Formal education is considered important, but there is an increased understanding of the importance of informal and everyday learning for immigrants to master their new life in Norway and tackle various challenges they face.

In Norwegian integration policy, lifelong learning is integrated into a broad approach with emphasis on a global and modern knowledge society (Båtnes 2012). This means that learning increasingly takes place in heterogeneous groups of adults characterised by cultural diversity. However, teachers leading multicultural learning calls for guidelines that both recognize and values the cultural diversity in different learning contexts (Monsen 2016).

This theoretical article discusses how diversity management can offer a coherent perspective to traditional adult learning principles and be a meaningful strategy to address specific challenges in managing learning processes in a multicultural learning environment. The question is how diversity management as a perspective can be included in organised learning processes aimed at adult immigrants. To elucidate this issue, existing literature describing diversity management is investigated and discussed. First, some key concepts are described and diversity management as a theoretical perspective is outlined. Thereafter, central pedagogical principles within adult learning are discussed in relation to how diversity management can be used to overcome some of the challenges and use diversity as a resource in multicultural learning contexts.

Immigrants in Norway, concepts and arrangements

Immigrants are persons who were born abroad by two foreign-born parents and then immigrated to Norway, while refugees are persons who are granted residence because they either fulfil the conditions of the Refugee Convention, or they are in real danger of being sentenced to death, torture or punishment on return to the country of origin. Some asylum

seekers do not have a need for protection that entitles them to asylum, but there can be strong human considerations that indicate that residence should be granted on humanitarian grounds (https://amnesty.no/asylsokere-og-flyktninger)

'Newly arrived immigrant' means adults between the age of 18 and 55 who have been granted a residence permit in Norway. The residence permit may be connected to asylum, permission on humanitarian grounds, family reunification, or limited stay pending clarification (IMDI 2020). Immigration from countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) is mainly people who are granted residence because they are refugees. There are now close up to 800 000 immigrants in Norway, which corresponds to 14.7 % of the population. 240 239 of these have a refugee background. This makes up 4.5 % of the population. Most refugees come from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea (IMDI 2020).

According to the Norwegian Introduction Act, Chapter 2, § 2 (2003), newly arrived immigrants who have a basic need for qualification must participate in the Introduction program. The Introduction program is a full-time qualification program that usually lasts for up to two years. The main purpose of the program is to learn the Norwegian language and basic qualification related to further education and work. The program also aims to give participants insight into Norwegian society and culture. The Introduction program forms the social context in which meaning are produced and exchanged through Norwegian language teaching. The content of the program is adapted to the individual participant's needs for competence, and an individual plan is drawn up for each participant. The municipal introduction programs are intended to teach participants basic skills in Norwegian language and culture, prepare them for an active working life, and/or motivate them to pursue further education. Municipalities shall provide introduction programmes for newly arrived immigrants who are resident in the municipality. As soon as possible and within three months after a person is settled in a municipality or after a requirement of participation is presented, the municipality shall provide an Introduction program. 20 968 immigrants participated in the Introduction program in 2019 (IMDI 2020). Between 70-80% of those who starts the program complete. Many of those who drop out, quit because they are offered a job. Between 60-70% continue to work or further education after the program. Participants receive financial support during participation (IMDI 2020). The Introduction program are one example of a

multicultural, heterogeneous learning environment that represent a relevant context in this article.

The concepts of inclusion and integration are often used interchangeably, both in political documents and in everyday practice. In anthropology and ethnology, the term integration denotes a social and cultural agreement between the elements of a socio-cultural whole, as well as the processes that produce such agreement. The term also emphasizes an interplay between cultural elements in a society where all individual parts contribute to the life process. Related to the integration concept is the word assimilate (lat.) that means to make equal. That is, an original cultural distinctiveness merges with another distinctive character, so that one can no longer distinguish them from each other. The word segregate (lat.) means to separate. The original cultural distinctiveness is retained in the face of another cultural distinctiveness. They do not mix with each other. The word integrate (lat.) means to merge into a whole, to coordinate into a new entity. In the new unit, the parts remain themselves, just like in a mosaic (Wrench 2007). This anthropological view is particularly well suited as a perspective in this article, therefore the term integration is used (IMDI 2020).

The concept of diversity is often used without conceptual clarification of what it entails (Wrench 2007). The term is part of our everyday language, and it is assigned different meanings depending on context and purpose. According to Berg and Håpnes (2001), the term 'diversity' assumes that something is different, but the difference is understood as something positive. In connection with diversity management as a perspective, diversity is not about whether we are the same or different, but that we are both similar and different at the same time. Differences are seen here from an opportunity perspective, where one goes from defining people as marginalised (i.e., a problem-focused view) to defining people in terms of potential (Berg and Lauritsen 2000).

Diversity management

Diversity management is based on interdisciplinary studies that address philosophical, sociological, economic, legal, historical, and geographical perspectives (Powell et al. 2015, pp. 518-535). However, most research on diversity management is within management and

organisational science (Healy 2015, pp. 15-38). There are various theoretical perspectives behind the approaches to, and practices for diversity management as a strategy. The strategy originated in the United States and has since gained a foothold in, among others, Australia, England, Canada, and Western Europe (Jack 2015, pp. 153-174).

Due to increased globalisation and multicultural societies, the rationale for diversity management has been updated. The main message is to see people's differences as strengths and potential rather than a problem (Berg and Håpnes 2001). Diversity management is a prepared management strategy to promote the recognition and implementation of diversity in organisations and institutions (Abramovic 2016). Diversity management is about facilitating the 'creation of space' for employees to develop themselves and the business they work in, thus promoting leaning through the exchange of experience, perspectives, and ideas (Drange 2014). The argument is that, by developing a diversity strategy, businesses can gain a strategic advantage by helping different groups "exploit" their potential (Dobbin 2009). Diversity management is about the leader actively clarifying expectations and showing interest in the individual employee's competence and needs (Sandal et al. 2013). It involves a management style that emphasises respect and tolerance among employees, good communication, utilising the individual's experiences and expertise, flexibility, and openness towards different perspectives (DiTomaso and Hooijberg 1996).

Some of the definitions of diversity management are strongly linked to potential economic benefits for organisations. However, in relation to adult learning processes, two other definitions have been provided by Thomas (1990, p. 112) and Cox (1994, p. 11). These describe diversity management as facilitating and leading diversity so that one can value the potential of each individual. This supports Drange's (2014) description of diversity management as 'facilitating the space for employees to develop themselves and the business they work in, thus promoting learning through the exchange of experiences, perspectives and ideas'. It is a way to approach workers who span the multicultural context. The strategy is to include and, at the same time, actively apply all the human resources that diversity represents (Holvino and Kamp 2009). It is worth pointing out as a critical element that one might suspect that the humanistic perspectives in diversity management are a 'shell shelter' for economic goals and motives. The concept of "exploit diversity" gives strong associations to such motives.

Drange (2014, p. 4) explains that diversity management can have two types of strategies. The first strategy is to 'dissolve diversity'. This means that the homogeneous group is gradually dissolved by adding diversity, thus moving in the direction of being more individually adapted (Drange 2014, p. 4). The second strategy is to 'value diversity'. This strategy values openness about diversity and the differences become a resource and not a limitation in relation to the various work tasks. Drange 'marks a distinction between having diversity and using diversity' (2014, p. 4). When one sees the utility value of diversity, it also means that one sees value in all people. Employees' experience of inclusion also depends on how they are involved and get to participate in the organisation's communication and information processes, as well as whether they can influence decisions that are made. In the book *Employeeship* (Velten et al. 2008, p. 54), the authors write that leaders can greatly benefit from sharing the leadership with the employees. 'Co-leadership' means that the manager gives the staff room to take initiatives in different areas without the roles being mixed. In this way, employees are engaged, which entails ownership of decisions and a shared responsibility for the development of the organisation. The authors argue that co-leadership creates job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, which have a positive effect on the inclusion process in the organisation.

There is, however, relatively little empirically based knowledge on the effects of diversity management, especially when it comes to the degree of integration and utility value and benefits for individuals. Diversity management research, relevant to immigrants' learning processes, points out that diversity management improves learning, problem solving, deeper reflection, and communication related to relevant tasks. Proponents of this approach believe that differences in terms of knowledge, experience, and perspectives lead to better decisions (Knights and Omanovic 2015, pp. 83-108). According to many international studies that support a positive relationship between heterogeneity and increased learning, creativity, and innovation (Cox 1994), there is great learning potential in heterogeneous groups.

A challenge in diversity management is that it is used as a fashionable term that exists only because it is regarded as a financially profitable strategy (Wrench 2007; Nehls 2005). As pointed out, diversity management holds many different understandings and practices with relatively weak precision. Despite conceptual ambiguities, diversity management is perceived as something positive in the context of inclusion. The challenge is to make diversity

management something more than a slogan or vague perspective – that is, 'give it a clearer direction for individuals and a clearer content' (Berg and Håpnes 2001, p. 46).

Adult learning principles

An important characteristic of adult learners is that they constitute a heterogeneous group with different experiences, values, attitudes, and learning conditions. Differences along different dimensions are thus an important starting point for adults who participate in different learning contexts (reference anonymised). Adult immigrants from different cultures are even more diverse than adults who are raised in Norwegian culture (Norberg and Lyngsnes 2008; Berg 2018). Different life experiences can vary and immigrants can experience conflicting expectations from the Norwegian social order, their family, and their social networks.

Engen (2010) emphasise that teaching immigrants, like other organised learning, should be based on the principle of adapted learning, were the content and choice of methods are based on the individual participant's needs and prerequisites. Adapted training makes learning more effective and provides the basis for a sense of well-being, mastery, and belonging (Engen 2010). Dysthe (2007) claims that the key to customised education lies in a balance between individual and community orientation. Adapting the training means that the teacher utilises the participants' previous experiences by starting with something familiar, close, simple, and/or concrete when presenting something unknown, distant, complex, or abstract. This approach is a well-known educational principle in adult learning (Knowles 1990). The academic content must thus be characterised by the participants' perceptions, experiences, problems and perspectives (Illeris 2003).

Linking the known to the unknown is said to be a prerequisite for understanding, seeing connections, and forming meaning. The teacher must thus have a certain insight into the individual's experience, background, and prior knowledge. Vygotsky's (2001) teaching about the closest development zone and scaffolding is also based on the principle of going from the known to the unknown. It is considered important that learners pre-understanding and prerequisites are explored and utilised in the teaching.

Dialogue is a tool the teacher can use to access the participants' experiences, socio-cultural background, family situation, and so on. The dialogue can build bridges between people and enables communication, contact, and collaboration across possible barriers to understanding (Skrevsrud 2012). In modern pedagogy aimed at adults, it has also been emphasised that adults have a basic need to be treated as independent and self-governing, which contributes to co-determination in relation to their own learning process (Illeris 2003).

Teacher role, class management, and learning environment are considered important in adult learning. In order to create a safe and effective learning environment, it is important that the teacher is authentic, relates to the participants as they are and is aware of the interaction with the participants (Illeris 2003). It is important that the learning environment is warm, shows social tolerance, and displays openness to learning strategies that take into account heterogeneity (Wahlgren 1993).

To summarise: going from the familiar to the unknown, using dialogue and reflection, teacher management, and taking responsibility for one's own learning are the most important pedagogical principles of adult learning. From this perspective, the diversity of multicultural learning environments represents an important basis for dialogue, reflection, and also for good learning processes. In the following section, some of the challenges faced in educational environments dealing with learning and integration will be discussed in the light of adult learning principles.

Challenges in multicultural learning environments

An immediate challenge in multicultural learning environments is that a significant proportion of the immigrants who have a high level of education and expertise, struggle to get their education and expertise recognised (MIPEX, 2013). This difficulty in receiving recognition can be because the content and level of competence deviate from the formal education system in Norway, the competence is not considered relevant, or it can be difficult to assess. Norway is one of the countries in Europe where immigrant's opportunities to get approved education and competence, access to education and career guidance, and opportunities for real-time competence assessment are lowest (MIPEX 2013). The lack of effective approval and

supplementation schemes means that the Norwegian employment sector cannot fully recognize and value the competence of immigrants (NOU 2011: 14). This raises the need for professional, quality-assured, and adapted guidance on education and career opportunities where one can work proactively so that human capital is made visible, further developed, and optimally used and valued.

Multicultural learning environment often consists of participants who do not have a common language for dialogue and communication, and who may not have the same written language either. There is limited documentation on which methods that are effective for language learning among immigrants, but studies indicate that adaptation to the participants, and preferably the individual participant, is what works best on the individual language learning (Langøien, Nguyen and Berg 2020).

Another major challenge relates to facilitating learning in multicultural learning environments. Strategies of assimilation, segregation or integration can be used by the newcomer himself, or they can be used by the society or the authorities that receive him or her. Assimilation occurs when individuals adopt the cultural norms of a dominant or host culture, over their original culture. Separation occurs when individuals reject the dominant or host culture in favour of preserving their culture of origin. Separation is often facilitated by immigration to ethnic enclaves. Integration occurs when individuals are able to adopt the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while maintaining their culture of origin. Integration leads to and is often synonymous with biculturalism (Berry 1992).

Marginalization occurs when individuals reject both their culture of origin and the dominant host culture. The results of these strategies can be very different. Some end up in isolation, others in innovation. There are Immigrants who try to retain their cultural background and their original language while adapting and learning the host country's language and cultural codes. But there are also examples of more positive results. The meeting between old and new cultures can lead to innovation, were the meeting between different cultural entities can lead to the emergence of something new that was not one of the original parts (Berry, 1992). Such result is the main perspective behind integration efforts in Norway.

Important requirements for an effective learning environment for adult immigrants are engagement, emotional attachment, teacher support, clear goals, and participatory influence. Norberg and Lyngsnes (2008) describe the requirements for a good learning environment by referring to the democratic conditions Knowles (1990) argues must be present when facilitating adult learning. Key terms used by Knowles include interest, experience, knowledge, and situations. These elements make it possible to develop teaching programmes that meet the needs of the participants to a greater extent, which means that the participants feel that the teaching is relevant and that the individual is heard and attended to. Knowles claims that democratic values are at the heart of a good learning environment. He has operationalised these democratic values into four basic conditions that must be present in adult education (Knowles 1990: Norberg and Lyngsnes, 2008, p. 79): respect, co-determination, freedom of expression, and shared responsibility. When these foundations are to be adapted for adult immigrants, Knowles (1990) can again be used to clarify how the educational content should be designed using elements from diversity management as a perspective. Participants should be involved in joint planning, diagnose their own learning needs, be encouraged to formulate their own learning goals, be helped to create an individual learning plan, and entered into learning contracts (Knowles 1990).

A fourth main challenge is how to use immigrant's previous experiences when helping them to acquire new knowledge. What experiences are relevant and how do you use experiences that can be difficult, traumatic, or provocative? By communicating and using dialogue in learning, experiences that can create anger, fear or resistance to learning may come to the fore because the experiences are not recognised as relevant in the learning environment. Recognising different emotions and experiences so that they can be communicated and reflected will require, in addition to linguistic skills, that the elements of diversity are highlighted. War, trauma, aggression, nationalism, religion, and political beliefs are factors that affect communication across different cultural backgrounds (Dahl 2001; Henriksen 2008). Broader knowledge of important cultural differences can enable us to facilitate good communication and relationships that reflect multicultural experiences and values. Research shows that it is difficult to organise and implement multicultural pedagogy because teachers lack multicultural competence (Danbolt et al. 2010).

The provision of adult learning is premised on the view that learning must be possible for everyone and that learning must be adapted to the individual's needs and circumstances. Self-directed learning is also important, but many learners will struggle to fully participate and be self-governing and responsible in their learning process because they lack previous experience of self-directed learning (Monsen 2016). Mutual cultural knowledge, interest, respect, and trust that are formed through dialogue contribute to self-directed learning. Furthermore, these elements are considered important in diversity management. Reflection and participation are also preconditions for effective learning and important principles in diversity management.

A fifth challenge is that immigrants come from other learning traditions and are possibly accustomed to other teacher-student relationships than those found in Norwegian culture (Hirsch 2009). In determining the best approach to facilitating learning among immigrants, differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures (Hundeide 2003) can challenge the pedagogical principles applied in other learning contexts. In collectivist cultures, values such as obedience, respect, cohesion, and loyalty are often more important than initiative, independence, creativity, and critical thinking. These values can affect the readiness and ability to critically reflect, make independent choices, and understand new teaching materials. Educational traditions are different around the world. Many immigrants come from a learning tradition that is teacher-driven and discipline-oriented with little critical reflection and independence (Hirsch 2009). In Norway, there is an educational perspective that emphasises commitment, emotional attachment, and support from the teacher. Clear goals and participant influence are also important principles in Norwegian education (Norberg and Lyngsnes 2008).

Reflecting on one's own values   and cultural codes, and recognising different cultural codes are important in diversity management. The teacher's cultural knowledge, confidence, dialogue, and ability to create space for exchange and reflection should be used actively (Wiktorin 2017). In addition to promoting cross-cultural communication and international understanding, it is also important that teachers in multicultural learning contexts reflect on their own pedagogical practice (Rismark et al. 2003).

What diversity management can offer as coherent perspective to adult learning principles

In the previous section main challenges in order to manage learning processes in multicultural learning process was emphasized. These challenges were:

- To recognition immigrant's prior learning and expertise.
- To find effective methods for language learning.
- To find and create effective and relevant learning environments.
- How to use and value the diversity in multicultural learning processes.
- How to meet the teacher's lack of multicultural competence.

Despite the focus on economical benefits for organizations and businesses, elements from diversity management perspectives seems to be relevant for facilitating multicultural learning processes in combination with well-known adult learning principles. Diversity management adds something new to adult learning by valuing positive elements of diversity and focusing on how to recognize the learning potential that lies in diversity. Differences between the perspectives are many, but one central difference is that diversity management as a strategy is voluntary, while to learn Norwegian through the Introduction program is mandatory. A critical question can be asked about the conditions and the ability to perform diversity management in work-place learning in businesses and organisations. Lack of time and resources related to an excessive focus on facilitation can be difficult to balance, when the focus is on production, sale and economical profit. In addition, diversity management perspective lacks pedagogical focus and personnel with pedagogical expertise. These factors can be a weakness in order to solve the challenges mentioned.

One challenge mentioned in this article is to meet and use immigrants prior learning and expertise. Diversity management offer a perspective that one must learn to know every aspect of the immigrant's earlier life to find and to use their earlier knowledge, experiences and personal characteristics in new contexts (Halvino and Kamp 2009). An important element in this perspective is to use the knowledge about each individual in order to develop a diversity strategy (Dobbin 2009). Diversity strategy includes how to see and use every individuals' knowledge and competences, how one can learn new things from each other and how every individual tries out different task in order to feel that they master, cope and develop.

There are many aspects of multiculturalism that can impact learning, education and integration. Diversity in a diversity management perspective is not about being 'exploited' or 'managed', but rather to be recognized, valued and negotiated at the interpersonal and structural levels. In multicultural learning contexts, it can be easy to discover power inequities in interpersonal interactions and institutional arrangements. An important point to mention is the awareness of and reflection on an anti-racist approach in multicultural learning processes.

The UNESCO framework for Global Citizenship Education (2018) has 3 dimensions that can be useful in diversity learning environments: - a) Cognitive: supporting participants to acquire knowledge, understand and develop critical thinking skills. b) Socio-emotional: supporting participants to have a sense of belonging to a common humanity; sharing values and responsibilities, sharing empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity c) Behavioural: supporting participants to act responsibly with respect for other people. (https://neu.org.uk/media/11236/view).

As pointed out earlier, there are little research on effective methods for language learning (Langøien, Nguyen and Berg 2020). In Diversity management theory, language is important, and communication is seen as a catalyst for exchanging experience, perspectives, ideas and to develop the business they work in. Language are to be learned, developed and used in different relevant context in organisations and businesses; when solving work-related tasks and challenges together with others, and when they socialize with colleagues at work and outside work. To 'create different spaces', were meeting and sharing experiences can be a platform for language learning and social interaction with others, can provide opportunities for language learning and integration. In diversity management, creating space is one main perspective that can create effective and relevant learning environments and an opportunity to value the diversity in the learning processes (Drange 2014). It also seems relevant to clarify goals and expectations, to develop a diversity strategy where the immigrants participate with co-leadership and shared responsibility. Diversity management strategy can create more systematic, order that predictability that provides security and trust (Sandal et al. 2013).

The last challenge mentioned in the previous section, is how to meet teachers lack of multicultural competence. Showing interest, alternate between individual guidance/teaching can increase the teachers' knowledge. To use 'role-models' or well-integrated immigrants as

co-teachers seems to be relevant as a supplement in the learning process. Role-models can function as bridge-builders into a new language and a new culture. The use of role models can also inspire conversations about difficult topics such as cultural differences, challenges and language learning. Management style, good communication and modelling behaviour is an imperative is important in a diversity management perspective (Velten et al. 2008). To be seen and appreciated, to master life, and feel the quality of life are viewed as valuable. Collaboration between different actors in the diversity management process are also emphasized in the diversity management perspective (Skrevsrud 2012). To collaborate with various actors outside the educational system, such as volunteer organizations, municipal agencies, health services seems relevant in order to fulfil the importance of seeing the whole person.

Diversity management in multicultural learning processes can utilise the pedagogical principles of adult learning by ensuring that everyone is seen, heard and included in relevant dialogues. All experiences in the learning environment are equally relevant, and the individual's background and circumstances will form the basis for their learning process. Teacher's cultural knowledge and reflection on their own practice are particularly important. Diversity management in multicultural learning processes thus involves seeing and valuing the diversity of experiences and reflections in a group through dialogue and communication. Furthermore, diversity management will have to take place through respect, security, and recognition of the different experiences, needs, circumstance, and individual goals. This approach requires that learning experiences are facilitated so that links are created between new knowledge and the adult immigrants' previous knowledge and experience. Being able to describe and explain one's own reasoning and learning processes is crucial for the individual to achieve increased self- awareness (Skrevsrud 2012). When immigrants are given responsibility, allowed to practice co-determination, and afforded the opportunity to talk about common experiences, their learning processes are supported. These are important elements of diversity management as a perspective.

Conclusion

In this article, it has been highlighted and discussed how diversity management perspective can contribute positively in solving challenges applicable to multicultural learning processes

in different learning contexts. This is a theoretical article, were the discussion is based on existing literature on diversity management and adult learning principles. A conclusion is that diversity management seems to offer a coherent perspective on traditional adult pedagogical principles and be a meaningful strategy to address specific challenges in managing learning processes in multicultural learning environments. Diversity management as a perspective can be included in organized learning processes for adult newcomers by facilitating language learning and communication, enabling co-determination, valuing the learning potential that lies in diversity, create spaces for learning and use 'role-models' as co-teachers. These elements can help to recognize and value diversity as a resource in multicultural learning contexts and hopefully provide new perspectives for practitioners in the field of multicultural learning.

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