

Käck, Annika

## Migrant teachers in Swedish teacher education and their re-entry as professionals

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# Inklusion von Lehrkräften nach der Flucht

Über universitäre Ausbildung zum  
beruflichen Wiedereinstieg

Gertraud Kremsner  
Michelle Proyer  
Gottfried Biewer  
(Hrsg.)

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*„Allen Personen gewidmet, die geflüchtet sind, sich derzeit auf der Flucht befinden oder noch flüchten werden.“*

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The painful fact for a refugee or a foreigner is that you will be always looking for a place to belong to, and you will never find it again you will become a foreigner everywhere you go, slowly you will change and do not fit anywhere. and there will always be a black hole. black hole.

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# Inhaltsverzeichnis

<b>Vorwort.....</b>	<b>9</b>
---------------------	----------

## **1. Darstellungen und Forschungen zum Zertifikatskurs**

<i>Gertraud Kremsner, Michelle Proyer und Tina Obermayr</i> Die Ausgangslage und die Einrichtung des Zertifikatskurses „Bildungswissenschaftliche Grundlagen für Lehrkräfte mit Fluchthintergrund“ .....	17
---	----

<i>Gertraud Kremsner, Michelle Proyer und Alexander Schmölz</i> mit Unterstützung von <i>Helena Deiß, Lisa-Katharina Möhlen,</i> <i>Sarah Hofmann, Marwa Sarah und Tina Obermayr</i> Das Forschungsprojekt „Qualifizierung von Lehrkräften mit Fluchthintergrund“ .....	46
---	----

## **2. Reflexion der Kursinhalte aus Sicht der Lehrenden**

<i>Ines M. Breinbauer</i> Wie man in die Pädagogik einführen und dabei selber viel lernen kann! Bildungswissenschaftliche Grundlagen in der Lehrer*innenbildung für Lehrpersonen mit Fluchthintergrund.....	95
--	----

<i>Regina Studener-Kuras</i> „Dass ich Lehrerin bin, das habe ich auf eine recht eigene Art ganz vergessen gehabt!“ Lehren und Lernen im Kontext von Flucht und Neubeginn.....	100
---	-----

<i>Michelle Proyer</i> ,Ich male denen die Perspektive‘ – Von Praxiserfahrungen zwischen ,bei uns‘ und ,bei euch‘, über das Erlernen von ,Reflexion‘ und hin zu einem ,Ankommen‘ im österreichischen Schulsystem.....	108
--	-----

*Neda Forghani-Arani*

Lived Experience of Teaching Displaced Teachers:  
A Postcolonial Reading of Positions, Voices and Representations ..... 115

*Gottfried Biewer*

„Inklusive Pädagogik und Vielfalt“  
für Lehrkräfte mit Fluchthintergrund..... 121

*Sabine Krause*

Schulforschung und Unterrichtspraxis. Bewegungen zwischen  
wissenschaftlicher Abstraktion und „Praxisrelevanz“ ..... 127

*Raphael Zahnd und Gertraud Kremsner*

Zur vertieften Auseinandersetzung mit Heterogenität in Schulkontexten... 134

*Michael Doblmair und Michelle Proyer*

Am Ende steht (wieder) die Reflexion ..... 141

### 3. Herausforderungen und Synergien

*Michelle Proyer, Gertraud Kremsner, Gottfried Biewer  
und Camilla Pellech*

Herausforderungen und Synergien aus universitärer Perspektive ..... 149

*Linda Kreuter, Helena Deiß, Lisa-Katharina Möhlen,  
Kamal Alyouzbashi, Saad Chatto, Sahar Hashemi,  
Nizar Mousa, Doha Tahlawi, Ahmed Zeki Al Hamid und Jomard Rasul*

„Werden Träume wahr?“ – Reflexionen der Kursteilnehmer\*innen..... 154

*Marie-Claire Sowinetz*

„Nehmen wir das Gute von uns und das Gute von euch –  
so werden wir alle besser.“ Ein persönlicher Rückblick  
auf den Beginn des Zertifikatskurses für geflüchtete Lehrer\*innen..... 166

*Katharina Resch*

Vier Strategien zur Entwicklung von universitären  
Weiterbildungsprogrammen im Bereich Flucht und Migration ..... 172

<i>Renate Faistauer, Thomas Laimer und Nicola Kraml</i> Beitrag zu einer nachhaltigen Sprachförderung für Lehrende mit Fluchthintergrund – Synergien in der Ausbildung schaffen und Empowerment bei den Teilnehmer*innen ermöglichen .....	178
---	-----

<i>Karoline Gerwisch, Denise Strehn, Nicolas Kieffer und Michelle Proyer</i> Reflexion der Kurspraktika – Perspektiven der Mentor*innen und Mentees .....	184
---	-----

#### **4. Internationale Perspektiven**

<i>Annika Käck</i> Migrant teachers in Swedish teacher education and their re-entry as professionals .....	197
--	-----

<i>Susanna Malm</i> Bridging Programmes for Migrant Teachers and Preschool Teachers in Sweden.....	202
--	-----

<i>Henrike Terhart, Ariane Elshof und Susanne Preuschoff</i> Programm für geflüchtete Lehrkräfte an der Universität zu Köln.....	207
---	-----

<i>Kristina Purrmann, Renate Schüssler, Christina Siebert-Husmann und Marie Vanderbeke</i> „Wir haben so lange auf eine Chance gewartet“ – Potentiale und Herausforderungen des Qualifizierungsprogrammes Lehrkräfte Plus für geflüchtete Lehrkräfte .....	217
---	-----

<i>Katja Kansteiner, Roswitha Klepser, Sarah Lukas, Kristin Rheinwald und Tim Kaiser</i> Integration geflüchteter Lehrkräfte in die Lehrer*innenausbildung in Baden-Württemberg – das IGEL-Programm.....	227
--	-----

<b>Abschlussbemerkungen.....</b>	237
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<b>Autor*innenverzeichnis.....</b>	239
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*Annika Käck*

## **Migrant teachers in Swedish teacher education and their re-entry as professionals**

Teacher education has the task of preparing teachers for a professional role suitable within a national context but with respect to a global information society. In this chapter, research concerning migrant teachers with foreign teaching degrees studying Swedish teacher education is presented. Findings identify unfamiliar ways of thinking and practising they experienced in a new context. Further findings show what educated teachers experience when they re-enter as professionals in a new school context. Lastly, there will be some thoughts about further education and what content is needed in order to scaffold migrant teachers upon re-entering their profession.

### **1 Cultural diversities and unfamiliar ways of thinking and practising**

Today, with increased migration and internationalisation, higher education faces challenges as the educational systems, and the way of thinking and practising within them, do not always match those of the international populations. Moloney and Saltmarsh (2016) report that there is a lack of acknowledgement for cultural diversities in teacher education programs. The prevailing approach is monocultural teaching. In higher education, there are unique traditions and practices concerning teaching and learning. These ways of thinking and practising have a strong influence on chosen teaching strategies and activities (cf. Kreber 2009; Hounsell & Anderson 2009). University teachers teach the way they learned within a certain discipline, department, culture etc. Hence, it is of significant pedagogical importance to help students understand those ways of thinking and practising (cf. Meyer & Land 2005; Meyer, Land & Baillie 2010). Carroll and Ryan (2005) talk about shocks, the cultural and the academic. In the latter, students lose their knowledge about how to learn and do well. Cultural bias has been found in assessment methods, for example, penalising international students beyond the differences in ability levels.



## 2 Swedish education and migrant teachers

Käck, Männikkö Barbutiu and Fors (2018b) conducted a study of migrant teachers, with former teaching degrees from 57 countries, studying at four Swedish teacher education programs. The aim was to identify what was experienced as unfamiliar during their studies. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed, including a web survey completed by 228 respondents, 5 focus groups and 9 individual interviews with 34 migrant teachers, as well as 30 reflective texts written by 15 participants. The results identified cultural embeddedness in teacher education in relation to unfamiliar teaching and learning methods, learning environments, epistemological understanding, examination practices and the roles and expectations of society and education. For some of the migrant teachers, the similarities between the teacher education programs were obvious; others had unfamiliar ways of thinking and practising to deal with.

### 2.1 Unfamiliar ways of thinking and practising in teacher education

When migrant teachers come into Swedish teacher education, they are both educated teachers and student teachers at the same time. Expectations from both the teacher educator and the migrant teacher are culturally determined. There is a strong focus on the individual student in Sweden, with student-centred, student-active learning, which some migrant teachers can find unsatisfying. Educating students who are so independent is, for some migrant teachers, a new way of teaching and learning that they must understand and become accustomed to. Furthermore, as a teacher educator in Sweden, one is more of a supervisor and mentor than an unapproachable, authoritative, central figure. The ways to acquire knowledge, as well as the design of teaching and learning could also be unfamiliar: for example, with digital environments, social-learning and group-work (some of them had never worked in groups), while others were familiar with the concepts. Being critical during education was considered problematic since some came from an educational system where this was not valued or promoted. Those migrant teachers explained that if a student was critical of the university teacher's teaching, the literature etc., they might receive a lower grade. In Swedish education, it is the opposite, and according to §8 and §9 in the Högskolelagen [Higher Education Act 1992:1434] (cf. Ministry of Education and Research 1992), the university education shall develop the student's ability to make independent and critical assessments, to critically reflect, in order to get a higher grade. Moreover, the examinations could be unfamiliar: blended examinations (oral, written, a variety of examinations during one course, group examinations)

and process versus results (that the process is important, often equal to the final result). There is also additional knowledge concerning a teacher's work in Sweden that was unfamiliar, such as writing individual study plans, the close relationship between parents and teacher, in addition to some of the different norms and values in Sweden. Migrant teachers talked about a transformed teacher identity with additional skills. It is important to remember that migrant teachers are not a homogenous group and cannot be treated as such. The education they have in their former country can be quite like the Swedish one; however, for some, there are huge differences.

## **2.2 The use of digital technology and media during the placement period**

The basic goal of professional development is to challenge teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices. According to Lee and Schallert (2016), in order to understand yourself as a teacher, you must identify and coordinate your past, present and the targeted future self. Also, the practice of integrating and developing digital competence relates to beliefs, values and teacher change. During migrant teachers' placement period in Sweden, unfamiliar ways of thinking and practising were found regarding the curricula, pedagogical methods and in their role as teachers. Furthermore, unfamiliar use of digital technology and media was found, due to country-based reasons such as it was not demanded in the former country, it was forbidden, there was a lack of infrastructure, or it was not viewed as part of the practice. Other migrant teachers thought Sweden was behind their former country when it came to the pedagogical use of digital technology and media; it was well integrated into all subjects in their former country. There was a ranged knowledge base, from being digital illiterate to being a teacher in digital technology. The placement supervisor is of great importance in enhancing digital competence, being a role-model and motivator. Migrant teachers expressed that it was important to be digitally competent working as a teacher in a Swedish school, since digital technology and media is widely used (cf. Käck, Männikkö Barbutiu & Fors 2018a).

## **3 Migrant teachers re-entering as professionals after further education**

Bigestans (2015) focused on migrant teachers re-entering the professional sphere in Swedish schools. Twenty-one migrant teachers, as well as principals, colleagues, administrators and teacher educators, were interviewed. Moreover, five of the teachers were observed in the workplace. One challenge discovered included subject-specific vocabulary, everyday communica-

tion, and bridging the academic language learned in teacher education between the two. Another challenge was the teacher's relationship with the students, which lacked the previous authoritative role. Occasionally the migrant teacher appeared less competent to parents and colleagues due to his or her Swedish language ability. Tension decreased if the school principal emphasised the recruitment as based on the assessment of the subject knowledge and teaching qualifications. The resources found included the migrant teachers setting limits in a way that positioned themselves as being someone to listen to, resisting being seen as less knowledgeable, and showing their professionalism (cf. Bigestans 2015). Seven migrant teachers' life stories about their professional practices in the Swedish school context, were investigated in a longitudinal study by Sandlund (2010). Migrant teachers construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their professional legitimacy in relation to the Swedish school. Since there was a struggle to gain legitimacy, several of them had to adopt a new professional approach. It was obvious that, when the school setting is uniform, there was no willingness to accept viewpoints or pedagogical insights from other school cultures. One conclusion is that identities not only pertain to private and personal qualities but also answers to contextual circumstances in the schools. In a study by Jönsson and Rubenstein Reich (2006) the meeting of migrant teachers with the Swedish school culture, their construction of a new identity and what school leaders consider when recruiting to a multi-ethnic teachers' collegium were investigated. They interviewed 25 migrant teachers, and 11 school leaders (who also answered a survey). Migrant teachers used different strategies for coping with the new school context. The adaptation was the most common strategy, while others tried to create a hybrid between the old and the new. Lastly, some chose a confrontational strategy. School leaders in multi-cultural areas highlighted the benefits of hiring migrant teachers, seeing them as resources, role models and bridge builders. For school leaders in areas with fewer migrants, the ability to collaborate and having a consensus in teaching and learning was more important.

#### **4 Bridging the further education and the re-entry**

Further education can promote inclusion and integration, but only if intercultural aspects are identified and included in teaching and learning. During their education and their re-entry as professionals, migrant teachers process and construct a new teacher identity. This is a sensitive, emotional process, in which they transform competencies they already possess, make modifications, add new competencies or abandon some of the old ones. The goal is

not to be a Swedish teacher, rather develop a new teacher identity with a strong knowledge base from a different educational system. Education is a creation of the past, present and predicted future, which makes the identification of ways of thinking and practising a process that must be carried out on a regular basis in order to enhance the quality and equality of teacher education so that it is suitable for the globalised 21st century.

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