Belongingness, academic learning and identity – Some results from TEAMS –project (Teaching that matters for migrant students)

Tentative results from Finland and Sweden

Tuire Palonen in Tallinn 24th Oct 2023

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TEAMS -project

- My talk is based on Teaching that matters for migrant students (TEAMS) project, funded by NORDFORSK, see https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/making-a-difference/teams)

- Labels in student survey: Belongingness, academic performance, identity

- Labels in school staff member research: collaboration, social ties, changing practices, challenges

- However, today I mainly focus on schools as institutional hubs for social ties and integration. My talk is based on observations and interviews in the school communities; student survey results will be published later.

Migration and societal changes

The specific reason for our study is in ascending migration in Finland among other European countries.

Migration has become a central issue in international and national policy debates. In many countries, migrant populations have increased substantially in recent years.

In schools, teachers and other school staff are key for creating opportunities for academic learning and for migrant students' developing a sense of belonging within school communities (Lund & Trondman, 2017).

However, they may also inadvertently reinforce barriers to learning for migrant students due to assumptions embedded in institutional structures, pedagogical practices, or their own unexamined beliefs (Pantić, 2017).

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How schools and day-care centers cope with and help refugees?

- **Academic learning:** Schools, day-care centers, and educational institutes in general, can be particularly important as a gateway to social integration. The education system in the new country is different than the one at home, and the children maybe have missed schooling due to the conflict. This can influence opportunities for their future education and employment

- **Belongingness:** The school creates routines in a new everyday life and possibilities for friendship and hopes for the future. School is also symbolically important for the feeling of safety and belonging in the new country. Students may meet temporal insecurity, a close–distant relationship with their significant others, and perhaps demands coming from a double curriculum, as many participate in host country schooling during the day and online Ukrainian school in the evening.

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Institutional hubs (schools and day-care-centers) bring together families and educators

Support from educators has been found to be a strong predictor of learning outcomes and study trajectories (Demir & Leyendecker, 2018; Quin, 2017).

Educators also provide resources for sustaining children's personal networks at stake in the crises (Primdahl et al., 2021; Skovdal & Campbell, 2015; Szkody et al., 2020).

From a social tie perspective, schools and day-care centers provide significant potential for creating and providing support for learning and well-being at times of crises.

Educational professionals' readiness needs to be cultivated so that they are able to support children, young people and families.

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Identifying resources and early predictors for social erosion

What are the social and pedagogical dilemmas arising from the temporal, relational and educational insecurities?

How can schools and the wider community, support refugee pupils in their social and educational development?

We must have readiness to identify early predictors of the erosion of children's personal, family, and institutional support networks to create strategies and models for sustaining and (re)building children's social ties during and after the crises.

The social ties are often trans-national; between home country, host country and other countries where refugees have escaped the war.

Tentative results regarding Ukraine refugee students (in Sweden: Professor Anna Lund's group at the University of Stockholm)

- Commitment at all staff-levels at school, including the local community has been important and remarkable

- Refugee students transition to Nordic countries is facilitated by teachers with Ukraine as a mother tongue, sometimes fleeing from Ukraine as well.

- Today's refugee students' transition is facilitated by the institutional memory and routines from the 2015 crisis.

- In addition, it is supported by the teachers that can speak Ukraine and have intercultural competences.

- Positive experiences of social contacts between local students and refugee students are seen – but does this develop to friendships in future? We do not know.

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We have some notions:

- Wider level of multicultural incorporation practices influence friendship over cultural- and linguistic barriers. It looks complex.

- Following the pandemi practices, some of the students have taken online classes and exams, following Ukrainian curriculum. How much this is still going on? Maybe less?

- Different national curriculums – some subjects are more advanced in Ukraine (perhaps e.g., mathematics) and some less (perhaps e.g., English). The level of English knowledge of Ukraine students can depend on the local school they were enrolled in.

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About structures and stability:

- Student composition in schools are both in separated Ukrainian classes and mixed with an "ordinary" class, over the school day.

- Ukraine students seem to enjoy horizontal teaching-student relations. Nordic schools are not very hierarchical.

- **Identity**: Ukraine students talk about the insecurity of not knowing where to stay or to return. In schools, teachers have sometimes talked about "saloon doors", i.e., students come and go.

- Ukraine students share war-related mind set while teachers want them to continue to work with their school tasks to cope with living with and through a trauma.

- Importance to have regular and systematic home-school contacts.

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About teachers' willingness to change their instructional practices

- New practices in schools require more than sharing information or pieces of advice. The interaction deep enough provides with opportunities to learn in social interaction. Teachers seem for example to be more likely to change their instructional practices when ideas are presented by a trusted colleague rather than by an unknown expert (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003).

- Social networks are seen as sources of social support providing instrumental, emotional, informational support or social companionship.

- Similarly, professional agency has proven to be a crucial aspect in changing school practices, particularly in the situations when teachers make decisions on how to teach or develop one's work (e.g., Molla & Nolan, 2020).

Thanks for your attention!