



Council of Europe
Language Policy Unit
DGII – Education Department

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Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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Language Policy
Politiques linguistiques

Educational culture

Adult migrants do not just come from nowhere. They come from another society where a particular educational philosophy applies and bring with them certain ideas of education and learning which they have built up from their personal experience of school or the ordinary social representations which usually describe and explain them. Like all learners who change educational environment (either in the same context – for instance, from school to university – or in a new one), they have to understand and indeed adapt to new ways in which the educational establishment operates. This and the interpretations of it may be termed educational culture. Although this field generally falls within the area of comparative education, it should actually be seen more as a form of intercultural encounter, between education/learning approaches and educational values, insofar as all societies have adopted systems for passing on accumulated knowledge.

Nature of educational cultures

Educational cultures are the framework in which educational activities take place. In the present case, however, the native teachers and the learners do not in principle share the same approaches. Different traditions have produced specific teaching practices, involving, for instance, clearly identified types of exercises such as replying orally to questions, doing written exercises or producing certain types of texts. These are not universal, however, and asking the teacher a question is not an acceptable practice everywhere. These teaching habits are accompanied by types of student behaviour which are expected and are deemed to be the only ones acceptable (for instance, arriving on time, addressing the other learners politely, doing the work asked of them, standing up to reply, etc). They govern the types of verbal relationship with the teacher, the rules on speaking (asking permission to speak?), assessment methods (what is a fair teacher?) or even physical behaviour (can a teacher sit on a student's desk?) and acceptable types of clothing. All these features which are considered natural on both sides need to be properly identified if they are a source of genuine misunderstandings. For these groups and others, the group educational culture therefore has to be negotiated.

Hands-on ways of teaching and learning

It is in this context that the question of the choice of teaching methodologies and hence of the expected learning behaviour arises. Preference may be given to approaches deemed to be active (and considered more effective), in which learners are involved in performing simple or complex, repetitive or open tasks likely to occur in social situations, in individual or group activities or in forms of formative self-assessment. However, language teaching specialists' beliefs of this kind have to allow for widespread practices such as rote learning, expanding one's vocabulary with bilingual dictionaries, making the most of description

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activities (“grammar”), translating everything and noting everything in writing... It is by no means certain that the best strategy for all groups is to banish these practices or “drag” them towards more “modern” practices. It is not therefore possible to propose a single standard solution: appropriate educational cultures must be devised on a case-by-case basis, while nevertheless taking account of the nature of the challenges posed by the language tests and certification which may be demanded of adult migrants.

JCB

Related Resources

- *Responding to the language needs of adult refugees in Ireland: an alternative approach to teaching and assessment*, 2008, David Little
- *Adult migrant integration policies: Principles and implementation*, 2010, Jean-Claude Beacco
- *Quality assurance in the provision of language education and training for adult migrants – Guidelines and options*, 2008, Richard Rossner