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## Migration Pedagogy and Early School Leaving

**Abstract:** The article focuses on migration and education, in particular on the anchoring of migration pedagogy within educational institutions in order to prevent early school leaving in the context of educational insufficiency and migration background; it discusses a requirement for educational reform with a focus on inclusion, and critically questions the institutional self-image of educational institutions – which is conceived along ethnic national and/or linguistically homogeneous lines – in migration societies. Pierre Bourdieu's conception of education and his concept of a "reflective sociology", Paul Mecheril's definition of migration pedagogy, as well as theoretical positions on the theme of inclusion form the theoretical bases of a line of argument which defines the necessary standards for migration pedagogy as an essential element in Austrian teacher training, a pedagogy that can avoid early school leaving.

**Keywords:** early school leaving, Austrian teacher training, migration pedagogy

**摘要** (Manfred Oberlechner: 移民教育学与辍学现象) : 本文讨论移民与教育, 特别关注教育机构为防止由教育资源稀缺和移民导致的辍学现象所采用的移民教育法。本文指出包容性是教育改革的一项要求。作者同时对移民社会中教育机构的自我形象进行了批判性的质疑, 指出该自我形象通常形成于单一民族或语言的社会背景中。Pierre Bourdieu 的教育观念和他的“反思社会学”概念, Paul Mecheril 对移民教育学的定义以及关于包容性主题的理论立场形成了一系列论证的理论基础, 这一论证定义了移民教育学作为奥地利教师培训的一个基本要素的必要标准。移民教育学可以有效的解决辍学问题。

**关键词:** 辍学, 奥地利教师培训, 移民教育学

**摘要** (Manfred Oberlechner: 移民教育學與輟學現象) : 本文討論移民與教育, 特別關注教育機構為防止由教育資源稀缺和移民導致的輟學現象所採用的移民教育法。本文指出包容性是教育改革的一項要求。作者同時對移民社會中教育機構的自我形象進行了批判性的質疑, 指出該自我形象通常形成於單一民族或語言的社會背景中。Pierre Bourdieu 的教育觀念和他的“反思社會學”概念, Paul Mecheril 對移民教育學的定義以及關於包容性主題的理論立場形成了一系列論證的理論基礎, 這一論證定義了移民教育學作為奧地利教師培訓的一個基本要素的必要標準。移民教育學可以有效的解決輟學問題。

**關鍵詞:** 輟學, 奧地利教師培訓, 移民教育學

**Zusammenfassung** (Manfred Oberlechner: Migrationspädagogik und frühzeitiger Schulabbruch): Der Artikel fokussiert den Schwerpunkt Migration und Bildung und ordnet sich ein, wenn es um eine bildungsinstitutionelle Verankerung von Migrationspädagogik zur Prävention von frühzeitigem Schulabbruch im Kontext von Bildungsarmut und "Migrationshintergrund" geht. Er diskutiert einen Bildungsreformanspruch mit Blick auf Inklusion und stellt gleichzeitig das institutionelle Selbstbild von Bildungsinstitutionen innerhalb von Migrationsgesellschaften in Frage, das vorwiegend ethnisch-national und sprachlich-homogen gedacht wird. Pierre Bourdieus Konzeption von Bildung und dessen Konzept einer „reflexiven Soziologie“ sowie Paul Mecherils Definition von Migrationspädagogik, außerdem theoretische Positionen zum Thema Inklusion bilden die theoretischen Grundlagen einer Argumentationslinie, die Anforderungen für eine Migrationspädagogik definiert, die frühen Schulabbruch vermeiden helfen kann.

**Schlüsselwörter:** frühzeitiger Schulabbruch, Lehrerbildung in Österreich, Migrationspädagogik

**Аннотация** (Манфред Оберлехнер: Миграционная педагогика и раннее «расставание» со школой): В статье фокусируется внимание на миграции и образовании; она встраивается в ряд тех публикаций, где речь идет о закреплённом на институциональном уровне функционале миграционной педагогике для предупреждения случаев, когда ребенок досрочно прерывает свое обучение в школе. Все это рассматривается в контексте понятий «образовательная бедность» и «миграционный бэкграунд». Дискутируется необходимость проведения образовательной реформы через призму инклюзии, одновременно формируется критический взгляд на институциональный профиль образовательных институтов, функционирующих в

*мультиэтнических обществах. Этот профиль задумывается преимущественно как этнически-национальный и гомогенный в языковом плане. Образовательная концепция Пьера Бурдьё, его теория рефлексивной социологии, также дефиниция, данная П. Мехерилом относительно миграционной педагогики, равно как теоретические положения по теме инклюзивного образования, составляют основу аргументационной линии, которая вырабатывает определенные требования к миграционной педагогике, помогая предотвращать случаи, когда дети уходят из школы раньше отведенных на обучение сроков.*

**Ключевые слова:** прерывание обучения, подготовка учителей в Австрии, миграционная педагогика

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Migration affects the system of formal education in a variety of respects. The conditions of heterogeneity and diversity, as well as of democratically-seen, non-legitimate inequality, visibly show the precarious status not only of habitual practices and institutionalised forms of pedagogical practice but also of pedagogical self-conceptions and programmes.

In a society, early school leaving has to be seen in the context of educational disadvantage (in the form of qualifications and skills) and unequal opportunities. In terms of a migration pedagogy based on inclusivity, social work and social pedagogy are important components of social competences within the framework of teacher training because a migration pedagogy oriented towards the social environment (see also Thiersch, Grunwald, & Köngeter, 2012; Otto & Rauschenbach, 2008) *can* avoid, i.e. prevent, early school leaving.<sup>i</sup> From this perspective, the question of the relationship between academic teacher training and social work and social pedagogy becomes vital. This article is therefore a response to the phenomenon of early school leaving in Austria and the related question of which role a migration pedagogy based on inclusion can play in preventing it.<sup>ii</sup>

The recent extension of compulsory schooling in Austria to the age of 18 only makes sense if this compulsory inclusion in the education system represents a genuine opportunity to prevent early school leaving. On a related note, in modern migration societies such as Austria there are also specific needs for school and university teachers to learn core skills based on migration pedagogy, including the ability to reflect in a thorough manner. However, this teacher training cannot only take the form of recommendations within the framework of a special minority pedagogy exclusively for migrants, since society, including Austrian educational institutions, has been profoundly shaped by migration: migration has become part of the norm in everyday life not only in Austria and at Austrian schools and universities but everywhere in Western Europe. Consequently, it is not enough to add optional modules on migration or interculturality (the very concept of which is problematic) to the curricula of teacher training degrees. *All teachers* need to receive systematic basic training on the phenomenon of early school leaving, in regard to which migration (alongside other social difference factors) can play an important role.

Intercultural competence is a concept which ultimately does not go far enough in terms of diversity-oriented teacher training, which encompasses far more than the meaning implied in the abstract concept of a successful understanding, or successful social interaction, between two or more cultures. It is more appropriate therefore to speak of diversity competence or multiplicity competence, within which intercultural competence is only a sub-section of the aforementioned competences. Ultimately, we have to take into account the diversity in a classroom, i.e. within a heterogeneous cohort of pupils, and we have to deal with this from the perspective of equal rights regarding participation and the safeguarding of equal opportunities. Diversity competence or multiplicity competence for teachers means being familiar with the different prerequisites for successful learning, or rather being conscious of the fact that, in particular, the sociocultural and economic backgrounds or social environments beyond school may inherently contain unequal

learning conditions for pupils. Here, the migration background, or cultural origin, is only one of many influencing factors which play a role in the success of the individual's learning. The others are social gender, the parents' educational background or level of education (cultural capital), socio-economic factors (social class, residential area, parents' employment status), unemployment, welfare recipients (poverty), size of family, family status (keyword: single parents), psychological illnesses or traumas in the parental home, the pupil's personal resistance or resilience – or the pupil's own self-image, illnesses, disabilities and limitations –, parental expectations (high or low expectations of achievement), etc.

In order to understand these factors, teachers *must* have background knowledge of the pupils' social environments and cultural models, empathy, knowledge about group processes and dynamics in groups (keyword: bullying), the ability to reflect – particularly on their own prejudices –, and awareness of their own cultural conditioning (cultural perception) and the resultant subjective interpretation and judgement of others.

Neither heterogeneity nor migration are regarded as the norm within society: this is reflected in the training and further education of teachers. Teachers are still not adequately prepared for working from a social perspective with a diverse pupil cohort. Subjects such as heterogeneity, migration and the migration society do now feature in the curricula and degree programmes of prospective teachers, but the systematic appropriation of necessary knowledge is lacking, as are the qualifications and attitudes required in order to create a learning culture in lessons and within schools which reduces discrimination and puts a value on differences.

Furthermore, especially the Austrian education system is still structured in a way that means migrants are more likely to be systematically disadvantaged in the Austrian education system, students with a migration background are especially likely to reproduce the phenomenon of early school leaving over the course of several generations: Given that many pedagogical practices paradigmatically see migration exclusively as a problem, it must be asked whether early school leaving among young people with a migration background is being systematically coproduced by schools, given that it is primarily those students who do not have a middle-class habitus (which is produced outside schools and universities) who are sanctioned, and that early school leavers with a migration background are more likely to face intersectional discrimination that systematically impacts on their education across multiple dimensions. The author takes the view that migration pedagogy should be implemented as a core element of teacher training in Austria.<sup>iii</sup> This is linked with broad-ranging ideas pertaining to a (self-)reflective and inclusive teacher training that is increasingly able to avoid shortcomings in the Austrian education system, such as the phenomenon of adolescents with a migration background leaving school too early. This inclusive teacher training is based on a particular kind of knowledge transfer whereby migration pedagogy is broadened to include an inclusive pedagogy. The aim is to prevent injustices and provide fairer higher education, thereby also achieving a perspective on migration that is more sensitive to diversity.

*What is the relationship between diversity and early school leaving in Austria?* Here, statistical data shows that urbanity, the parents' employment status, the parents' education and the pupils' so-called migration background are, today, significant influencing factors in social differences when it comes to the risk of early school leaving (BMUKK 2012, 15; Steiner, 2009, 146): for young people whose parents do not have the Austrian school leavers' qualification, the risk of discontinuing training in Austria is four times higher than for those whose parents have the qualification. This means that anyone who does not have the cultural and financial resources to support their children has to face the consequence that their children will underperform and leave school early.

*What enables the socio-critical consciousness required for the new teacher training? To what extent can educational institutions influence stability and change in a society and, in so doing, make a specific impact on social inequalities?* This kind of reflective teacher habitus can provide innovative alternatives which make it possible to think and act from an educational science and pedagogical

perspective. A corresponding educational mandate might start with the reflective competence of teachers and learners, the prevailing teaching methods and teaching content and the characteristics of the (institutional) educational organisation. *To what extent does social change lead to social dimensions of difference – where advantages and disadvantages prevail – and to multiple experiences of recognition or neglect among persons included in the educational process?* To answer this question, intersectional analyses of discrimination must be carried out with a focus on a concept of education that is humanizing, self-empowering, democratic and egalitarian. The potential and existing barriers in teaching-learning situations can then be assessed more accurately. Such a reflective teacher habitus provides innovative possibilities, promoting pedagogical debate and didactic practice in relation to migration, too: the critical potential of the considerations that follow should contribute to a deeper and more systematic understanding of inclusive migration-pedagogical professionalism in the context of a reflective teacher habitus (Oberlechner, 2018).

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The term “migration” refers to a cluster of multifaceted phenomena relevant to education. They produce different educational trajectories and are therefore of importance to educational institutions – including higher education institutions. Accordingly, “migration society” and “migration” are adequate references in terms of pedagogical thinking. It is not enough to add optional modules on migration or interculturality to the curricula of teacher training degrees. All students *need to receive systematic basic training* with regard to migration, and this must include an intersectional perspective on other dimensions of difference such as gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, aptitudes or cognitive, motivational and emotional potential, age, mental and physical impairments and/or position within the structure of social inequality. The Austrian education system discriminates significantly more against students with a migration background, pushing them to leave school too early (Oberlechner, 2018), because young people with a migration background often find themselves facing “intersectional” discrimination which systematically impacts on their education across multiple dimensions. It is not surprising that the proportion of children with a migration background who are certified as having “special education needs” is still significantly overrepresented in Austrian special education schools (even though poor German language skills are not supposed to be the reason for this: learners with a migration background are therefore more likely to be de facto shunted into special education establishments which generally fail to offer them any adequate school-leaving qualification for them to build on in their further education) (Oberlechner, 2018).

A correspondingly critical and reflective teaching habitus contributes to ensuring that the requirements of migration pedagogy are met as adequately as possible in teaching and learning situations. This is primarily the case where institutions of higher education also have a reflective culture that accepts mistakes, where they are familiar with the practices of case review, peer advice and supervision, and where offers of training are not interpreted as implying weaknesses or even incapacity on the part of the staff. The question of how the educational environments can become places of reflection, places where professionals likewise view themselves as learners, is *central: reflective practice requires reflective environments*. It is important to increase the awareness of this, as otherwise it is not possible to continually re-conceive the field of migration and take it beyond an overly-prescribed migration discourse (Oberlechner, 2018). A reflective habitus based on migration pedagogy uses a concept of migration that is neither a-political nor post-political but instead cognisant of moral pitfalls, difficult balancing acts between divergent outlooks on life and the risks of instrumentalisation. This concept reflects critically on approaches that culturalise the phenomenon of early school leaving in connection with migration, since students and teachers need to be able to justify their pedagogical practice. Those responsible for managing schools or universities need to know how and why the issue of migration should be implemented within the

framework of diversity management in relation to both administration and teaching staff, since migration is an issue that is of relevance to all areas of school and university organisation (Oberlechner, 2018).

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*Migration and early school leaving* need to be discussed in connection with diversity in the recruitment of academic and teaching staff. Schools and universities could implement guiding principles at their own initiative, or reforms could be proposed to create an inclusive atmosphere in schools and classrooms. After all, a key factor behind early school leaving is whether *everyone* has an emotional attachment to, and sense of belonging at, an educational institution. These inclusive reforms would need to involve parents, migrant communities, NGOs and above all the migrants themselves. All this requires continuous reforms of educational institutions. Furthermore, universities of education must not leave fundamental research on migration and early school leaving to non-vocational universities and limit themselves to research that is narrowly focused on the teaching profession and only covers issues “directly linked to actual practice with children”. This requirement to measure direct impact in practice restricts the relevance of research as a whole and curtails the demands and possibilities of migration pedagogy-based research, not forgetting early school leaving, since reflection and deconstructive criticism do not necessarily directly lead to practical proposals for pedagogical solutions. Critique and reflection are valuable in their own right, and they are only possible if practices of teacher training cultivate a critical awareness. Highly reflective approaches help to ensure that teaching staff continue to apply pedagogical theories in practice. It needs to be possible to address questions that go beyond the immediate teaching and learning context in universities and schools and that pertain to society as a whole. In the case of migration, this can lead to fundamental questions of social philosophy or even questions of an existential nature. A multidimensional migration pedagogy and, alongside it, a more complex educational mission for schools and universities hence involves four main factors: the characteristics of the teachers, the organisational features of the school or university, the form and content of teaching and the characteristics of the students. Moreover, migration pedagogy must keep a constant eye on society and social changes, since statistics show that students whose language skills and “ethnic” status differ from what the education system constructs as normal still have extremely restricted opportunities for participation in the Austrian education system. Because early school leavers, and indeed *all* students, are a heterogeneous group with different experiences of education, different social backgrounds and different needs and goals, a migration pedagogy thus conceived is also an efficient tool for preventing educational disadvantage and socio-economic exclusion in Austria’s migration society. By drawing on intersectionality research, it is possible to continuously and concretely assess how strongly dimensions of difference between students influence successful learning outcomes. The central question is what potential advantages and disadvantages are associated with different social dimensions of difference and lead to multiple experiences of recognition or neglect in the education process. Social dimensions of difference and potential categories of discrimination need to be constantly analysed so that it is possible to precisely assess students’ potential and impediments in relation to the learning process, since potential, on the one hand, and impediments, on the other, can trigger positive or negative spirals respectively in relation to successful educational and learning outcomes. Early school leaving can be an intersectional event in the educational biography of a young person that is preceded by cumulative and observable processes of discrimination or of alienation from school learning.

If students’ potential is unlocked and used as “capital” in Bourdieu’s sense of the term (Bourdieu, 1983, 183), this can trigger multiple experiences of recognition among students (see, for example, Honneth, 2012). These experiences ultimately increase inclusiveness across multiple dimensions in the social environment of the school or university, prevent early school leaving and help pave the way for a successful future career. However, if students start their education with multiple

impediments and these are combined with experiences of discrimination, this can result in far-reaching experiences of neglect that lead to students feeling excluded (whether or not they have a migration background) and ultimately to early school leaving.

Attainment deficits must be understood not just as individual problems but always also as socially constructed ones. The phenomenon of early school leaving has correspondingly complex causes and multidimensional interactions that can only be explained by reference to an intersectional, interdependent interplay of socio-economic milieu, a lack of problem-solving strategies at an individual level and systematic conditions. Systematic institutional discrimination at educational institutions also plays a significant role. This discriminatory external selection at a systemic level often goes hand in hand with individual self-selection by students who lack a feeling of self-esteem and belief in their own self-efficacy. Experiences of devaluation and humiliation can significantly contribute to students' lack of confidence in their ability to achieve success at school.

Major consequences of early school leaving include restricted life and career opportunities in the future and higher long-term risks of health problems, low life satisfaction, social exclusion and unemployment. These risks last throughout the early school leavers' entire lives. There is a need for reassessment of and sensitisation to the "deficit-focused perspective" that is adopted on migration within educational processes, which results, firstly, in negative expectations and one-sided assessments of performance by teachers and, secondly, in students with a migration background being disproportionately allocated to lower-ranked school types compared with students without a migration background. Teachers' focus on students' weaknesses is a fundamental problem that can contribute to early school leaving. Teachers' conceptions of intelligence and talent, which are usually ethnocentric, i.e. predominantly geared towards white middle-class students, need to be critically reassessed, including intelligence tests or linguistically demanding tests of knowledge that are geared towards educated middle-class norms or neglect first languages other than German. Consequently, it needs to be asked what knowledge is legitimised by Eurocentric educational institutions and what knowledge is rejected and disqualified through epistemic disciplining.

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i From the beginning of the academic year 2016/17, the government introduced a package of measures which stipulates mandatory training until the age of 18. The corresponding legislative proposal of 2016 exempted asylum seekers from this: a failure which, from the perspective of inclusive migration pedagogy represented here, has not done Austria any favours (retrieved from URL: [https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR\\_2016/PK0808/](https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2016/PK0808/); accessed on 02.01.2019); this mandatory training applies to all young people who completed their general compulsory schooling at the end of the academic year 2016/17 and onwards.

ii The early school leavers group consists of young people who end their educational career as soon as they have completed their mandatory schooling, as well as of those who do begin senior high school education but then discontinue this without replacing it with anything else, i.e. who do not switch to any other form of schooling or training (Oberlechner, 2018).

iii In 2013 the “Federal Framework Law Introducing New Training for Educationalists” was passed in the Austrian National Council, thereby creating the legal basis for the education policy project “PädagogInnenbildung NEU” (retrieved from URL: <https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/schulen/pbneu/index.html>; accessed on 02.01.2019).

