

MIGRATION BACKGROUND AS A RESOURCE AMONG SENIOR EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The study identifies different types of competence that senior employees aged 50+ with a migration background possess, develop and use in their work, and the significance of this competence in their working practices in Norway. The employees are teachers of immigrants in two schools of adult education and nurses in a nursing home. The purpose is to analyze the significance of the seniors' background in their work and relate this to the kinds of actions they were able to take. The aim is to gain a better understanding of such competence and the possibilities for affordances for action in the institutional practices. Studies of senior employees with a migration background have not yet been widely undertaken in research in Norway. Ethnographic fieldwork took place from August 2017 to March 2018. It was based on observation/participant observation following seven senior employees with a migration background in three workplaces, focusing on what they were doing when they conducted their everyday work tasks. Both in-depth interviews and informal conversations were conducted. In addition, five of their managers were interviewed once. The data were analyzed thematically. The study identified that the senior employees draw on language, cultural background, personal experiences and migration process as important parts of their prior learning differently from Norwegian-born employees and shows how they use their informal competence in new ways. The seniors' competence is in demand by colleagues and shared to promote colleagues' informal learning, but are only identified and recognized by one of the managements. The study shows that the senior employees with migrant background draw on their total competence and not only their formal one in their work practices and problem-solving. This is relevant knowledge in an increasing diverse multiethnic and multicultural society, and relevant at all levels of education and in health care. Being competent as an employee and senior is also relevant in societies where senior employees have to challenge age stereotypes or discrimination. The findings imply that not only it is important to know about prior learning in a workplace, but also to recognize competence based on different prior learning, and managers need to know what to look for.

Keywords: Senior employees, migration background, working practices, competence, prior learning, Norway.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article draws on ethnographic data and the theory emerged from these data. The study² reported identifies different types of competence that senior employees aged

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² It is a sub-study of Silver Lining – a study of employability and learning trajectories of late career learners. The study is a collaboration between the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research and Oslo Metropolitan University, and funded by the Research Council of Norway, grant number

50+ with a migration background possess, develop and use in their work, such as how they draw on their background and the significance of it in their working practices in Norway. The employees are teachers of immigrants in adult education and nurses in a nursing home. The study includes the managers' perceptions of the significance of the seniors' background, and the seniors' affordances for action offered by the priorities of the managers. The purpose is to analyze the significance of the seniors' background in their work and relate this to the kinds of actions they were able to take.

The competence connected to migration background as used here include the employees' prior learning, but the focus is on the competence acquired through growing up in and being part of another society, their cultural repertoires and personal experiences before and during the migration processes. The concept migration background therefore captures the context of the migrants before and during migration, whereas terms like migration, emigration and immigration relate to experiences after their migration process started. A migrant has always been an emigrant before immigration (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2000; Jenkins, 1998), and a migration process probably does not have an end. However, the wider context of migrants is not necessarily apparent in the immigration country, nor is the meaning of migration processes when it comes to their total competence. The aim of this article is therefore to gain a better understanding of such competence and the possibilities for affordances for action in the institutional practices.

Few studies in Norway have been conducted among health care personnel with migration background (Christensen & Guldvik, 2014). Differences among employees evident in research in this area suggest that nurses belong to a desirable profession explicitly in care of the elderly (Di Rosa, Melchiorre, Lucchetti, & Lamura, 2012; Munkejord, 2016)³ named as an international niche migration (Friberg & Midtbøen, 2018) and migration industry (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018). This type of migration is an important issue in migration studies (Cranston *et al.*, 2018), and is relevant to research in vocational work and workplace related issues. Research on immigrants and work has in many ways focused on lack of skills and relevant qualifications (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Friberg & Djuve, 2004) and problems of validation and recognition of prior learning and work experiences among employees (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Andersson & Osman, 2008; Friberg & Djuve, 2004; Olsen, Jarmila, & Elken, 2018) rather than on migrants' broader repertoire of knowledge and experiences as a source of competence in work practices. However, research also shows that migrants are knowledge carriers and learners (Williams, 2006), and possess new forms of migrant-specific cultural capital, and shows that migrants "actively create dynamics of validating cultural resources as capital, resulting in new forms of intra-migrant distinctions" (Erel, 2010, p. 656). Furthermore, research on migrants and seniors is more likely to focus on ageing and vulnerability (e.g. Ciobanu,

255210. I would like to thank all who took part in this study, head of the study Dorothy Olsen, and my colleagues Sigrun Stiklestad and Hæge Nore for giving comments on earlier drafts.

³ By 2035 Norway will be short of 28000 nurses (Roksvaag & Texmon, 2012).

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

Fokkema, & Nedelcu, 2017) than on senior migrants as assets in the labour market. Reviews on migration and workforce ageing show that educated immigrants and immigrants who possess vocational credentials face barriers in being recognized by potential employees (Field, 2013). Reviews also show that the proportion of females and older adults are an increasing part of the workforce, and few studies have been conducted among migrants who have emigrated in later life compared to migrants who have aged in the immigration country (Field, 2013, p. 76). In Norway, studies of senior employees with a migration background have not yet been a focus of research.

This article contributes to the literature by identifying that senior employees with a migration background additionally draw on competence different from colleagues without such a background, and that their competence to some extent are in demand and shared by their colleagues, with or without the knowledge of their managers. This indicates that the article contributes to increasing understanding of migration as potentially beneficial, and that migration may contribute to senior employees' possibilities for affordances for action in specific job contexts. This is in contrast to Norwegian-born employees, who may experience the same situations as "forked road situations" (Dewey, 1933, p. 14) without being able to solve a problem and complete a work task. Attention to employees with a migration background and their total competence may contribute to a better understanding of migrants' prior learning and the significance of their total competence at work.

The structure of the article is as follows: In the next section, a theoretical framework is outlined, followed by brief information about adult education, nursing homes and immigrants. The following section then describes the data and methods, and the subsequent section the empirical findings before a short conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Education and learning comprise formal, non-formal and informal aspects. Formal learning refers to education, non-formal to planned training and courses, and informal to both intended and unplanned learning (Cedefop, 2015; OECD, 2008). Prior learning refers to "all the competence a person has acquired through paid or unpaid work, in-service training, continuing education, leisure activities in addition to the competence documented through basic education and training" (NOKUT, n.d.), in other words, "all competence obtained via formal, non-formal and informal learning" (Olsen *et al.*, 2018, p. 7). This study also includes all competence from the migrants' background and migration processes. Prior learning as used here therefore refers to the employees' total competence. The article is also based on an understanding of competence as tacit and explicit (Polanyi, 1983), as well as socially situated and contextual (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mulder, 2015).

The theoretical framework also consists of two interrelated concepts: competence and affordance. Inspired by Jenkins (1998, p. 1), competence is the "capacity or potential for adequate functioning-in-context as a socialized human". Jenkins also states that "capacity, potentials and adequacies are to be understood as socially constructed and

ascribed”, and adds “rather than objective attributes of persons” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 1). This definition fits Erel’s point of view, who criticizes the tendency to reify migrants’ “cultural capital” as transported between countries (Erel, 2010, p. 643), and Barglowski (2018, p. 4) when she says that “migrants do not carry fixed forms of capital with them that either fit the new arrival context or not”. Research on competence shows that “the meaning of competence is situation-specific or context-bound” (Mulder, 2015, p. 19), and a demand in the working contexts in this study for seniors is to be able to adjust to new situations and solve problems. To be able to solve problems is an important competence among the “21st-century skills” (Binkley *et al.*, 2012; Csapó & Funke, 2017; NOU 2018: 2, 2018). According to Jenkins (1998, p. 1), the presumption of competence may also be withdrawn, because competence are not only presumed by the person herself, but also by others. *Others* in this study are managers, colleagues and students/patients. Hence, a question is whether the others possess relevant competence to identify, explore and recognize the migrants’ competence based on non-formal and non-documented learning. The Norwegian national policy strategy of competence resembles Jenkins’ definition, and it defines competence as “the ability to solve tasks and cope with challenges in concrete situations, which includes knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, p. 26), and how these are used in interaction with each other (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2016). The competence of the employees is not only individual, but also important for the competence of the entire workplace and develop through professional learning communities (Senge, 2006; Wenger, 1998). Therefore, it is necessary to share competence. Otherwise, it will not contribute to the development of a community of learning at the workplace (Senge, 2006; Wenger, 1998), but have only limited impact on individuals’ work. The competence will also be lost when employees leave the workplace for retirement or other reasons. The concept *affordance* is originally constructed by Gibson (2015) in quite a different context, and refers to the action and development possibilities formed by the relationship between an agent and its environment. He also connects affordance with perception. In the case of my data, affordance is useful when seen by the employees in terms of their possibilities for action in the institutional practices. In addition, senior employees may be seen as boundary crossers or brokers (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011b). Boundary crossing is defined as the “negotiation and combining ingredients from different context to achieve hybrid situations” (Engeström, Engeström, & Kärkkäinen, 1995, p. 319), and boundaries “as socio-cultural differences leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011a).

3. ADULT EDUCATION, NURSING HOMES AND IMMIGRANTS

According to Statistics Norway, there are 765108 immigrants in Norway. This is 14.4 % of the total population, and 3.4 % of the total population are the children of immigrants. They have emigrated from 221 countries. The proportion of refugee background among immigrants is 30 %. Immigrants are settled in all municipalities (Statistics Norway, 2018b, 2019a, b). Adult education offers courses in Norwegian language and social studies, and primary and secondary levels of education to e.g. immigrants. The municipalities where immigrants live are responsible for such

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

education, and nursing homes are also a public responsibility. In municipal health care services, which include nursing homes and home care for elderly and disabled people, one out of six employees is immigrants. In Oslo, the percentage of immigrants employed in such care is 44 % (Statistics Norway, 2018a). The largest branch of employees with an immigrant background is health care services, where 19 % of the immigrants are employed, whereas less than 6 % of immigrants are employed in teaching (NOU 2018: 2, p. 33). Included in this 6 % are also mother-tongue teachers for children with and without relevant formal education. This implies that the proportion of teachers with formal education is low among immigrants.

4. DATA AND METHODS

This article draws on data from seven seniors and five of their managers⁴. In accordance with Norwegian regulations, the Norwegian Data Protection Authority approved the study (08-2017). Before this, I contacted heads of adult education and nursing homes to localize workplaces with senior staff. The managers invited relevant employees to participate, and the criteria were that participants had to be 50+, skilled and to have immigrated as an adult. After approval, the fieldwork started and lasted until March 2018 (8 months). It was undertaken in three workplaces in the eastern and most populated part of Norway. All received an information letter and signed an informed consent document. Consent was re-approved when we made new appointments.

The fieldwork was based on observation/participant observation following the teachers and nurses. The study was inspired by Gherardi (2012) and Lave and Wenger (1991) on practice-based studies, and the focus was on what employees were doing as they conducted their everyday work tasks. While observing, I was sometimes seen as a participant in the settings, e.g. when teachers included me by asking questions or asking me to make comments or to tell the students about the topics discussed. The participation included breaks, lunch or a cup of tea together with teachers and nurses, being in meetings with their colleagues in informal and formal meetings, and in seminars and workshops. I followed up with questions based on observation, and with multiple interviews that took place in their workplaces, or outside in a café. During the research, I observed situations where the teachers used their first language or another language to help students in their problem solving or to understand the text they were working on. In the same way, I observed what I identified as cultural background and personal experiences among the employees, which were part of their job accomplishment and competence related to their background and migration process. The senior employees themselves reflected upon this competence and their use of it in their working practices, and how they in different ways were sharing their competence among colleagues. I then followed up with questions with seniors and their managers. The interviews were therefore based on questions from the

⁴The managers were heads of adult education and the head of a nursing home. In addition, two were heads of departments in adult education. Management is used as a term for principals and heads of departments and a head nurse and her section managers.

observation/participant observation, and included questions about the participants' background, migration and integration process, and their formal, non-formal and informal learning and work. The interviews were both in-depth interviews and informal conversations (Kvale, 1996), and lasted from a few minutes to two and a half hours. An important aspect of such interviews is informality. Notes were taken openly and continuously in notebooks, and most of the notes were transcribed on to a computer the same day. I also contributed to the production of data together with the employees, because the empirical data and its interpretation are always influenced by the researcher's own experiences and knowledge. As an anthropologist with an interpretive analytic perspective, I look for not one but many insights, because my acquired insight is positioned (Rosaldo, 1989). The analysis is based on identification of how the employees used elements of their background in their work practices. To that end, the data were categorized in two main themes: 1) language and 2) cultural background, personal experiences and migration process. Included are also work experiences from before the migration. For an anthropologist an analysis is an ongoing process where the researcher is observing, participating, interviewing, writing, systematizing, reading, looking for certain topics, returning to the participants for further interviews, and then re-writing.

In addition, I performed semi-structured interviews with the managers. They lasted for one hour in four interviews, and one and a half hours in one interview. We also met for short informal conversations. An interview guide for these interviews was made in collaboration with the research group. The guide included topics about the workplace and employees with focus on seniors, in addition to migration background. An audio recorder was used to collect this data. All interviews were transcribed in an accurate way without names and other identifying details. The data was then analyzed thematically.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

All participants and names of organizations are anonymized. Midtberget was a middle-size school for adult education, Storberget was larger and the nursing home was relatively large. Two principals, two heads of departments and one head nurse participated. Four of the employees were teachers and three were nurses. They were between 51 and 68 years old, and had emigrated between the ages of 27 and 51. They were from different countries and had been living in Norway for 10 to 26 years. All were fluent in Norwegian. In addition, they spoke two to four other languages.

The seniors' migration trajectories varied from being refugees or becoming reunited with a spouse to expert trajectories. Three of the employees had a long professional career before migration, and two of the teachers did not need further education. One of the nurses had worked in Norway on qualifications from her own country and in one year completed additional courses to gain Norwegian qualification. The others had to participate in formal education and work as auxiliary nurses for some years.

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

According to their managers, they were as competent as any other employees were, and familiar with Norwegian socio-cultural skills. Three participated in project work, which comprised courses, developing instruction material and collaboration with colleagues, or testing out different tools or working practices. One teacher and one nurse were currently undergoing further formal education. The seniors' formal competence had given them access to jobs in their profession. In addition, they drew on other resources, which this article further explores.

6. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

6.1. How senior employees use language

The nurses in this study belong to immigrant populations with relatively few elderly people. Hence, second languages did not contribute to the nurses' job accomplishment among residents, as opposed to the situation in the schools and presented in the following.

Sara from Midtberget was going through Norwegian concepts and a text. She alternated between explaining, repeating, asking question and waiting for answers. She moved between the whiteboard and each student. When she came to a student who had been in Norway for a few days, she repeated herself in their common language, Arabic, which is one of many languages she speaks. In another class, Sara collaborated with a teacher with Norwegian background, who explained to a student in different Norwegian words how the student could complete her exercise, but gave up and asked a co-student to explain. Later on, another student told the Norwegian teacher that she did not understand the word she needed to complete her exercise. Again, the teacher tried to help, but the student did not understand. After ten minutes, Sara went to the student's desk and she told about her problem in Arabic. Sara thought and said the word *balance* in the student's first language. The student gave Sara a big smile and continued her work. Because of her command of the student's first language, Sara understood what the student did not understand, and could therefore help. In the next break, the other teacher acknowledged Sara's competence, not only for the benefit of students, but also as an asset amongst colleagues.

The above shows how Sara used one of the languages she has a good command of to contribute to the students' learning, and as one of Sara's *others* (Jenkins 1998) the Norwegian-born teacher had relevant competence to recognize Sara's situation-specific competence. For the students, Sara's language proficiency was an additional resource for problem solving, and an additional resource for Sara as a teacher, whose job is to impart knowledge so that the students manage to accomplish their tasks. Therefore, the praxis of using the student's mother tongue or another language they have in common served at least two purposes. However, not only students coming from Arabic speaking countries may profit from having a teacher who speaks Arabic. Other languages, like Farsi, Urdu and Hindi have words in common with Arabic, and many among the Muslims understand some Arabic, because the Koran is in Arabic. Therefore, prior learning in languages may also contribute to a better understanding

among students with another background. Sara herself said that both colleagues and management knew about and recognized her language competence. The principal and head of department from Midtberget answered in the affirmative to my question about language as a potential resource among teachers, and knew about such situations as in the above examples. They also extended their answers to comprise more than languages, as is presented later.

In contrast, prior learning in languages was not identified as a resource by the principal and head of department at Storberget. After being in a classroom observing how Latifa used one of her languages to assist some students at Storberget, our conversation went as follows:

Researcher: Do you think the management look upon your background as an asset?

Latifa: No. Once, someone from the management participated in a meeting, and a teacher told her that we have great language resources among the teachers, but she only replied, “oh, yes”. I know that my colleagues appreciate my language qualifications. We talk about such things, but I have never talked to the management about it.

Later Latifa added, *“I know many words connected to feelings in their languages, because such words are common in many languages.”* She elaborated that it gives her an opportunity to understand her students in context other than without such qualifications and to respond to her students in adequate ways. This shows that her language competence contributes to a broader didactic competence than it would without, but that the management has only been interested in her formal competence. Not to include such languages as assets in teaching is in line with the policy of the management at Storberget, as indicated in the next sequence.

Researcher: Have you considered whether the teachers with a migration background possess any profitable informal competence?

Head of department: Yes, they have learned Norwegian as a second language, but this is not important.

Researcher: What do you think about teachers using their native tongue in the classroom if some of the students speak the same language and do not understand a Norwegian word or task?

Head of department: All students have the same rights. I am an opponent in principle of using a language not familiar to all.

The teachers’ experiences from their own learning of Norwegian language are one experience they had in common with their students. Indeed, it was mentioned as an asset, but not important. However, the right to equal opportunities for all to learn and non-discrimination in education would imply not doing the same to all and differentiating between different needs.

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

Norwegian-born colleagues had asked Sofia from Storberget for assistance in grammar for years, and in meetings during the fieldwork, colleagues asked such questions. As a teacher in Norwegian, she learned Norwegian as a second language before migration and had to understand the structure of the language in detail, as she said. She was delighted to answer questions, and explained that the reason was simple: *“I can answer the why-question in grammar, which in many cases is not explicit knowledge among teachers in their native language, even if they are educated in Norwegian language”*. In her classes, students asked why-questions often during the fieldwork. This competence was based on her formal education, as opposed to Sara, who did not have formal education in Arabic language.

In my discussions with the head of department at Storberget, she said that she expects all teachers to have the same level of knowledge in grammar and she did not have any answers when I asked about the potential positive significance of the teachers' migration background for the work place. However, when I asked the principal about knowledge in grammar, she said it is not important to know about it for learning Norwegian. According to her, all senior teachers had high competence in grammar, but she pointed out that research shows that teaching grammar, as many of her senior teachers are doing, is not up-to date, and added: *“Society has changed, and language-in-context is more emphasized. Society is not as much concerned about perfect Norwegian, but understandable Norwegian.”* The manager also mentioned competence in new research-based didactics as an advantage in the new recruitment of teachers as opposed to competence in grammar. Sofia and her colleagues emphasized, on the other hand, that this is not a contradiction, and that to make themselves understood, immigrants have to know how to use the language. Without an understanding of grammar, this is difficult, according to the teachers. Sofia used her expertise in grammar as a tool to help the students in their learning and was able to explain so they were able to understand, and she shared her competence with Norwegian-born colleagues when they asked.

This example shows that a teacher educated in Norwegian outside Norway may possess knowledge that Norwegian-born teachers with formal education in their first language not necessarily possess. It is not possible to answer all questions about language, or culture, because much of our knowledge is tacit (Polanyi, 1983), and therefore not explicit and possible to articulate and explain. However, the study shows that Sofia has a pedagogic tool to use in her teaching because she learned Norwegian in a different way to most teachers with Norwegian as their first language. Her competence was explicit, in contrast to Norwegian-born colleagues. When a manager takes for granted that all teachers have the same knowledge and therefore the same competence, this may not be correct. Findings from both schools show that teachers with a migration background used languages other than Norwegian and English as pedagogic resources or tools, and their affordance for action was present in both workplaces, but based on different circumstances. The management from Midtberget was aware of and recognized such resources as competence for their students and teachers. In addition, the teachers at both schools experienced that their competence was appreciated and demanded by colleagues and the management at Midtberget.

This was in contrast to the management at Storberget, which neither knew about the teachers' practices of using other languages nor put any value on their use of such languages.

6.2. How senior employees use their background and personal experiences

Cultural background and personal experiences from before and after migration were identified as beneficial in specific contexts to solve problems and in accomplishing work tasks. At Midtberget, the head of department was very interested in sharing this among colleagues. Our conversation went on as followings:

Researcher: How do you relate to the fact that some of the teachers have a migration background?

Head of department: It is good for the students to see them. They serve as models for the students. We ask them about their opinions. We get advice when we ask. Their answers are very valuable to us. We use their experiences.

Researcher: How?

Head of department: Questions about languages, religion and culture, with which they are familiar, are a resource to us. They have a combination of formal education and cultural knowledge, and therefore an understanding we do not have, and knowledge about Norwegian language and culture, as well. They are always positive and have a high standard of work ethics. They tell us that they identify with the students and use their own experiences of migration and being new in Norway to understand how the situation might be for their students.

The above dialogue shows that the manager considers formal education as well as the background and migration process as useful, not only for the teachers themselves, but for students, colleagues and management. She also acknowledges their competence in Norwegian language and culture. Cultural competence in the meaning of being able to understand a situation in its correct significant context is a core competence in communication. This is competence all the seniors used, based on their prior learning before, during and after migration.

During a lunchbreak, Sara from Midtberget said that she serves as a model for students as a skilled, fulltime employed woman with a family, and her Norwegian colleagues added that she is a role model for students because of her background. The principal made similar comments, and said that the teachers and head of department mutually recognize and appreciate each other's competence and resources. The interview with the principal continued with the following dialogue:

Principal: I have emphasized employing such teachers, and I really want to employ more with a multicultural background.

Researcher: Why?

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

Principal: Because I think they have a very useful background for our students. In my opinion, we need differences among the employees. I also think it is motivating for the students to see that people with immigrant and refugee background get education, get jobs as teachers, and manage. I know that they have experienced how it is to be an immigrant and refugee themselves. I do not think that we have been enough awareness of their resources and how to make use of them. On the other hand, they have always been a natural part of the work place and fit very well into the work environment.

The principal added that she had employed one teacher with a migrant background a short time back, and continued: *“As long as they have the correct competence in subjects and teaching, I would like more diversity. I want diversity when it comes to gender, age and background.”* She also said that she does not have concrete knowledge about what kind of resources teachers with such a background have and how they can share and use their competence among the staff in a different way than they already do. If competence are situation-specific and contextual (Mulder, 2015), it will be a challenge to identify additional competence in the meaning of something reified and countable, except for languages based on formal learning and tests. However, to get an idea about additional competence is possible. The point is that the study shows that being different, may serve as a resource in work. Participation in the study might also have contributed to additional focus on this topic. However, independent of that, management and colleagues at Midtberget identified that migration contributes to different and additional competence to their working context and acknowledged the total competence of staff with a migration background. In addition, they supported the concrete action that these teachers are able to take. The teachers with migration background appreciated the management’s recognition of their total competence and the affordances they are given to use their competence, compared to Storberget, where competence based on more than formal education were identified and demanded by colleagues, but not by the management. The management at Storberget did not pay attention to teachers with migration background as potentially carriers of informal learning to draw on for students, colleagues or the organization. Hence, migration background was not relevant when it came to employment at Storberget. However, this study shows that working practices were based not only on formal competence at Storberget either, but also on total prior learning, which means competence in development related to specific contexts, as further explored in the following.

Renate from Midtberget and Latifa from Storberget came from different countries with Muslim majority populations. During the period of the research, their students were also mainly from Muslim populations. Both teachers were actively using their personal ties to their cultural background to accomplish their work. The next quote is an example of how Latifa learned to use her experiences in new ways after migration.

When there are conflicts, I use my knowledge about being a good Muslim. I refer to the Prophet, claiming that Muslims should not do so

and so, like shouting and so on, and that we are responsible for ourselves. Then they calm down. I use Islam to explain that they have to pay taxes, and not be involved in moonlighting. Another example is noise in the classroom. I am just silent in front of them without asking them to be quiet. If a teacher hushes them up, they will never ask any questions. When I am silent, the students are wondering what is going on. I have an understanding of their culture, and I know how it is to learn a foreign language. I have grown-up in another country, and I know “the bumps on the road”. I can also speak so it is understood in a positive way. I know their religion, and the students think that I understand them, and I do. They listen to my advice, and I am perfectly suited to do this job. All here are skilled and hardworking teachers.

The citations show that Latifa uses her extensive cultural repertoire to legitimate and support the Norwegian learning contents and to correct the students’ behaviours and attitudes, as well as strengthening their psychosocial learning environment based on common language, religion and experiences from Muslim countries. Latifa knows that hushing up adults is not a constructive practice. Therefore, she can concentrate on work. Latifa shows that she is able to understand migrants and their situation in a different way than without such a background. She has and uses a different repertoire to her colleagues, with whom she shares her competence in different meetings. She actively uses the fact that she is one of the migrants, and not only one of the teachers. Latifa and the Norwegian-born teachers have similar competence acquired through formal education, but also different competence, because their competence is based on more than formal learning and developed in different ways in different contexts. The employees with migration background contribute in different ways with alternative understandings, answers and practices in a work process than without such a background. When the senior staff use elements of their additional resources, they are crossing the borders of the competence of the Norwegian-born seniors.

When I asked Latifa if she thinks that the management at Storberget looks upon her background as an asset, she answered “no” and added: “*The management does not know what we are doing.*” Latifa and also Sofia emphasized that no one had ever observed them in their classrooms before this study. Sofia said:

I draw on all my experiences from my education and from my experiences from my home country, and all my professional experiences and life-experiences. I am acknowledged by the management as a teacher, but they do not know what I am doing. I am acknowledged by the students. They like me. That is the most important.

According to my understanding, the management at Storberget did not place emphasis on languages or cultural and personal background. However, the findings show that their Norwegian-born employees identified and recognized these aspects as beneficial to the teams and to themselves, and used them as resources in their own working practices and informal learning. As long as the management did not interfere in the working practices by e.g. visiting the classrooms and/or asking the teachers not

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

to use competence based on informal learning, teachers at Storberget also had considerable affordance for action based on their total competence. To understand the significance of such competence, it is necessary to pay attention to it, e.g. listen to Renate, who used rucksack as a metaphor and said as the following:

As adults, we have a heavy rucksack. It is valuable. When I needed something, my rucksack had something I could use. Just to be myself. It does not cost me much. I actively use my rucksack. I do not need to worry about doing something wrong, etc. In compulsory Norwegian school, I would have been worried about the pupils' parents. What would they say about me? I have actually been a teacher in such a school. It is all about trust. I think I had to show that I was as good as any other teacher. Here, you have to do that also, all have to, but.... here I can rest even when I am giving the maximum. My interest in refugees developed slowly. Immigrants and refugees are carriers of different life stories. What we have in common is an arrival to a different country. Everything is new and different, and there is a new language. My manager appreciates both my formal and informal knowledge, my background.

The dialogue continued as follows:

Researcher: What have you learned in Norway?

Renate: In Norway, people trust the system. Trust and honesty. It is much easier to be honest in Norway. These values are taken for granted, but it is not like that in all societies. I do not raise a warning finger, but I talk about respect, and include Norwegian values. I talk about the value of contributing to the community.

Renate also shows that she is aware that her competence consists of much more than formal education. Like with the other seniors, Renate uses different sides of her competence, depending on the situation and context. My understanding of her choice not to work at a compulsory school is worries about triggering an othering process (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Said, 2003) because of her migrant background, e.g. found among highly skilled women in Germany due to an accent (Grigoleit-Richter, 2017). Even though her Norwegian was almost without an accent, she shows other signs of being different to the majority population. Mentioning trust also indicates that her experiences of being a professional in another context might decrease the possibilities of building trust-relations because of her migration background. In addition, she includes experiences from her own learning process after immigration in her working practice. She also uses her prior experiences from being in a war zone and on the run as a resource. Her experiences have an impact on what she emphasizes in teaching, she said. She also recognizes different feelings among students, and gives advice to students based on her experiences. The dialogue continued as follows:

Researcher: Do you tell them about your refugee background?

Renate: I do not mention much about my refugee background, but I use my background as a resource with regard to the way I impart knowledge, and I try to understand the students in another way, because I have a similar background.

We do not know if migrants are refugees or not, but a combination of people's appearance as different from the majority population and an accent indicate a migration background in Norway. Teachers' and students' points of intersection are based on similar experiences different from Norwegian-born ones.

According to my understanding, the teachers experience that they and their students share some reference points, like being part of a migration history and process, and according to the teachers the students understand that they both have this in common, even though they also are different. The teachers are capable of grasping issues that colleagues may not understand. They appear as one of "us" among students because of their migration background, and as one of "us" among colleagues as experienced teachers in a Norwegian context. Hence, they appear as boundary crossers (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011b) between migrants and non-migrants and persons who offer resources among students with a migration background and teachers without such a background at both schools. To combine formal and informal competence in language, culture and experiences of another society, and experiences from previous work and migration, contributed in this study to the employees' opportunities to cross boundaries and create new contexts, or to achieve hybrid situations (Engeström *et al.*, 1995, p. 19). This is valuable in many ways as research from Norway shows that students with a minority background experience that their cultural references are not acknowledged and that this contributes to their experiences of not being included (Chinga-Ramirez, 2015; Sajjad, 2016).

The teachers and the nurses said that the most important significance of their migration background was their awareness of hard work to become skillful teachers and nurses. The nurses were very clear about their opinions when they reflected upon the differences between themselves and Norwegian educated nurses, and how they understood these differences as assets in their own favour. They were very experienced as nurses before coming to Norway. In addition, they had more diverse practical experiences than their colleagues did in many of their work tasks, also based on seniority, as opposed to most of their younger colleagues. One of the nurses said: *"When I am in an emergency situation, I feel confident of managing and I keep myself calm. I use my previous experiences from my home country. When colleagues are under a lot of stress and do not know what to do, I understand that they are scared."* At the same time, she explained that she may also be scared, and influenced by heavy stress, but because she is trained not to show such feelings, she keeps it inside herself. She explained this due to previous education and work practices different from Norwegian ones. She also said: *"Many of my colleagues are not like that. They are not experienced in the same way as I am during my education and from my practical work."* The nurses said that the work condition were much more demanding in their home countries, e.g. due to experiences of war and socio-political changes. Their

Migration Background as a Resource Among Senior Employees

prior learning has given them generic affordances for action when professional and human situations occur in new contexts in Norway.

Even if the nursing home had given work to many foreign educated nurses, they had not reflected upon whether the nurses had competence based on more than formal learning of importance to the working practices or of interest to the workplace. Therefore, the manager said that they had not developed any strategy to use such additional competence because they do not know about any competence except for those documented. However, the study shows that the nurses draw on a combination of formal and migration-specific competence in their working practices, as well as on formal and non-formal ones from seminars and courses, and affordances for action were given to them independent of the source of such competence. Two of the nurses were asked to train colleagues in specific work tasks because the management knew from other managers and from feedback from employees that the nurses held certain expertise valuable to their colleagues. Sharing their total competence was part of the nurses' daily work, but this did not have any impact on e.g. their salary, which one nurse mentioned as demotivating. The nurses said that Norwegian colleagues do not have all the necessary basic skills from education and praxis, and therefore they have to do work tasks that all nurses in general should have been able to do. The third nurse also said that she was very well aware of using her background intentionally in caring, as she also showed me, and addressed residents with concepts like *mother* or *father* to show respect. To use family concepts with non-related persons is not common in a Norwegian cultural context, but is an important way to address elderly persons in her own cultural context and to establish trusting relationships. She said that every day she uses her migration background, e.g. her knowledge about elderly people, in a successful way during her work. Another example was to give hugs to residents on a regular basis, in contrast to what she understood as common practice. Both examples show that she uses her background in her caring strategy. Data from the nursing home shows that competence based on prior learning before migration are utilized during working practices with Norwegian residents and colleagues. This means that nurses with migration background also are boundary crossers of significance to the nursing home.

7. CONCLUSION

The study identified that the seniors draw on competence from their language, cultural background, personal experiences and migration process as important parts of their prior learning different from Norwegian-born employees, and shows how they use informal competence in new ways as boundary crossers. The seniors showed their "potential for adequate functioning-in context" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 1) based on their total competence and that this may contribute to an alternative understanding in a work process and a focus on other issues and solutions than without such competence. This is relevant knowledge in an increasingly diverse multiethnic and multicultural society, and is relevant at all levels of education and in health care. Being competent as an employee and senior, as shown here, is also relevant in societies where seniors have to challenge age stereotypes or discrimination (Field, Burke, & Cooper, 2013;

Solem, 2016). The findings imply that it is generally important to know about prior learning among employees in a workplace as something other than “objective attributes of persons” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 1). To identify and recognize competence based on different prior learning, managers need to know what to look for. To support such competence to be used and further developed in different contexts and learning communities at workplaces may contribute to a deeper insight into learning at the boundaries of working practices. Managements which do not know about such competence among migrants and their significance, may not know that such resources may be in demand among colleagues to support their informal learning and working practices, and that it may be pure coincidence if or when colleagues get access to the competence, as this study shows. Exploring employees’ prior learning and how their informal learning can be used as a resource in the workplace and in recruitment is possible. In line with other studies (e.g. Mulder, 2015), this study shows that such competence is contextual and situational. However, the study also showed that competence used in one situation might also be relevant in other situations. Managers therefore need to see that it is possible to develop something new in such boundaries and new contexts, which might be useful to them. As a result of this study, managers and colleagues may profit from visiting classrooms and wards to observe and have dialogues about their employees’ and colleagues’ practices, which might also open up to explore tacit knowledge, but interdisciplinary competence or collaborations may also be needed. When competence based on prior learning are not identified, recognized and put into a system of sharing for informal learning purposes, such competence may only have an ad-hock effect even if affordances for action of such competence is present. Further research may explore the abilities of management to acquire competence to identify how such prior learning may serve as resources. An implication of a narrow understanding of competence may contribute to a narrow understanding of the working practices of employees with migration background specifically, and among employees and seniors in general.

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