

## **Cultural Integration of Migrant Citizens:**

A Social Responsibility Learning Project

Singla, Rashmi; Akora, Lydia; Panesar, Jasbir; Lindström, Kaisa

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## CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT CITIZENS: A SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY LEARNING PROJECT

Rashmi Singla, Lydia Akora, Jasbir Panesar & Kaisa Lindstrom

*Artiklen handler om praksisforskning baseret på et transnationalt EU-projekt, der sigter på at forbedre »adult migrant learners'« kompetencer for aktiv deltagelse i samfundet. Projektets formål var forbedring af de voksnes forståelse af socialt ansvar på forskellige niveauer ved at gøre dem bevidst om deres retigheder og pligter – både som medborgere, som forældre og som enkeltpersoner. Projektets grundlæggende begrundelse er et empowerment perspektiv, set som processer hvorigennem underprivilegerede individer og socialgrupper forbedrer deres evne til at skabe, overskue, kontrollere og håndtere materielle, sociale, kulturelle og symbolske ressourcer. Uformelle lærings-tilgange såsom dialogiske psykosociale workshops, »creative writing workshops« og filmproduktion, blev benyttet i forskellige geografiske kontekster: en NGO i København, Danmark, en NGO i London, United Kingdom og en Folkehøjskole i Mikkeli, Finland i perioden fra 2003 til 2006. Projektet indeholdt bl.a. etablering af kontakt på tværs af etniske, uddannelsesmæssige og nationale grænser, inddragelse af »adult migrant learners'« stemmer og løbende evaluering. Artiklen diskuterer ligeledes begrænsningerne af de tidsafgrænsede projekter.*

*På trods af forskellige dominerende fokus i de tre lande (forældre-empowerment i Danmark, forbedrede jobmuligheder og entreprenørskab i UK og forbedret social tilpasning i Finland) var det fælles aspekt i projektet, at de voksne kursister kunne reflektere over deres forståelse af deres medborgerskab i en kontekst af multikulturalisme og postmodernisme. Derudover var der fælles temaer, hvor lige muligheder, social inklusion og racisme inden for hvert land blev belyst med inddragelse af implikationerne for de voksne. Desuden belyser artiklen, hvordan videnformidling gennem transnationale konferencer førte til øget empowerment og forbedret socialt ansvar ikke kun blandt kursisterne, men også blandt de professionelle.*

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Rashmi Singla, cand.psych., M.Sc., Ph.D., specialist in psychotherapy, in-charge T.T.T. and assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Roskilde University, Denmark.

Lydia Ejang Akora, cand.psych., Psychologist, Family Therapist, Rehabilitation Center for Traumatized Refugees, Odense & consultant T.T.T., Denmark.

Jasbir Panesar, BA (Hons), MA Social Science, Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Community Development Co-Ordinator, University of East London, and Sherico Care Homes Limited, London, UK.

Kaisa Lindström, M.A., Principal, Otava Folk High School, Mikkeli, Finland.

»The next necessary thing...is neither the construction of a universal Esperanto-like culture...nor the invention of some vast technology of human management. It is to enlarge the possibility of *intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another* in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way.«

Geertz, 1988

## 1. Introduction

Ethnic minorities in Europe have been characterised by a problem discourse during the past couple of decades with hardly any focus on the counter discourses about their strength and empowerment. This article is an attempt to present such an emergent strength and empowerment discourse, based primarily on the project experiences of NGO TTT<sup>1</sup> in Denmark, combined with experiences from the transnational partners Sherico Care Homes Limited, London, United Kingdom and Otava Folk High School, Mikkeli, Finland. At the same time, the project can be seen as an attempt to establish contact between people across various borders.

During the period August 2003-July 2006, TTT has been involved in a transnational project with economic support from European Community Socrates/Grundtvig learning partners programme<sup>2</sup>. Transnational meetings have been held at London, United Kingdom, Copenhagen, Denmark and Mikkeli, Finland.

The global trends influence the disadvantaged adult immigrant's level of participation in learning within the European context. These patterns are influenced by a variety of factors, which included the opportunities of lifelong learning within these countries' and socio-economic positions of this target group. There are differences and similarities within the adult immigrants living in Denmark, United Kingdom and Finland.

The article presents the aim and rationale for the project, followed by a description of the project in the different context and finally presenting a conclusion as well as perspectives applying to all the partner countries.

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- 1 Transcultural Therapeutic Team: for young ethnic minorities and their families. Address: Nørre Voldgade 6, 3rd floor, 1358 Copenhagen K, Phone: (+45) 33 93 12 02, E-mail: [TTT@TTTdanmark.dk](mailto:TTT@TTTdanmark.dk), Homepage: [www.ttt danmark.dk](http://www.ttt danmark.dk)
  - 2 Thanks to Nilofar K. Pilegård, psychologist, TTT, Mouna El Riadi student assistant TTT, professor Arne Poulsen, Roskilde University and member of TTT's back ground-group, Karl-Henrik Jørgensen, Principal, Greve Gymnasium, Khadija Al Mohammadi, project-in-charge, Pailletten, all in Denmark for their contribution to the project.

## 2. Aim of the project

The project aimed to develop a transnational community creative writing, psychosocial workshops and educational skills programme with learners from migrant communities, especially women, involving mostly professionals with ethnic minority background. The project utilised an informal approach allowing learners to increase their capacity to play a full active role in society. Learners would be given an opportunity to express their cultural, social and economic experiences in relation to citizenship through essays, journals, media and workshops. Support and guidance systems would be put in place for developing self-confidence, motivation and educational awareness. The project's outcomes would include case studies, publications, an exhibition, seminars, workshops, www-sites and partnership exchange visits allowing for wider dissemination across local, national and transnational communities.

The objective was to involve the adult immigrants, further referred to as adult learners, in the development of the project activities within each country enabling them to explore their identities, transnational experiences as migrants, learning about each other's culture and reflect upon their definition of citizenship.

Creative writing, educational guidance in adult skills programs and parental empowerment workshops would encourage specific targeted migrant communities from each country to engage in widened participation through the transnational community. The learners were encouraged to understand their position within the new society they were engaged in, especially the experiences of migration and the effects of state legislation.

The empowerment of the learners was initiated in various forms depending on the structures of each partner country's services, and situation of the ethnic minority communities. What was the rationale behind this empowerment perspective? This question would be answered next.

### *2.1 Overall Rationale: Empowerment of the Migrant Citizens*

The project can be considered as an action research, which is seen as a way of understanding, and organising research, rather than a »method«. The simultaneous action of undertaking broad social science research, involving participants in the process, and addressing social problems forms the basis for placing the project as action research. Knowledge is considered to be created and developed in practice through common action, co-operation, problems, conflicts, dilemma, coping, resolving and experiences gained) (Højholt, 2005). Knowledge is generated by what we do – in a context.

The basic rationale of the project is the concept of empowerment, which focuses on the processes through which underprivileged groups improve their abilities to create, overview, control and wield material, social, cultural

and symbolic resources (Andersen, 2005). These processes contribute to the sense of social responsibility by counteracting the lack of power characterising these groups. Following this conceptualisation, the first step in these processes is collective problem recognition, followed by attempts to influence surroundings norms and values, e.g. challenge the discourse that the social inequalities are due to personal shortcomings. Thus the empowerment processes involved vertical (groups are empowered in relation to power centres at higher levels) as well as horizontal (groups are empowered in relation to the actors at the same level) dimensions. The project thereby attempted to develop an enhanced sense of responsibility among the adult learners at several levels: making them more aware of their rights and duties as citizens, as parents and as persons. At the same time the concept of vertical empowerment implies that project also attempted to enhance the sense of social responsibility among the professionals by making them more aware of their responsibility towards the ethnic minority groups by including their nuanced, well-documented voices and relevant ways of improving their situation.

The different project activities involved interactions between the professionals and the minority persons as well as interaction among the adult learners themselves.

One of the major features characterising the migrant citizens is the experience of racism and social exclusion. Delineation about tackling the roots of racism underpins empowerment through education as the key intervention in combating racism, though most interventions involve the powerless, rather than the powerful and the influential (Bhavnani, Mirza & Meeto, 2005). Therefore the present project targeted not only the migrant women but also the professionals through the dissemination of knowledge.

The project was inspired by different types of parental programmes, such as the integrative intervention programme (Hitli, 2004) with children, which included sessions with the parents in order to give them knowledge about the children and how to help them. The workshops have been further inspired by the rationale of Couples Group Intervention project (Cowan & Cowan, 2004), according to which both *theory* and empirical findings suggest that an intervention to help parents in relationship with their children and some social issues might produce preventive effects on families likely to experience distress. At the same time the interventions promote the effects that increase the adaptation of both strained and well functioning families. Thus the workshops had both preventive as well as promotive functions.

Furthermore within a relatively narrow psychosocial framework, the project rationale can be interpreted as family centred empowerment model as in the family life education (Hennon, 2006). The empowerment model implies that enriching the migrant family's cache of resources is critical. The interventions should be aimed to help the migrant parents increase the positive, protective factors and reduce the risk factors. The psychosocial

workshops contributed to build capacity for resiliency among the women, thereby enhancing the family's resiliency.

The adult learners were involved in suggesting the themes for the workshop, reflecting Hennon's conclusion that the empowerment processes should present information in such a way that it can be incorporated in the already existing understandings as well as widen their horizon. This resulted in a combination of theoretical knowledge with research-based knowledge in interaction with the everyday experiences of the adult learners.

At the same time it is kept in mind that there is a great diversity within ethnic minority groups and that culture does play some role in how parents are parenting. Therefore, cultural competency among the professionals is a necessary component of relevant interventions. Caution was maintained not to over generalize and »type« migrants of a particular group as being like-minded and similar in parental concerns and practices (ibid, 2006).

We are aware of the potential complexity, levels and extent of the disadvantages and problems faced by the ethnic minorities in the above-mentioned contexts. Inspired by culture anthropologist Geertz's pointing of the importance and complexity of culture and the need for its interpretation, we worked with an understanding of culture as a broad world-view (Geertz, 2000). As mentioned in the op. cited, we attempt to create contact across the borders of ethnicity, educational level and nationality. At the same time we are also aware of our limited resources, therefore the project aimed at transformations and exchanges at a modest plan on an interpersonal level.

The following sections illustrate these theoretical conceptualisations in practice by throwing light on the experiences in the above-mentioned three contexts.

### **3. The Danish project**

In Denmark during 1968-1971 there were prospects for labour oriented migration, which resulted in migration from various developing countries. The first immigrants were mostly young men in the age group of twenty to thirty who came to Denmark without their families and encouraged further migration of their relatives and friends, thus resulting in chain migration. The transplanted communities experienced security and comfort but they also experienced marginalisation and isolation from the receiving societies. In the past two decades, there have been major structural changes in the Danish society with negative focus on the minority populations creating the need for ethnic minority empowerment programmes. The migrant population in Denmark primarily originates from Turkey, Pakistan, former Yugoslavia, Morocco, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

NGO, Transcultural Therapeutic Team (TTT) for ethnic minority youth and their families, which has been providing psychosocial services since

1991, was responsible for the Danish project. The ongoing systematisation of the experiences based on the psychosocial work with the youth, directed the attention to the significance of preventive intervention programmes. Along with the experiences from TTT, the earlier mentioned projects have also inspired the projects.

### ***3.1 The Pilot Workshops***

Pilot workshops with the learners were initiated in order to develop appropriate themes based on the earlier described experiences and inspired by the transnational exchange among the learning partners. The workshops were conducted with learners of Turkish background and involved a dialogue between the mothers and daughters in the vicinity of Copenhagen.

Firstly, the potential learners were given the choice of participation, which included only mothers, mothers and fathers or mothers along with their children (13–20 years old). It turned out that there was a clear expression of interest about participation of the mothers and their teenage children. The number of participants was 8–12.

The workshops aimed at supporting participants through equal dialogue on constructive methods of handling conflicts with the young generation (positive strategies). Main focus was on being parents and youth in a society that rapidly changes and in a country where they have the ethnic minority status. A good relationship between the two generations would imply interdependency with focus on each other's resources, room for the weak points as well as positive experiences from the daily life.

There were three generations in the workshops, which composed of mothers, young daughters, and also a grandmother along with her teenage granddaughter. Evaluation by the learners was a part of the workshop. Some of their comments are given below:

- *»Got a lot out of this. How the others do things«*
- *»It is good with midpoints and examples.«*
- *»It was good but there was not enough time.«*
- *»There were some important points that mean a lot.«*
- *»The best is that I am together with my children here. Very interesting.«*
- *»Psychology teaches us how to act right. Then one stands stronger in the fight.«*
- *»Good to know about the young's rights and responsibilities.«*

### ***3.2 Workshops in the Informal Sphere***

These pilot workshops formed basis for the major project during the second project year. The project had a gradual increase in the number of adult

learners in the last few workshops with predominantly Pakistani and Arabic backgrounds (8-12 persons). There were 5-6 workshops in a year, approximately a workshop was conducted every second month.

In spite of the pilot workshop's positive results about including the parental and young generation, the workshops primarily targeted at the adult learners due to pragmatic limitations.

The workshop can be regarded as bilingual and multilingual, as both the lectures and discussions carried out in Danish were translated into Urdu, Arabic and Farsi, depending on the composition of the adult learners group. The lectures were followed by active dialogue and discussion in the groups.

The major themes were about the dynamics in the family relations, parental understanding and co-operation with the school system and, the social participation in the broad society including the experiences of discrimination and coping. These themes are perceived to contribute to an enhanced sense of social responsibility among the adult learners. .

The focus in some of the workshops was on the different strategies to get ahead in the context of exclusion at different levels in the society. In the lecture preceding during the discussions some concrete examples of the positive strategies were given, for example, formation of networks and suitable forums. In this connection, DRC (Documentation centre against racial discrimination) was named as a forum for registering and discussing experiences of discrimination. The psychological advantages of discussing such experiences within the family and the informal networks were also taken up. Furthermore these experiences were related to a broader perspective and other settings such as exclusion of certain groups in the adult learners' countries of origin.

After the lecture, the adult learners were encouraged to share their own experiences in a supportive and constructive environment, which led to a number of suggestions at the everyday life level. Close interaction with the children and invitation to discuss progress as well as problems in the school, were a few of the suggestions from a relatively older participant, whose daughter-in-law also participated in the workshop. Greater parental participation in school meetings, the importance of parents as good role models and some positive examples from the religious scriptures in order to cope with the experiences of exclusion, are only a few of the points that were emphasised. Another adult learner argued that parents and the youth generation, minority and the majority population should be made aware of these processes.

On the whole, there were fruitful exchanges of knowledge, not only between the professionals and the learners but also among the learners themselves.

On-going evaluation was a significant part of the project and was included in every workshop. In the last part of the workshop, the adult learners

were requested to evaluate the workshop as well as present suggestions for the coming workshop. The evaluative comments and the suggestions were noted down. The evaluation of the workshops from the participants identified a need for parental empowerment workshop. The following comments demonstrate this need.

*»We get some good suggestions. It becomes easy for us to manage our children.«*

*»We should make our children stronger. Our children are getting ahead in education.«*

*»It has been good to know how we can help our youth who are in the college.«*

*»We also learn from each other and from each others' experiences.«*

Due to the success of the above workshops, further workshops were developed to focus on school and family co-operation. Within these workshops the learners were inspired and strengthened also by each other at different levels and in different areas of their life worlds. For example, one participant suggested that the young people should be made aware of the development of qualities like discipline, patience and reflection in connection with the religious observance like fasting.

Thus the broad aims of the dialogical psychosocial workshops for the adult learners were both preventative as well as promotional in the Danish context. An analysis of the parental perception of their children's psychosocial intervention by psychologist Højholt (2005) indicated that parents are much concerned with the children's school in their everyday life. Furthermore the relationships between the generations within the framework of interdependency were discussed. These presentations were primarily based on the theoretical and practical experiences of TTT, involving the complex post modernity context and multiculturalism in the society (Singla, 2004).

Thus the project on the one hand included the family relations and on the other hand the school – family relations and the societal conditions as the pivotal themes for the adult learners.

The evaluation of the project indicated that there was a heightened insight and awareness related to the learners' societal position as ethnic minority, the family dynamics, especially, their role as parents as well as a better understanding about the school system. This led to better family functioning and co-operation with the school according to their own ongoing participant evaluation. These processes can be considered as part of an empowerment process for the ethnic minority learner, contributing to their voices being

heard at different levels – at home, in the community and in the broader society. The major project was characterised by dissemination of knowledge for the adult learners as well as professionals in larger settings among others at regional levels.

### ***3.3 The Workshops in the Formal Educational Institution Sphere***

Parallel to the above mentioned workshop series in the informal sphere; pilot workshops were conducted in a mainstream educational institution, Greve Gymnasium (Upper Higher Secondary School) in Copenhagen suburb. This institution has a considerable percentage of students with ethnic minority backgrounds.

In the first phase there was a meeting with the Integration Committee of the educational institution. In the meeting, in-depth questions were raised indicating a serious interest in this project. After a long exchange of viewpoints, only minority parents of youth from a particular class were invited for the pilot workshop, along with two of the students, who were members of the high school integration committee. The major themes and form of the workshop was similar to the pilot workshop in the informal sphere. However, the major focus was on empowering the parents to deal with the young generation in the context of post modernity and multiculturalism. This was done through dialogue within the framework of interdependency.

Access to and continued participation of the adult learners can be perceived both as a challenge and difficulty encountered in the project. Although there was a limited attendance in the workshop due to a variety of reasons, the following positive evaluative comments by the parents and youth forms the basis to continue with the practice of workshop later, possibly with some transformations in the access procedure and the form.

*We have learnt something new, even though we have a good relationship with our daughter.*

*We have heard some other viewpoints they can help us sometime.*

*It has been good to discuss things, also with these young people.*

### ***3.4 Limits of the project***

In spite of the above mentioned positive evaluative comments by the adult learners, there were number of limitations experienced by the professionals in carrying out the project.

There were »visions« about involving both mothers and fathers in the project but the very first limitation experienced was access to fathers. Even otherwise the access to a target group in the first phase was demanding as it required an extensive network. Due to structural changes in the institution where the pilot workshops were conducted, co-operation could not con-

tinue and resources were used on locating suitable institutional partner. In the informal sphere the adult learners who benefited most were the women without employment and not attending any formal education as they could attend the workshops during the daytime. Uncertainty about the continuity of the project after the first two years also led to negative reactions among the adult learners and some degree of dropouts in the summer period.

On the contrary, the pilot workshop in the formal sphere was characterised by limited participation of the parents, the number varying from 2-8 participants. The professionals have speculated about the reason for low participation, as there was positive evaluation by the parents who participated. Inviting only the ethnic minority parents could possibly imply a subjective feeling of stigmatisation. We had discussed a broader model of workshop in which both ethnic majority and ethnic minority parents could be invited, but this model was dropped due to experiences from our transnational partners. Their experience indicated that the broader model can be experienced as fully safe for the ethnic minority parents and they can be inhibited to express their views. The solution was to invite the ethnic majority parents later and then finally invite them together to focus on the similarities as well as the differences in their experiences as parents.

Another reason for low participation could be the timings- one workshop was conducted on the first day of the Ramadan (the holy Islamic fasting period) and another was marked by a snowstorm. Amongst other reasons, the limited resources and limitation in the co-ordination resulted in conducting only a few pilot workshops. Thus the project did not benefit the target group to the extent it was planned. Unfortunately there was no final evaluation meeting in the formal sphere as the project finished in the month of July when the upper higher secondary school was closed. Though there is still e-mail contact and possibility for future co-operation.

### ***3.5 The Transnational Conference in Copenhagen***

The last period of the project was marked by an international Conference, where knowledge was been disseminated amongst institutions, agencies and local communities. Thus both the adult learners as well as professionals were part of this conference, which initiated further co-operation with institutions working in related field. There were about 40 professionals and 10 adult learners who participated in the conference.

The presentation of the project experiences by the Danish project in-charge as well as the transnational project in-charges formed a basis for an exchange across the borders at several levels.

An illustration is the inspiring presentation of the ethnic minorities' struggles against racism by the UK partner, which related these experiences to a broader perspective and other settings such as exclusion of certain groups in the learners' countries of origin.

Another illustration is the participation of the Danish European Union local agency, which made contact building between the transnational partners and the local agency possible. An exhibition of the project's activities was also put on display, further inspiring the participants visually through photographs, booklets and brochures.

The project has resulted in the empowerment of the learners and professionals in relation to their societal position as ethnic minority as well as active citizen in the society. The learners could also strengthen each other in their life worlds especially insight about the family dynamics and the society as the global situation had also been included in the workshops and the conferences. The next section deals with the project in the UK, which has relatively broad societal perspective.

#### **4. The United Kingdom project**

Unlike Denmark, United Kingdom has a much longer history of immigration where labourers from their colonies were encouraged to migrate due to labour shortages after the Second World War. However, in the 1960's and 1970's British policy makers became aware of what migrant communities could politically generate and instigate through community activists. This enabled these communities to make a landmark of their solidarity and once this was accomplished it left them to concentrate on the different migrant communities' identities, cultural, racial and religious aspects.

In United Kingdom, the communities targeted were from the South Asian subcontinent. These communities emphasised that each section of their own communities had a different religion, culture, identity, customs, language which were influenced by the part of the country they originated from and which they realistically identified as »home«, due to the sense of familiarity. Within Asia, there are several factors, which impose traditional dos and don'ts due to class, religion and caste identities. There are also religious communities within the Indian Sub Continent, which have been influenced historically and culturally by the other communities (Brah, 1996).

The learners reflected upon the themes of exploring the importance of learning the English language, relevant legislation, making them aware of the services open to them locally as well as dealing with personal issues such as domestic violence, unemployment and immigration.

In comparison to Denmark, the Asian communities in the United Kingdom have embraced the opportunities of Lifelong Learning which has led to some social change, where their socio-economic status has improved through taking up educational opportunities, better employment options and entrepreneurship.

#### ***4.1 The creative writing workshops***

There were 12-20 women participants in the creative writing workshops. All of them had south Asian background but with large variations. The varied gaps between the learners enabled them to share their individual experiences with an interest due to the different stages in their lives, educational backgrounds, different countries they were raised in, employment opportunities, cultural constraints, different experiences with family and their in-laws. Activities were offered at venues where materials produced sought to empower learners with further skills and knowledge. However, unlike in Denmark and Finland where other languages were used for communication in the projects, proficiency in the English language was considered paramount by the learners in the United Kingdom in order to progress in their self-development in the migrant country. On the whole, the sense of determination encouraged the learners to express their ideas and improve their communication and writing skills. They were also given the necessary force to plan their own future and pave the way to take up new opportunities.

Topics around citizenship provided an opportunity for the learners to express their own voice. Similar to Denmark, the learners engaged with each other on issues where the discussions assisted them to acknowledge and rise above the situations they could deal with or work around. This was done on a more preventive and promotive level. Like in Denmark, issues promoting diversity and equality were considered to be important for the learners to get an understanding on how to handle negative experiences and circumstances. Reflecting with each other within a group encouraged the learners to analyse their current situation and create realistic manageable progression routes for themselves. The project attempted to demonstrate to the learners the need to take grasp of the barriers, where once they had accomplished some of their aims, changes will automatically occur in building up their confidence. This will be a safe realisation of the level of achievements, which could be obtained and only by these experiences they could encourage others to grow.

The workshops themes were designed in keeping with the processes of lifelong learning. They were intentionally student centred, where the topics reflected the Asian women's perceptions of their migrated country, their status in their own community, and the country of settlement their own initial analyses of their personal development, achievements, learning needs and outcomes. Therefore, students recorded their personal testimonies reflecting these issues. The personal testimonies highlighted common themes, which related to the status of an Asian woman in the Asian family, community and the wider society. This article gives an account of these testimonies which draws out the barriers, responsibilities and expectations.

The testimonies show an appreciation of the young care free lives the women had led and maturing that occurred in relation to coping with the demands of married life, as well as living with extended families. At a lo-

cal level such workshops encourage friendship, learning that others are in similar situations, draw support from each other and empowerment through the skills and knowledge learnt. This influence encourages the learner to understand the importance of completing and existence of such courses. Furthermore, the learners gain a wider political perspective on the necessity of the Asian women's movement in Britain and Asia which in effect works towards globally addressing issues raised in the learners case studies perspectives. The Asian women's movement has been instrumental in raising issues effecting Asian women on a national level and with those persons able to highlight their voice in areas of policy change. The following testimonies illustrate some of the major themes covered in the creative writing workshops.

#### ***4.2 Life after Marriage***

For Asian women life after marriage imposes different demands, but what this means in eastern values needs further examining. There are differing expectations due to eastern culture, the new in-laws family's way of life and what their expectations are of a daughter-in-law. The new arrival is expected to mould into the family, without any protest, acceptance and recognition of her new responsibilities. In other words, one's life is no longer in one's control. Often some women have a notion of a romantic marriage similar to the Asian Bollywood movies, often an unrealistic story which does not gel into the reality of life. A woman participating in the programme said:

*Before I was in a dream world, the romantic movies appealed to me and I thought everything would be perfect, as girls were not prepared to face the problems that are created afterwards. The financial problems made me wise so quickly and I knew that both I and my husband faced a hard struggle.*

#### ***4.3 Transition and expectations of marrying and moving to another country***

There is a myth that life beyond the South Asian subcontinent provides better opportunities, and economic stability. It can be said there is a desire for many women to marry in order to experience the west. However, these visions can be short lived, as many women have conveyed they had unrealistic expectations of smooth pleasant visions. Upon arrival transitional experiences to the new country in the west construed differing visions.

*Leaving my family and friends was a difficult thing to do. Starting a new life within the United Kingdom was not an easy task. I did not understand English very well and did not know who to trust.*

It is difficult as it is to leave one's family, kilometers away in another continent, to start a new life in another foreign land, with a new family, environment, culture and language. Yet the memories of one's native country are never forgotten but vividly remembered.

Often there is a feeling of isolation, as life is busy in the United Kingdom, different from the more relaxed atmosphere of life in the South Asian sub-continent:

*Life is so busy over here and the social life is much less than compared to India. Without work life is boring. Everyone in the house went to work leaving me alone. The days were long. Even television did not make sense to me because I could not understand English. I was afraid to go out alone. I was in a prison. I was scared and afraid to go out on my own. I was at home each day missing my family back home. My mother in-law and I spent the afternoons going to the town or we watched ZEE TV. In India we used to go to each other's homes.*

Often the women believe they are not able to use their education in the new country, as they are discouraged from facing barriers, especially language.

*I have got a degree as a dietician but sadly my degree is not recognised in this country. As an Asian and due to my English proficiency I could not get a job and some shops would not even give me an application.«*

It is important for women to learn to speak English for survival reasons, to overcome isolation through being able to communicate with confidence and gaining of independence.

*I feel confident I can do most of the work myself. I have learnt how to use the library and have a full driving license. I can go to the bank, hospital, shopping, and children's school alone. I have gained a lot of experience.*

Even settling in another country is not an easy task, as economically one has to take whatever work is available to bring families over and cover basic living costs.

*When I was studying all my friends were well off, but I never complained that I had not had the things. After school I used to go to our neighbours house to do the cleaning, because we needed the money.*

#### **4.4 Leaving the family**

In the east women are expected to leave their parents home and join their new family; the in-laws. This practice exists in England and around the world. It is as if the community has kept its traditions, despite the migration and influences of the west. There is an eastern scenario where a girl belongs to her in-laws after marriage. Therefore, her own family will no longer interfere in her life, as she no longer belongs to them. Many women described their new journey in this context, being a journey that was happy for many, but unhappy for some.

*I have been brought up in a joint family. All my uncles, aunties and their children lived in the same house. When I was young I saw my cousin sisters getting married and leaving our house. It is difficult to understand why girls have to leave the place where they were born and brought up and then start a new life somewhere else with a person whom they hardly know.*

*My parents used to treat me like a guest. They used to say that I was only there for a few more days and I was no longer their little daughter but somebody's wife. I tell you that feeling was so odd. It hurt when they used to say that but even so I knew it was true.*

#### **4.5 Asian women becoming aware of services and provisions available**

The workshops ensured awareness raising with women knowing more about the services, provisions and legislation available in various areas. This enabled them to take control of political, employment and educational opportunities. This lack of knowledge is reflected in the experiences revealed by women who could have improved their situation if they were aware of the available benefits and services.

*I worked as a flat machinist when I used to get ready to go to work, my children would stick to me. The money I earned was not enough to pay for rent, babysitting and food. I never knew or got any advice that I could get support from the Department of Social Security. The women are not aware of services available. They need to be informed, where to go.*

#### **4.6 Legislation**

The women became aware of legislation, which can be used when experiencing discrimination or inequality. However, concern was expressed that equal opportunities for many was just paper policy, where in reality, this does not exist. There is ignorance and gaps in support, provision and

commitment. However, women became informed that they could challenge inequality.

Inequality is challenged in a number of ways and the use of Asian fiction is important in portraying that Asians in Britain can integrate, preserve their identity and stand up for themselves.

In the South Asian subcontinent, the type of employment taken up by women to a certain extent would be determined by their social background, religion and caste. However, migration tends to make a person change these restrictions and attempts to adapt to new conditions, purely for survival reasons. A woman from an orthodox Telugu Brahmin family in South India experienced caste difference.

*I applied for a Ph.D. encouraged by my achievement. I was called for an interview. I also answered well but when the result came out, it was like a bolt from the blue. I was not selected because, my guide said I belonged to the forward caste and she was under pressure to choose a lower caste as her research assistant as it was the government's rule.*

#### 4.7 Services

One woman stated that a time came when she could no longer suffer abuse in silence. Any assistance was refused by her brothers because they believed a woman is carried into her new life of marriage and should only be carried out on her death bed. She had to leave her abusive situation with the assistance of a friend:

*The Citizens Advice Bureau arranged for me to go to a safe house. The staff helped me to rebuild my life. I wish I had known where to go for help before. I would not have suffered from my in-laws. Many Asian women tend to suffer abuse in silence as many women tend to suffer in silence because of the pressure from the family and the society.*

These testimonies illustrate clearly that the South Asian women are reflecting on their situation and becoming aware of their responsibility at various levels through participation in the creative writing workshops. For all the three countries, the project brought into perspective that it is important for the persons and the community to develop in the new migrant country. But in the United Kingdom, this also meant giving the time and sweat which many community leaders and activists have sacrificed in instigating community mobilisation to bring about changes for better, through strength of solidarity and dealing with needs collectively. Collective resistance is essential as it directs an individual not to lose sight and promotes personal experiences and political involvement, but it is not without contradictions (Sivanandan, 1976). The communities have had to define their own identity for enforcing

their rights within a climate where the promotion of diversity and equality is being reinforced by the current legislation.

Active women's groups' roles are vital in making women aware of the legislation and others who are willing to argue for policies which are non racist and take into account the economic, social and cultural positions of black and ethnic women in Europe. With this awareness the learners drew strength from each other from the shared experiences. They had began to value themselves by understanding their current situations, controlling their lives and plan ahead by utilising available opportunities through progressing on to other forms of learning, transferring academic and practical skills to other course programmes or specific employment. Furthermore, the conferences mentioned below underline the broad range of activities carried on by the various ethnic minority especially women's groups in which there was participation of the UK project partners.

#### ***4.8 Diverse conferences***

In term of conferences, the project participated in the UK Reality Check Conference which based it's discussions on citizenship where the Sikh community was able to update itself with current issues and assist the community to move from the marginalized position to being constructively engaging in the governance and decision making process in the United Kingdom. A conference for Black and Asian women was organised where the project was disseminated. This conference highlighted the need for women from minority communities to engage in further education, entrepreneurship, participate in middle and corporate management employment, political and media careers.

An event was organised called 'Chiragaan Da Mel Milan' during the Festival of Lights which the project engaged in the discussion groups. This event encouraged a discussion on the theme of inclusive integration as UK had witnessed the recent Tsunami and bombings in London where it was intended to bring together the communities during the faith festivities. The theme of this event was to celebrate Eid, Diwali and birth of Guru Nanak (Sikh religion). It was felt it was necessary to have such a dialogue, as during this period there had been a growing unrest where the religious establishments were being attacked. The celebration of the faiths had brought together the communities where we were able to celebrate our folklore, appreciation of faiths and music. There was a discussion on stories of what had happened to the participants during their youth in their own countries and recognition of our own roots was very important no matter where one has made their own home. It was recognised that the faiths need to embrace themselves and should not allow them to be divided as we have other common connections such as culture, music and language.

Also, there was the celebration day of Asian women's citizenship and diversity. There were stalls of women businesses to promote entrepreneurship. At this event the project partners exchange meeting took place where the partners had a workshop to disseminate the project. Workshops were run with Bangladeshi women who claimed there was a myth in East London that they do not want to engage in education or employment. However, these women wanted to gain the necessary skills to gain further skills and knowledge as they wanted to improve their employability chances. Further workshops were run with Asian women who were interested in having the necessary access to training where they could become self employed and engage in entrepreneurship.

These experiences from the UK point to a relatively comprehensive activity level aimed primarily at the South Asian community, reflecting the particular immigrant population structure in London area. On the contrary, the migrant population in Finland does not include any South Asians as seen in the Finnish project experience presented next.

## **5. The Finnish Project**

In contrast to Denmark and United Kingdom, it was only in the 1990's that Finland had a major in flow of immigrants. The total number of immigrants in 2005 is still relatively low. The majority of immigrants are from Russia, Serbia and Montenegro and other parts of former Yugoslavia. (Source: Website of Directorate of Immigration in Finland).

The Finnish partners on the other hand, targeted communities from Russia, Kosovo, Turkey, Afghanistan, China and France in their project and worked with creative writing. However, on initiating creative writing with the migrant communities it became apparent that language was a crucial issue. At one level, when the learners came from many different countries and spoke many different languages, there were concerns as to how to engage them in a workable writing initiative.

### ***5.1 The creative writing and film workshops***

There were 12 migrant students, who took part in the creative writing courses and during the academic year 2005-2006 in the film project.

For the learners, just like in the United Kingdom, there was a need to learn a common language, but due to the varied grasp of the Finnish language among the learners, it was not possible to learn Finnish as a common language for the creative writing. Therefore, it was decided to use the languages amongst the learners in a very creative way. Pictures and photographs took a very important role in this process and productions, which later followed.

Creative writing courses were based on the method, where participants own language, Finnish language and English language were used together

with pictures, drawings and digital photos. Students told stories from their lives, to find the ways to cope with the life events and changes in their lives. These processes needed very open and friendly atmosphere to be successful. Stories were produced in the form of collage and they were collected to the common file<sup>3</sup>.

One of the important aspects was to avoid stereotyping, cultural and linguistic bias or assuming lack of confidence or limited communication skills suggesting a lack of intelligence amongst the migrant communities. The skills within the digital photography became crucial. Learners became aware of media coverage, as well as encouraging them to engage in digital photographing to focus on how they perceive their social environment.

In the last phase of the project, the students participated in a film school where they learned the basics of film making and made several short films under the guidance of art and film teachers. Basically film project was a continuation to the creative writing.

Participants started the film project by thinking personally their own life trip and then everyone picked one episode which has moved/ touched them greatly in one way or another. After that they went to the groups and presented their stories. The group chose one story to develop it as a short film through group discussion. The group started to work for the film by planning, making drama, filming, editing, developing voices and texts for the film. One demand from a teacher was essential: in the story there must be found an unexpected change at the end.

The products are actually like »fast food«, »fast films« (2-6 min), which, instead of technical qualities focus more on the pedagogical qualities, open ways to another's experiences and deeper understanding<sup>4</sup>.

It is important to note, that while Denmark and the United Kingdom are concentrating on preventative and promotional work, the Finnish project is seen to mainly support the adjustment of the migrant communities in the first phase of settling down. Common for Denmark and Finland though, is that the learner's mother tongue was an important resource for communication and in that sense multilingual methods are used in the project.

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3 Some of the stories are seen in the wwwpages: <http://grundtvig2.otavanopisto.fi/en/sisalto/mamujutut/01-studentsarticles> and [http://www.miamedia.fi/fi/orgs/enter/root/sisalto/muut/otavan\\_opiston\\_maahanmuuttajat/jutut/maahanmuuttaryhma\\_esitaytyy](http://www.miamedia.fi/fi/orgs/enter/root/sisalto/muut/otavan_opiston_maahanmuuttajat/jutut/maahanmuuttaryhma_esitaytyy) (in Finnish)

4 Some of the examples and photos about the process will be found from the site: [http://www.miamedia.fi/fi/orgs/enter/root/sisalto/muut/otavan\\_opiston\\_maahanmuuttajat/jutut/mamujen\\_elokuvakoulu](http://www.miamedia.fi/fi/orgs/enter/root/sisalto/muut/otavan_opiston_maahanmuuttajat/jutut/mamujen_elokuvakoulu)

### ***5.2 Limits of the project***

As a form of expression the learners also implemented creative music and dance performance. Working together within various communities had changed attitudes and created confidence in different groups. However, difficulties have been encountered in keeping the groups motivated through the creative writing process as many of the learners' view of learning has been very formal and expectations were focused on degrees and marks. Therefore, in order to stimulate an understanding on the formal processes of creative writing, reasons behind why this form of writing were explained. Learning needs to be holistic and student centred, where different cultural abilities and knowledge are taken into account. In some countries, those educated abroad are used to a more formal traditional teaching style and therefore, there is a need to show the learners how to be more involved actively in differing learning processes.

Furthermore, to encourage learning the »learning to learn« – learning skills and educational guidance programme aimed to make learners aware of their own learning processes. Learning English was encouraged where learners and staff were encouraged in this process. The use of ICT which, composed of information society education, gave learners skills in information technology. Learners have learnt about editorial practice where they have been engaged in interactive activities. The Internet media called »I-media« was used as a window and a voice for the migrant communities where they have become more visible and concrete for other local people. The goal of the project was to share citizenship experiences through this form of media. However, the UK and Denmark could be inspired by the »I-media« since it also served as an excellent way of integrating with local organisations and communities.

### ***5.3 The National Seminar in Finland***

In Otava , a National Seminar was held in June 2006, there were appr. 25 participants. It was combined with the transnational meeting. The seminar was called »Otava Film Festival« because the main contents consisted of short films made by immigrant students. Films were products of a special pedagogical method developed by an art pedagogy and film director to process the identity work and to cope with their life situation. Films were made as a project activity during the academic year 2005-2006. The aim of the seminar was to use those films as an inspiration for the interaction and discussion. Otava Folk High School who was responsible for the arrangements, invited the local actors, teachers, educational advisers, social workers and representatives from the local immigrant communities to take part in the National seminar. Immigrant students who have been involved in the film project were there to take part in the discussions. They also gave a lot to think to the audience by expressing their opinions. The film director and

teachers opened the seminar by explaining the idea of the sensitive areas of the life of young immigrants and it gave guidelines for further work with the local immigrant communities. Immigrant students told how important the group work during the film process had been to express their feelings and open up with their peers. Besides, group work among the students from different cultural backgrounds was considered to play a very important role by the students involved in the film project. The feedback discussion brought also up experiences related to drama exercises used in the film project, the self-esteem and self-confidence of the participants had strengthened.

In Finland one of the unexpected results consisted of immigrant students who wanted to continue working together in a group to keep up the channel for expressing themselves. The group has now identified their needs to make films or drama together and this resulted can be considered as a significant influenced their identity process. Also, working in a film project in the multicultural, heterogeneous group had changed the attitudes positively and lowered tension between cultural communities to increase understanding. In networking with other folk schools in Finland as well as with the Nordic folk high schools have created more new possibilities for the immigrant educational work and increased the professionalism of the folk high staff when working with immigrant students.

## **6. Conclusion**

Analyses of the project activities indicate that positive dynamics in contact between the learners and the professionals led to increased social involvement and responsibility of the adult learners as well as the professionals. Although there are differences in the methods and processes involved in the empowerment of the ethnic minorities leading to enhanced sense of social responsibility, yet there are similarities and cross cutting themes.

The seminars, workshops and conferences have had a cross cutting themes where equal opportunities, social inclusion and racism within each country had been explored in terms of what does this mean for adult learners, what can be adopted to deal with racism in their everyday life and how the learners can exercise their own legal rights. In Denmark, the basic social psychological framework of the dialogical workshop was concerned with the development of constructive strategies to cope with experiences of social exclusion and racial discrimination. The learners were encouraged to form networks and forums. On the whole the project has been very proactive in giving learners and partners a strategy to work together better.

In the United Kingdom the evaluation of the workshops, seminars showed that many of the adult learner beneficiaries were unemployed, educated at higher education level from their own countries, some had only engaged in the UK on small low level courses, had expressed difficulties in communi-

cating with the indigenous population and had not realistically felt that they could make positive changes to their lives. The nature of the end beneficiaries has meant for the project that some of them had been guided in preparing themselves to becoming entrepreneurs when they had skills and knowledge, which could help them to earn their own living. Some had gone on to formal education and training provision, including higher education in order to improve their personal self development. Many participants were interested in childcare and teaching courses. There was a realisation amongst many of the participants that they needed to improve their language proficiency now not only in areas of integration, employability but also when seeking citizenship of the country which is now a mandatory criteria. The beneficiaries were inspired by the presentations made by the professionals from teaching, research, social care and community backgrounds.

In the Finnish point of view the beneficiaries were students who had been involved in the project activities. Also, the possibility to meet other immigrant students in transnational meetings, having an opportunity to talk to another in their own mother tongue and share experiences in a wider European immigrant context has been considered to be a big benefit for the Finnish participants, who normally are learning in culturally heterogeneous and quite small groups. It can also be seen that the local area of Mikkeli has benefited both from concrete information channels created during the project, and from the knowledge and professional experiences the participants and local authorities and project workers have gained during the project.

## **7. Perspectives**

On the whole, the project has been challenging for both the adult learners and the professionals involved through the experiences at local, national as well as transnational levels. The objective to involve the adult learners in the development of the project activities within each country was successfully reached. The project activities enabled the adult learners to explore their identities especially as related to their parental functions and experiences as migrants. The group dynamic and the discussions created the basis for the participants to learn about not only each other's culture and the receiving society's culture but also about the complex interactions between the minority and the majority in the society. In spite of the differential dominant focus on the parental empowerment in Denmark, better job prospects and entrepreneur skills in United Kingdom and improved societal adjustment through Internet as well as film production in Finland, the commonality is that the adult learners could reflect upon their definition of citizenship in the context of multiculturalism and postmodernism.

The significance of the project for the professionals is illustrated by the following answers to the question in a workshop in Finland in July 2005: *What differences can we make in our own practices?*

*We can encourage others to become more realistic and achieve goals, which can be expanded later.*

*We need to recognise and value our skills*

*We need to learn to share our problems as we can find assistance and ways of coping with them due to the level of support received.*

*Empowerment is essential for families, our children, teenagers and us.*

*We need to be aware of the self-knowledge, which we gain during our everyday practical work we are engaged in on a day-to-day basis.*

*Building confidence amongst ourselves is the best present, which we can give each other.*

These narratives by the professionals involved in the project point out the mutual inspiration in the project activities especially the transnational meetings provide for them.

Now the challenge is to make constructive use of these experiences both further practice wise and knowledge dissemination wise in the future. This use of experiences should benefit both the ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority, not only in the three countries but also at the broader European level. The article is hopefully a step in that direction.

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