Activity as a tool in language training for immigrants and refugees

ENOTHE, York, England

17th-19th of October, 2013

Inger Brit Werge-Olsen

Sør-Trøndelag University College, Trondheim, Norway
Det blir kaldere.
Det er skyer
18-10-01-TORSdag
skyer
littskyet 0°C
ibrahim-flyttet
bukser blad
rot

Fatima, 33
● The qualitative study is based on fieldwork carried out in relation to a group of illiterate immigrants at a centre for adult education

● The participants consisted of 11 adult students, four males and seven females, between the ages of 20 and 65.
The participatory observation in the activity during the language practice took place during a six-month period.

The group interview was conducted with two groups of illiterate students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Time spent in Norway</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Homeworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Homeworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Carpenter/painter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Homeworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Bus driver/mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Steamstress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Homeworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Shop assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Weak language skills may cause problems related to the lack of cultural and social integration in the society.
Reflection and language are the keys to understanding the nature of human consciousness.

It is essential to relate language training to everyday activities in order to gain understanding.
• To take care of central values and skills from their native country can be a resource in their meeting with the new culture

• Many of the students had flight and traumas as a near experience
The focus of this study is how skills acquired from everyday life in one's native country can represent a resource in language training and work for immigrants and refugees.

The specific aim is to explore what significance activity and participation in activity have on language training.
● The word relations is used in everyday language about relationships, contact or connections between people.

● How are relations experienced when language is a challenge?
- Are we occupied with the students activity history from their home country?
- Do we ask what you can, what you did in your home country, what were your interests and what you worked with?
The main findings were that the individual immigrant’s history of activities received little attention during the language training. There was hardly any mention of previous experience from everyday life and work.
Issues that the participants had in common

- Disruption
- Continuity
- Bridge-building and possibilities
- Changing social status through activities
Nowroz (New Year, Spring Arrives)

Winter is over
The spring arrives
The trees grow leaves and become attractive
The sun shines
The family leaves to grill food in the mountains
We see our family, mum and dad
The children get new clothes from their parents
Everyone gives and receives gifts
We sit under the trees, drinking juice and tea
We have a good time
We are not inside, but outside
We sing a song about Nowroz and dance
The whole family is gathered
Some get married
Everyone says: ‘Enjoy your evening!’

(Text written by Badi)
By relying on different activities in the language training, the resources and background of the individual immigrant would have become more visible. Familiar activities from one’s own culture enable communication when language skills are limited.
Sources

- All photos by Inger Brit Werger-Olsen