KAPITTEL 4

Student mobility in kindergarten teacher education in the North: A dialogue on pedagogy between Russian and Norwegian students

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Abstract: This study reports on how participation in a short-term bilateral student exchange project between kindergarten teacher training institutions in Norway and Russia can contribute to the development of students' general pedagogical thinking. By applying Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue, I show how, through pedagogical provocations, students from these two countries construct several pedagogical tensions toward which they then attempted to take an active stance. The paper argues that taking a dialogical approach to short-term student mobility has the potential to provide academic benefits in general pedagogy for students enrolled in kindergarten teaching education programmes.

Keywords: kindergarten teacher education, short-term mobility, pedagogy, pre-service teacher, dialogical approach

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Introduction

The educational transfer of ideas and practices has been taking place in many parts of the world since the first millennium (Manzon, 2018). The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education defines internationalisation in education (Knight, 2012). One of the indicators used to assess internationalisation is mobility (stays abroad) amongst staff and students (Akdağ & Swanson, 2018; Denisov & Stepanova, 2015). This study focuses on short-term stays in Norway and Russia that were organised as bilateral student exchange projects with a duration of five days for each group. More specifically, the study explores the potential of using a dialogical approach to perform tasks during these stays, which may contribute to the general pedagogical knowledge of future kindergarten teachers.

If they are well-designed and have clear academic content, short-term stays can be highly beneficial for students (Gaia, 2015; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015). In Norway, the kindergarten teacher education programme consists of a bachelor's degree comprising nine areas of knowledge and ten academic subjects (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012b). While all Norwegian kindergarten teacher education programmes give students the chance to study for a semester at a foreign university in their third year at school (Bjerkestrand et al., 2015), few students take advantage of this opportunity and/or the offer of a work placement abroad (White Paper no. 7 (2020–2021)). Previous studies report on both the challenges of and preconditions for successful student exchanges. One reason may be that the rigid structure of the Norwegian kindergarten teacher education programme makes it difficult to accommodate mobility windows (White Paper no. 7 (2020–2021)). Research reports that Norwegian students enrolled in early childhood education programmes experience unclear cohesion between their time abroad and the general content of their education programmes (Isaksen & Olsen, 2023).

Student mobility in kindergarten teacher education has been studied and reflected upon in a large number of theories and concepts – most commonly, the theory of transformative learning and various aspects of interculturality and sociocultural theories (Anderson & Fees, 2017). In this study, I use a dialogical approach based on Bakhtin's concept of dialogue. Birkeland (2015) argues that the focus of a dialogical approach to

cross-cultural studies helps us to gain a better understanding of kindergarten practices and how these relate to culture and society. Therefore, the interplay between insiders and outsiders is crucial, which means giving students opportunities to be involved with "insiders." The opportunities for such dialogue must be more than an exchange of information; on the contrary, a student must challenge preconceptions by being open to the other's convictions. Another important voice in the dialogical approach to international education is Josef Tobin (Tobin, 2014; Tobin & Karasawa, 2009). He uses the concept of multivocality to show how preschool staff members reflect upon and impart their cultures' core beliefs. This study will elaborate further on the dialogical approach by focusing on yet another aspect of culture – the relevance of response to the *Other* in cross-cultural student exchange programmes.

The research questions are thus as follows: *How can students' responses from early childhood education programmes in two countries, in the context of a bilateral student exchange project, show the potential of using a dialogical approach to study short-term mobility?*

Context of the study

The participating universities, one in northern Russia and the other in northern Norway, have collaborated since 2012. They both offer kindergarten teacher education programmes. The collaboration has to date included several meetings and seminars for both schools' academic staff. In 2017, the universities initiated a student exchange programme[1]. The overall theme of the exchange project was "children's learning in kindergarten." One class of fifteen students from a kindergarten teacher education programme in northern Norway and one class of fifteen students from a kindergarten teacher education in northern Russia each spent a week at each other's kindergartens and universities. The Norwegian group consisted of second-year students from a kindergarten teacher education programme. The Russian group consisted of students from various university-based professional education programmes, all of whom had been trained to work in kindergartens (as regular teachers, special needs teachers, and speech therapists). The stay lasted five days and included visits to kindergartens and the host

1 The student exchange project was funded by the Barents Secretariat, which is the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' channel for funding cooperative projects in the region.

university. Three teachers from each country accompanied the students on their journeys. The programmes for the stays had been created by teachers' groups during two meetings (one in Russia and one in Norway) in advance and were identical for both groups. During their stays, the student groups were given the same tasks: They were to make observations and take photos of learning situations in the kindergartens, keep logs of their impressions, and attend lectures on the education systems in the host country. After their stay, the students submitted their texts in their local language (i.e. Norwegian or Russian).

Bakhtin-inspired discourse analysis as a methodology

I will explore the research question using Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895–1975) understanding of *dialogical existence* and *meaning-making*. According to Bakhtin, the *Self* exists only in relation to the *Other* (Holquist, 2010). Both the Self and the Other mutually define each other; the Self exists as a reflection of the Other and vice versa. Similarly, in this study, Norwegian and Russian kindergarten pedagogy are regarded as reflections of one another.

Bakhtin believed that meaning-making is a dialogical process (Bakhtin, 1994), and that the understanding of phenomena lies between individuals. "The border (of understanding) is not me, but I in relation to other subjects, which means I and the Other, I and You," (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 371). Any discursive unity is based on the idea of *dialogical cohesion* (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 197). In the difference between two or more meanings inherent in an utterance, Bakhtin identifies a tension between two forces. There is a centripetal force towards uniformity, a shared and common meaning, and a centrifugal force towards diversity of discourse (Bakhtin, 2012). The presence of both forces is necessary for the existence of each dialogue. Further, the forces each have different purposes in the dialogue. The centripetal forces secure possibilities for mutual understanding, while the centrifugal forces secure possibilities for diversity within the dialogue – and may imply directions for further possibilities within the dialogue. Thus, I assume that there is some common understanding of pedagogy that makes it possible to collaborate across national borders. This common understanding acts as the centripetal forces in the dialogue when participants from different countries collaborate. In this context, differences in pedagogical thinking act as the centrifugal forces.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogue involves the idea that all utterances are part of an infinite chain of utterances where the distinguishing characteristic of an utterance is the fact that it is possible to respond to it" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 268). To induce responses, I used *dialogical provocation* as defined by Matusov (2019b). Matusov (2019b) describes provocation as the process of inducing a response by feeding participants a predetermined statement, usually a provocative claim to which they must then relate. In this project, I used the students' own understanding of the pedagogical practices expressed in their local texts to provoke responses from them in a dialogue about pedagogical issues that are common to both student groups.

The dialogue between the students and the texts of the students from another country in this study is not a speech-based dialogue with spoken and heard utterances that Bakhtin's concepts of forces were invented to analyse. I am studying the dialogical relationships between the discourses on learning expressed in texts written by students from one country and students from another country. I understand these relationships to be ones between concepts that have different ideologies and values.

Dialogue on pedagogy as an antinomial practice

I have found the understanding of pedagogical thinking as universal thinking promoted by Danish pedagogue Alexander von Oettingen (2011) to be highly relevant to my research. Von Oettingen (2011) presents pedagogy as an antinomial practice, meaning it consists of contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions that cannot necessarily be resolved but which require educators to always take an active position. This antinomial pedagogical nature is independent of the place and culture in which educational actions are carried out (von Oettingen, 2011).

Next, von Oettingen (2011) divides the antinomial pedagogical practice into four parts, which he terms *problems*. These are the *action problem*, the *normative problem*, the *institutional problem* and the *recognition problem*. The action problem entails taking an active position on questions related to what a child and adult must do in order for the child to learn. The normative problem entails taking an active position on questions about the ideal to which the child should aspire. The role of the kindergarten in children's empowerment processes is part of the institutional problem. The recognition problem entails the fourth issue and consists of justification for

educators' actions. It is difficult, if not impossible, to claim that there is one right answer to these problems; on the contrary, the answers will always involve uncertainty and include taking an active position on contradictions and tensions. Pedagogues' professionalism, according to von Oettingen (2011), concerns their ability to reflect on these four problems. Therefore, educational institutions must facilitate the training of this ability. In the context of interaction between students from different countries, the four problems act as centripetal forces, while contradictions, paradoxes and tensions within these four problems act as the centrifugal forces in the dialogue on pedagogical practices.

Data production

The data source for this article consists of focus group interviews with students who participated in the "Russia–Norway" student exchange project. I conducted one focus group interview with the Russian students, and two with the Norwegian students (because it was a larger group). There were twenty participants in the interviews in total: six in the Russian group and seven in each Norwegian group. The focus groups with the Norwegian students, which were conducted in Norwegian, each lasted one hour. The focus group with the Russian students lasted two hours and was conducted in Russian. The interview with Russian students lasted twice as long as the Norwegian sessions because of the students' answers and their general questions about living in Norway, which they asked at the end of the interview.

In focus group interviews, data is produced through a process called "the development of everyday conversations" within a group about a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Topics for the focus group interviews were compiled based on an analysis of the texts that students submitted after their stays. These texts were subjected to thematic analysis as described in Braun and Clarke (2006). The topics were subsequently compiled based on the topics I identified in my analysis, as well as in selected quotes from the students' texts. The compilation comprised topics and quotes to be used in the focus groups; one for the Norwegian students (21 topics) and one for the Russian students (17 topics).

In preparation for the interviews, students were asked to read one text written by a student from the other country. These texts were to give the students first-hand experience and constitute the first provocation

(Matusov, 2019b). To this end, I translated two student texts (one from Russian to Norwegian, and vice versa) and asked the students to read these texts in advance of their interviews. The texts were selected based on the topic, quality of observation, and accompanying photos.

I started the interviews by asking the students whether they had found anything surprising in the texts they had been asked to read before the session. I structured the conversations using the topics taken from my analysis of the student texts. For example, I provoked the Norwegian students by reading the following quote from a Russian student's text: 'There are few joint projects between children in Norwegian kindergartens. Instead of working together to build a shared Lego house, the children each build their own while sitting next to each other.' I then asked two questions about the quotes: 'What might be the background for this practice in Norwegian kindergartens? What do you think is the reason the Russian student finds this very interesting?'

The three focus group interviews were recorded. I listened to the interviews several times and noted the timestamps for dialogue sequences that dealt with the tensions that I identified using the procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Through completing multiple steps, I sorted and reduced the data using a common process in qualitative surveys (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). In the first step, I *sorted* the interviews by dividing them into meaningful units, which I termed *responses* in keeping with Bakhtinian principles. I recorded these responses with quotes, topics, and timestamps.

In the second step, I *sorted* the responses by thematising them through an abductive approach involving "an alternation between theory and empiricism, both of which are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 56). To identify pedagogical tensions, I used concepts related to the main questions or problems of pedagogy (von Oettingen, 2011). For example, I termed sequences that dealt with kindergarten teachers' relationships with the children under the heading "The individual child – the child collective" as part of the normative problem of pedagogy in von Oettingen's classification.

In the third step, I *sorted* the data by noting how the same tensions were discussed in all three interviews.

In the fourth step, I *reduced* the data to a selection of nine tensions that I present in the Results section of this paper. These are the topics and quotes that shed light on the pedagogical tensions that arose most noticeably in the

dialogue between the student groups. In this study, I consider the student groups as two complete entities without examining internal nuances within them. The focus of the study is to shed light on tensions in the dialogues between the Russian and Norwegian groups.

In the fifth step, I *reduced* the range of dialogue sequences to those that could best highlight the selected tensions.

In dialogical analysis, the researcher is a dialogue partner with the informants and their ideas (Matusov et al., 2019a). I am fluent in both Russian and Norwegian, and I was the Norwegian students' pedagogy teacher during their first and second years of schooling. I was also a guest lecturer for the Russian students at their Russian university. The students were clearly informed that withdrawing from the study at any point would be unproblematic. Agreements to participate in this research project were collected according to the procedures of and approval by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt)[2]. In this study, data production was facilitated through my own response to the specific informants, who were present during the focus group interviews. On the other hand, the project participants have received an education that is highly regulated by the authorities in their respective countries. This makes it possible to generalise findings analytically for other contexts related to student exchange programs.

Results

I present the results by pointing to provocations and their chains of responses. First, I present quotes from one student group; secondly, I present excerpts of responses from the other. The subsections start with "Set 1," a dialogical provocation with quotes from Russian students' responses to practices in Norwegian kindergartens. Then come excerpts from responses to this provocation from the Norwegian groups. Next, "Set 2" follows with responses from the Norwegian students to Russian practices. Then come excerpts from responses to this provocation from the Russian group. The headings in the Results section are based on statements in the accompanying data. All student names are fictitious.

2 The project has been approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.

The role of the adult

Set 1	**Dialogical provocation** A Russian student has written that adults in Norwegian kindergartens are more of a friend than an authority figure. **Responses from Norwegian students** Mia: The kindergarten should be a safe place. [...] and that means an adult has to be on the same level. Lise: We want to form a relationship with the child before we go in and correct that child. We emphasise relationships. Per: I think it's about building trust.
Set 2	**Dialogical provocation** The Norwegian students commented a lot on how much respect the Russian children have for adults. **Responses from Russian students** Irina: Adults must treat all children equally, equally well, so that there's no jealousy. [...] The child gets love at home. The kindergarten teacher only spends a limited amount of time with the child. When there's enough love at home, the child isn't concerned about whether or not the kindergarten teacher likes them. Kindergarten's fun, there's a lot going on [...] that the adults organise. [...]. Lisa: Children need to communicate and spend more time with their peers, and not with adults [...] The adult is an authority figure.

These dialogues deal with the role of the adult in kindergarten. The tension that comes to light here is between the role of the adult as a friend to the children and the adult as an authority figure. The Norwegian students associate the role of the friend with quality in adult-child relationships. They say, "it's about building trust," and that it is important that the kindergarten "is a safe place, and that means an adult has to be on the same level" (i.e. be a friend). The Russian students respond by emphasising that the kindergarten teacher organises the children and acts as an authority figure (i.e. they refer more to the management and organisation of educational processes for a group of children).

Should children be told what is the best practice?

Set 1	**Dialogical provocation** A Russian student has written: The child stands on her head by leaning forward on her hands and putting her feet up against the wall [...] The other children watch the girl, repeating what she does and trying to do the same. The girl is a good example of imitation [...] I would have asked the children to carry out the exercise in a special way. I would have told them not to do any dangerous exercises. I would also have invited the help of a physical education teacher who knows how to do this exercise without getting hurt.

Responses from Norwegian students

Anita: They (the children) should explore a bit on their own, instead of someone telling them how to (do it).

Inger: That's kind of our view of learning. Norwegian children learn from their mistakes. Compared to Russia, where they have to learn first, and then try and be allowed to make mistakes. [...] They (Norwegians) are allowed to experience, to try and to fail.

Set 2 **Dialogical provocation**

A Norwegian student has written: During the dance, there was one girl who stood out. The girl in a green skirt was always at the front, and I think that this may have something to do with the fact that she was seen as being very good, and thus, it was natural for her to stand at the front. The girl noticed when another girl didn't quite know where in the dance she was, and she made a small sign with her gaze that they were now in the part of the dance where the umbrellas should be held in front of them. While it's fine that they use her because she's good, it's too bad that they haven't let other children share the spotlight, so they could also practise being a leader.

Responses from Russian students

Marina: We always do it that way. Always. [...] Where the child who can be an example stands at the front. That doesn't mean we discriminate against the others.

These dialogues are about how participants understand where the ideal (i.e. what children should achieve) comes from. The Norwegian students respond with the statement that things should be arranged in a way that allows children "to experience, to try and to fail." As I interpret it, these students believe that children must not be shown or given an explanation of how to do something (i.e. how to master the ideal). They must discover the ideal for themselves. The Russian students respond by saying that the children must be presented with an example that they can imitate.

Desire or duty? What should form the basis of children's motivation for learning/training?

Set 1 **Dialogical provocation**

A Russian student observed that children in Norwegian kindergartens can leave an organised learning situation without being reprimanded by their teachers. The students ask: Can children learn only according to their own wishes?

Responses from Norwegian students

Mia: We try to persuade and motivate children.

Sofie: If children don't want to participate, we have to make changes to the activity so that they'll want to join in.

Set 2 **Dialogical provocation**

A Norwegian student observed that in Russian practice, activities with the children are carefully planned and that the children are disciplined and obedient.

Responses from Russian students

Olga: We teach children that there are things that they *can* do, and there are things that they *must* do [...] when they follow an educational programme. It is important that each activity has a goal and tasks they have to complete in order to achieve that goal [...]

Evgenia: Our work is aimed more at achieving goals, while theirs (Norwegian) is geared towards process.

These dialogue sequences concern children's freedom to participate in the training sessions planned by their kindergarten teachers. The Norwegian students respond by emphasising that it is important that the children want to participate, and that kindergarten teachers endeavour "to change the activity so that the children will want to participate." The Russian students respond by saying that if kindergarten teachers are to succeed in achieving their goals, children must distinguish between "wanting to" and "having to" (i.e. between the children's wishes and freedom on one side, and their duties on the other side). Kindergarten teachers can aim their work at particular goals or processes for working with children.

The individual child vs. the child collective

Set 1 **Dialogical provocation**

A Russian student wrote about the Norwegian practice where when playing with LEGO bricks, the children sit next to each other but each works on their own project. There are few joint projects, and adults do not encourage the children to build in teams.

Responses from Norwegian students

Mia: We want the children to initiate things themselves [...] They should be independent and able to play on their own and teach each other. They learn a lot through play.

Petter: A lot of problems arise if, for example, everyone is supposed to build one house. Then one person wants to have a red wall, and the other doesn't, and then there may be bickering [...] or maybe everyone wants to place a certain LEGO brick in their own way. It becomes hard to work together, instead of everyone enjoying a nice game, working together and helping each other with their own projects.

Set 2 **Dialogical provocation**

Writing about a Russian practice, a Norwegian student observed that "they (the children) also had competitions; competitive activities can be really fun, but in Norway we often think that competitions don't belong in a kindergarten."

Responses from Russian students

Olga: Competitive elements must always be present in all collectives.

Arina: This prepares children for school and the rest of their lives.

Natasha: (At first) it's difficult to gather children or get them to run in a certain direction (collectively). And then they have to run for a team, run in pairs. At the age of five or six, the children begin to understand that "this is my team" [...]. The children understand that they're responsible not only for themselves but also for a collective.

Many dimensions are actualised in these dialogue sequences. I wish to comment on the understanding of the tension between the individual child and the collective that comes to light here. The Norwegian students believe that kindergarten teachers should arrange for children to have "a nice game, working together and helping each other with their own projects." The reference to a game suggests that the Norwegian students believe that children's participation in the collaboration and help they provide each other is light-hearted or voluntary as part of their play. The Russian students believe that children must learn that they "are responsible not only for themselves but for a collective."

Packed lunch from home or meals made by a public health nurse?

Set 1	**Dialogical provocation** A Russian student reacted to the fact that none of the Norwegian kindergartens they visited had their own cook, that the children took no vitamin supplements, and that there was no quality control of the food in the packed lunches the children brought from home. **Responses from Norwegian students** Rita: Bread can be good food, too [...] Norwegian kindergartens aren't focused on hiring their own cook. The food is what it is, and it's still good food. Hilde: Because the children spend a lot of time outdoors, they have a good immune system. Per: The kindergarten does have some control. Anna: We can express a few wishes about what we want the kids to have in their packed lunches.
Set 2	**Dialogical provocation** One Norwegian student wrote that Russian kindergartens have a daily schedule that is followed by all the children there: They eat, sleep, attend activities, and engage in free play at the same time. **Response from Russian students** Vera: At our kindergartens, they've researched what's good for children's development. How much protein, how much fat, how much the kids should be outside and how long they need to sleep. The gymnastics that they (the Norwegian students) noticed are also aimed at helping the children to wake up faster. It's good for their bodies, for waking up, for being able to work and for their self-esteem.

Food, sleep and daily schedules were topics that received a great deal of attention in both groups. Here, I choose to comment on the students' justification of practices in their own kindergartens. The Norwegian students argue in favour of sandwiches, packed lunches and spending time outside, without referring to any research or guidelines. The students do not see a

need to look for other justifications that lie outside of the prevailing practices. A likely explanation is that the justification for these practices lies in the students' (Norwegian) culture and traditions. The Russian students, on the other hand, believe that justification should come from research (i.e. science).

Dialogue about pedagogy

While both groups agree that children learn in kindergartens, they have different opinions on how they do this. These differences were actualised in the discussion and description of several pedagogical contradictions or tensions (von Oettingen, 2011). On the topic of whether children should be presented with the best practice, the tension between independently trying, finding out, and failing, and being told how to do things, is actualised. On the topic of the individual child versus the collective, the tension is between understanding competition and helping the group. The tension between these two actions also lies in the extent to which children's participation in learning/training is intended to be voluntary. The tension between the voluntary and involuntary is also actualised with respect to the topic of whether children can learn merely by following their own wishes or whether they require activities where goals are set up by adults. This is the tension between the ideal of oneself and a constructed predetermined ideal. The tension in the understanding of the child-adult relationship is expressed particularly in the topic of the role of the adult with regard to the children. Here, we see the actualisation of the tension between the adult as a friend and the adult as an authority figure. On the topic of the relationship between the individual child and other children, the tension between the individual child and the collective is actualised (i.e. the tension between having binding responsibility solely for oneself or for the collective in which the child is placed as well). As previously mentioned, the institutional problem concerns the role of the kindergarten in children's lives. Tensions actualised in the data are related to whether the kindergarten should engage in systematically targeted training to prepare children for life after kindergarten, or instead focus on life in the here-and-now and children's (learning) processes. The recognition problem is clearly expressed when the students discuss food and everyday schedules. Here, the tension concerns the sources of the justification of educational actions and norms. One group turns to tradition, while the other turns to

science. The tensions show reflections of Russian kindergarten pedagogy in Norwegian kindergarten pedagogy, and vice versa. These are summarised in the following table:

Table 1 Dialogue on pedagogy between Norwegian and Russian students

Pedagogical 'problems' (centripetal forces)	Tensions (centrifugal forces)	
	Norwegian students	**Russian students**
Action: How does the child learn?	The child/children learn(s) by finding solutions themselves, helping each other, and following their interests.	The child/children learn(s) by being told how to do things, by competing, and by following goals that are set up by adults.
Norms: What norms should the child learn regarding their relation to adults and other children? What is the origin of the ideal that the child has to achieve?	It is normal that the adult is a friend to the children. Support for the development of every child's individuality is important, and every child creates their own ideal to achieve.	It is normal that the adult is an authority figure. Support for developing the children's collective is important. The ideal that the child must achieve is formulated by the adult.
The role of the kindergarten: What role does the kindergarten have in children's empowerment process?	Kindergartens accommodate children's self-guided learning and focus on the process of learning.	Kindergartens provide training for children and focus on the results of their work.
Recognition: The knowledge base from which educators obtain justification for their choices.	Justification for pedagogical actions comes from tradition.	Justification for pedagogical actions comes from science.

The dialogue in the focus groups was made possible by being two present forces. The centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 2012) consist of four common pedagogical problems. The responses that students gave to one another in the focus group interviews show an actualisation of pedagogical tensions (von Oettingen, 2011) within those problems and act as centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 2012) within the dialogue. The requirement of differences in the context of the dialogue has encouraged the students to emphasise how their understanding is different in relation to one another. In this way, this part of the dialogue made limitations for the students to explore their understandings. The exploration could be possible if the students could get the opportunity to "make an utterance on the Other's territory" (Bakthin, 2012, p. 36) by trying to place their understanding in the context of the Other. This could be realized by giving the students an opportunity to explain their understanding to one another in the next part of the dialogue in the new meeting between them. The new chains with responses could have forced the students to redefine themselves in relation to each other; they

could also have resulted in changes in their understanding of pedagogical problems. As Bakhtin (2012) points out, an active dialogical understanding has a random and unpredictable character.

Dialogical approach to short-term stays abroad

As previous research points out, short-term stays must be well-designed and have clear academic content (Gaia, 2015; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015). In the dialogical approach to mobility in this student exchange project, the academic content was developed in dialogue between academic staff from both countries. This dialogue included a chain of responses (Bakhtin, 1986) during several meetings prior to the student exchange, resulting in the formulation of a joint focus and tasks for both student groups. The students' engaged responses offered to one another in the group interviews outlined tensions that served as a line on which they tried to place themselves. These lines, as von Oettingen (2011) pointed out, are lines that future teachers must learn to relate to and reflect upon. Bakhtin points out (Bakhtin, 1986) that the dialogue contains an infinite chain of utterances, which means that all dialogues must be continued. Preparation for the next step in this dialogue could be a new provocation (Matusov, 2019b) – for example, by initiating a meeting between the students. A preparation for this meeting and the formulation of a joint focus could be an introduction to the universal concept of pedagogy (e.g. as suggested by von Oettingen, 2011) or other themes in the students' regular education. Inclusion of the students' responses could lead to the combining of their experiences from staying abroad with the ordinary education provided at their home institutions.

The previous research using the dialogical approach (Birkeland, 2015; Birkeland & Ødemotland, 2013; Tobin, 2014; Tobin & Karasawa, 2009) shows that this approach is useful in research and pedagogical thinking on long-term stays abroad that offer participants the opportunity to experience the complexity of the relationship between culture and society. Birkeland's project on mobility (2015) shows how the dialogical approach to student mobility can be useful in facilitating students' opportunities to acquire a better understanding of kindergarten practices and how these relate to culture and society. The interaction between insiders and outsiders is crucial in this context. Tobin (2014; Tobin & Karasawa, 2009) shows how the dialogical approach can be useful for obtaining knowledge

on how a culture's core beliefs are reflected in their preschools. In order to use those opportunities to acquire this knowledge, students require longer exposure than a short-term stay can provide. Research on the benefits of short-term stays abroad shows that short-term stays provide an opportunity for contact with other cultures, rather than an opportunity to understand their complexity (Gaia, 2015). Nevertheless, I argue that the dialogical approach can be useful in research and pedagogy in both short- and long-term stays. The contact with other cultures may be understood as a contact with the Other (Bakthin, 2012). This contact acts as a provocation (Matusov, 2019b) that requires a response from the students. As this study shows, this response may have an academic topic in the context of a bilateral student exchange. For this purpose, academic staff from both countries must be involved in the dialogue prior to travel and elaborate on the joint academic focus for the pedagogical provocations. The timing of provocations is of equal importance to facilitating situations with the receipt of responses and point out directions for further dialogue. The facilitation of directions may be towards themes in the students' regular education, as was pointed out earlier, or on the students' Self. Following Bakhtin's idea of the Self and Other as preconditions for the existence of each (Bakhtin, 2012), it is possible to say that Norwegian pedagogy exists so far as others' (in this study, Russian) pedagogy exists, and vice versa. Kindergartens, kindergarten teachers, students, university faculty, and the children that the students met during the exchange project are Others who could be engaged in dialogue with the Self. The Other may make it possible for the Self to be aware of the Self's own values that shape their own way of thinking and performing pedagogy. The bilateral student exchange may allow students to get to see themselves as future kindergarten teachers. This is perhaps the most valuable benefit that short-term stays abroad may offer.

Conclusion

The study has shown how, through provocations and their responses to alternative kindergarten practices in another country, the student kindergarten teachers from Norway and Russia involved in an exchange project can express certain tensions in general pedagogical thinking. As an element of a kindergarten teacher education programme, while the short stay can be of academic benefit as experience with general pedagogical thinking, it requires carefully detailed preparation and organisation.

More research is needed on how short-term mobility can be part of a professionally-oriented kindergarten teacher education programme at students' local universities.

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