

WHEN RESEARCHERS IN TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING *OTHER*: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE “MIGRANT STUDENT” IN AN EU–FINLAND PROJECT

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ABSTRACT. This article investigates the positioning of the “migrant student” in an EU–Finland project which aims to prepare teachers for social justice “migrant education.” Since the project is produced in and for a neoliberal economic-political supranational institution, the authors seek to examine the potential contradictions between the frameworks of social justice and neoliberalism in documents produced by the project teams. The results show that the migrant student is othered and mostly positioned as different, disadvantaged, and problematic. The implications of othering are thus addressed, with recommendations made for ethical treatment of the other in research and education while urging, for example, funding institutions and individual scholars to recognize and address academic othering in the Nordics and beyond.

QUAND LES CHERCHEURS EN FORMATION DES ENSEIGNANTS *ALTÉRISENT* : JUSTICE SOCIALE ET « L'ÉLÈVE MIGRANT » DANS UN PROJET UE-FINLANDE

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article examine le positionnement de « l'élève migrant » dans le cadre d'un projet UE-Finlande visant à préparer les enseignants à une « éducation des migrants » socialement juste. Le projet étant produit dans et pour une institution supranationale économico-politiquement néolibérale, les auteurs cherchent à examiner les contradictions potentielles entre les cadres de la justice sociale et du néolibéralisme dans les documents produits lors du projet. Les résultats montrent que l'élève migrant est altérisé, désavantagé et problématique. Les implications de cette altérisation sont donc abordées, avec des recommandations pour un traitement éthique de l'autre dans la recherche et l'éducation, tout en exhortant les institutions de financement et les chercheurs individuels à reconnaître et à traiter l'altérisation académique dans les pays nordiques et au-delà.

In recent decades, thousands of competitive large-scale projects on teacher education / training and the “migrant student” have been completed in educational research within the European Union (EU) area. Well-intentioned, these projects aim to, for example, promote more equitable and socially just learning opportunities and facilitate students’ adaptation and integration by targeting teachers and school leaders with initiatives that adopt (amongst others) intercultural, culturally-responsive, and social justice frameworks (e.g., the QuaMMELOT project, *Qualification for Minor Migrants Education and Learning Open Access – Online Teacher-Training*, Mortensen et al., 2020). Yet, although a large amount of pedagogical and technological tools and teacher training interventions and recommendations have emerged from such initiatives, these EU projects have been less frequently examined in relation to the encounters between the migrant student, teachers, and researchers that they produce. An earlier study by Lukala (2023) represents an exception in this context.¹ In global research, encounters and relations between researchers and migrants have been studied in relation to (amongst others) researchers’ empathy following interviews with migrants (e.g., Maggio & Westcott, 2014), researching *with* young migrants (Billett et al., 2019), and migrant researchers researching migrants (e.g., Nowicka & Cieslik, 2014). This article contributes to this underexplored topic within the EU-Finland context by focusing on a European project regarding teacher education / training and the migrant student in which a Nordic country, Finland, is included. The lenses of the neoliberal imperative, ventriloquism, and academic othering are made use of to investigate the topic in the article.

Our starting point is based on the examination of potential contradictions between the frameworks of social justice and neoliberalism in an EU project. *Social justice* in this article is understood as (a) recognizing and acknowledging another individual’s self-determination and independence, (b) ensuring the equitable treatment and safety of all, and (c) developing a sense of agency and social responsibility (e.g., Bell, 2016; Rajendra, 2017). Within the framework of neoliberalism, entities are reduced to fit the market economy imperative. The reduced self that inhabits such a world, as Brown (2015) has argued, is the “*homo economicus*,” an “intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavours and venues” (p. 10). Contradictory to the aforementioned aspects of social justice, under neoliberalism the individual is reduced to their skills and competences, their capital(s), which may be measured and profited from by a more powerful entity – while feigning to care about, for example,

democracy, well-being, and agency (see the idea of “cannibalistic capitalism” by Fraser, 2023). Ball (2016) has argued that neoliberal reform technologies rarely emerge as grand strategies. Rather, they reside in vocabularies, titles, templates, reviews, and output indicators. They also divide, classify, and compare, telling us how to understand ourselves and each other. Finally, they value, reward, discipline, and sanction. Attention has been brought to the power imbalance that characterizes a variety of such relationships, particularly by scholars investigating “othering.” *Othering*, according to Jensen (2011), consists of “discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups” (p. 65). Such an approach fails to recognize the independence and self-determination of another, and may rather be used to justify their unequal or harmful treatment (e.g., Pietrandrea & Battaglia, 2022).

By taking the lens of othering as the primary focal point, our article seeks to investigate what seems to be “done” to social justice and the migrant discursively while adhering to this normative framework of performance, managerialism, and competition. We approach this question by investigating a project which aims to make assessment in mathematics and science education in primary and secondary education more equitable, particularly for students who have just migrated (“newcomers” in EU parlance), by offering technological tools and training to teachers in the EU. On surface level this aligns with social justice-oriented goals to ensure equitable treatment of all. The project is however produced in and for an economic-political supranational institution embedded in neoliberalism, globalization, and late capitalism – the EU (Carroll, 2022). These translate into the application of market and market-like characteristics to every aspect of society, intensifying economic competition between and within European states (and beyond), and leading to further inequalities, deindustrialization, and systematic environmental decline (amongst others, see Carroll, 2022). The influence of the EU on Finland (the authors’ context) should not be understated. As Finland has been a member of the EU since 1995, this supranational institution has influenced the 5-million inhabitant Nordic country by its educational policies, recommendations as well as discursive and ideological positions. As such, the project under review may be understood as a site of “glocal” (local + global) educational knowledge production: It is a European project, co-produced by several individual (local) member states located

both in the South and North of Europe, trying to jointly “care” for the migrant in education.

The relations and positions of these member states towards the migrant student both differ and overlap locally. In the international literature, the figure of the migrant is a plural and contested one (e.g., Kunz, 2020; Rosenberg & Stöckl, 2018; Vietze et al., 2023). In this article, we are interested specifically in how the project itself positions and constructs the polysemic figure of the migrant student in the European context. We consider how the project, which adheres to EU ideological orders, parlance, and (hidden) agendas, asks the teachers it trains to understand the “other,” and if this construction is in line with social justice and the neoliberal ideologies that impact it. Documents produced by the research teams to both introduce and discuss the project aims and achievements are analyzed. Following the analysis, we problematize the role of researchers in dealing with the migrant student in neoliberal educational and academic times and suggest steps towards addressing the other ethically in teacher education / training and research.

VENTRILOQUISM AND ACADEMIC OTHERING IN A EUROPEAN PROJECT ON THE MIGRANT STUDENT

The European project under review states as its aim to make assessment more equitable for migrant students and others by proposing an innovative technological assessment tool. Additionally, teacher education was offered to around 80 teachers who were taught to use this tool and then tested it in their respective classrooms in different EU countries. Prior to launch, the figure of the migrant student was negotiated, constructed, and produced collaboratively by a team of multilingual academics. They first came together and spent months preparing a project application that was subsequently submitted competitively to the EU, peer reviewed against thousands of other applications, and eventually approved for funding. During the writing of the more than 100-page project application, the meanings and connotations of the “migrant student” had to be renegotiated since the diverse team of interdisciplinary and international researchers did not necessarily comprehend this figure the same way. In the participating countries, although all EU member states, discourses of the migrant student might differ in terms of who it represents and how to “deal with” them in educational contexts. For example, while in some areas the idea of ethnicity might be used to refer to characteristics of the migrant in education, in others, language and multilingualism might be more common (Vietze et al., 2023).

Three central concepts are explored to examine how the figure of the migrant is represented in the project under review: ventriloquism (Cooren & Sandler, 2014), othering (Jensen, 2011), and academic othering (Kramer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). These concepts will support us in examining how different documents derived from the EU-Finland project position the migrant student, thus providing us with a picture of how this polysemic and central figure is constructed by scholars in this context.

The concept of ventriloquism is first introduced as an entry point into the construction of discourses on the other. As powerful discursive figures in neoliberal societies, who often represent a link between decision-makers and the larger society, scholars are used to speaking for others, for instance for their research participants or specific groups in which they specialize (the migrant being one of these groups; see Kramer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). The metaphor of the ventriloquist appears to be well-suited to discuss this important aspect of scholarly work. In general, a ventriloquist is a performer who creates the illusion that their voice is coming from a puppeteered dummy. We use this concept in reference to Bakhtin's (Holquist, 1982) work on heteroglossia where he suggests that a multitude of voices inhabit an individual utterance (see Cooren & Sandler, 2014, too). Bakhtin (Holquist, 1982) called this process “voicing,” which was later referred to as “ventriloquizing” by, for example, Authier-Revuz (1984) and Tannen (2007). For the Russian literary scholar, an utterer may speak or write in the voice of another. By so doing, the utterer may dominate or distance themselves from those whom they ventriloquize (Sullivan, 2016). What is more, speaking on behalf of and (often) over the other may have negative consequences, despite good intentions. When the ventriloquized is an oppressed other, the act of ventriloquism may even increase or reinforce the oppression of the ones spoken for/over (Alcoff, 1991, p. 7). The utterer's omnipotence in this realm of discourse allows them to (re)produce the other as oppressed, and enunciate the “same” as, for example, exceptional (see Authier-Revuz, 1984; Dervin, 2008, 2016, 2023).

In the material investigated here, as the main characters of the project, we hypothesize that the authors of the project documents often ventriloquize the migrant student, speaking about, for, and over this figure. In other words, the migrant student is most likely othered. Jensen's (2011) definition of othering (turning another into an other by essentializing their attributes and personal features), as presented in the introduction, involves two central aspects (p. 65). First, the difference between the “same” and the “other” is created, rather than pre-existing – the other is defined into existence. In the project under review, the migrant student is

constructed first and foremost as the one who is not from “here,” neither from Finland nor from other European partner countries and the EU in general. The same that the other opposes is constructed (in)directly by the mere presence of the word “migrant” as European, that is, from EU locality. Second, for Jensen (2011), othering involves ascribing (mostly) negative characteristics to the other. Negative here refers to characteristics that are usually not attributed to the same in terms of, for example, characteristics, competence, and agency. In this article, these perspectives are considered as the key indicators of othering.

Research on academic othering is scarce, while othering as a research object is plentiful. There are in fact many ways in which, academics in particular, may other. In a rare article on academic othering, Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) outline four such methods:

- objectification of the research participants (reducing and subjugating of their humanity, complexity, and personal perspectives);
- decontextualization (foregrounding behaviour as separate from the context that enables and sustains it);
- dehistoricization (foregrounding the present as separate from the past that led to it); and
- deauthorization (producing text that appears authorless, and thus autonomous and objective).

These work firstly to reduce the other to a few characteristics, secondly to omit information essential for understanding the participant and their situation, and thirdly to portray such depictions as objective (see the phrase “research-based”).

Working within the framework of an EU–Finland project on the migrant student, the project members, mostly EU citizens themselves, are somehow empowered to speak for this polysemic figure. Ventriloquizing and othering go hand in hand in this process and will support us in observing how documents produced around the project contribute to constructing this multifaceted and central figure (e.g., the teacher training intervention related to assessment in mathematics and science education in primary and secondary education provided by the project).

MIXED METHODS TO OBSERVE THE POSITION OF THE MIGRANT STUDENT

The analyzed material consisted of (a) an introductory document produced for European teachers and teacher trainers involved in the project and other stakeholders (37 pages), as well as (b) 40 pages of the 133-page grant

proposal of the project which correspond to the project description (budget allocations, distinguishing information of participating institutions, and time allocation information were excluded from the analysis since they were irrelevant for our purpose). Both documents had multiple authors and were written in the English language, as requested by the EU. Despite their different purposes and target audiences, these texts are consistent. We even identified similar sentences copied word for word in both documents, and due to their similarity, the two documents were analyzed together. We note that these documents were not published publicly but are accessible by anyone upon request. No page numbers are thus presented in the following analysis. Access to the documents was gained through the authors’ involvement in the project as a project manager and a project planner.

In the analysis, we bring together the aforementioned theoretical concepts of othering, consisting of defining an entity into existence and ascribing characteristics to them (Jensen, 2011), ventriloquism as a way of speaking on behalf of and animating the character defined into existence, and academic othering consisting of objectification, decontextualization, dehistoricization, and deauthorization (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; see Cooren & Sandler, 2014, too). These are seen as contributing to the positioning of the migrant student. *Positioning* (see Davies & Harré, 1990) is understood here as a product of naming and ascribing of characteristics and actions to an imagined migrant student. We argue that examining positioning can help us identify how the migrant student is (*de*)agentivized, that is, how they are potentially “demoted” (deagentivized) or “empowered” (agentivized) by what the project documents say about them (Bernárdez, 1997).

The analysis consisted of mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative means (Poth, 2023). A pragmatist position, whereby our careful choice of a mix of methods, data, and procedures of research aimed to support obtaining a variety of perspectives on the way the migrant student is constructed in the project documents, was adopted as the philosophical foundation of mixed methods research (Shan, 2022). All in all, we agreed that a mixed method approach could allow a robust description and interpretation of the data, reinforcing the intelligibility of quantitative results and applicability of qualitative findings. The quantitative part of the analysis concerned frequencies of agent-verb-object pairings (see Dowty, 1991), that is, all instances where action was implied on behalf of an actor (here, the migrant student). The analysis was limited to instances in which the migrant student was either the agent or the object, and these instances were further analyzed qualitatively.

The qualitative analysis was based on discourse analysis, with an emphasis on semantics and enunciative pragmatics (Angermuller, 2014). Semantics was chosen as a theoretical guide due to its distinction between the sign (e.g., the words “migrant student”) and the signified (e.g., any person who has migrated) (Chandler, 2007, p. 65). This enabled focusing on the constructed sign of the migrant student, limiting the investigation to how they are ventriloquized by the authors of the project documents. Concepts from the field of semantics, such as connotation and paradigmatic (“Why this instead of that?”) and syntagmatic (“Why this after that?”) axes of analysis also aided in understanding how the migrant student is characterized. Enunciative pragmatics then emphasized that the context, the “where,” “when,” and “who” of the utterance, is central to the analysis of the sign (Angermuller, 2014, pp. 1–3). This framework served to draw our attention to the authors of the project documents, and how their position as academics enables potential othering in particular manners. It also offered concepts, such as preconstruct (“What is non-negotiable fact?”) and presupposition (“What is taken for granted?”), which helped situate the authors and readers.

The links between the aspects of positioning and the chosen theoretical (academic othering, othering, ventriloquism) and analytical (semantics, enunciative pragmatics) devices are illustrated in Figure 1, and put into use in the following analytical sections. Due to space limitation and the mixed methods nature of this study, five carefully selected and representative excerpts are included in the analysis (see Lukala, 2023).

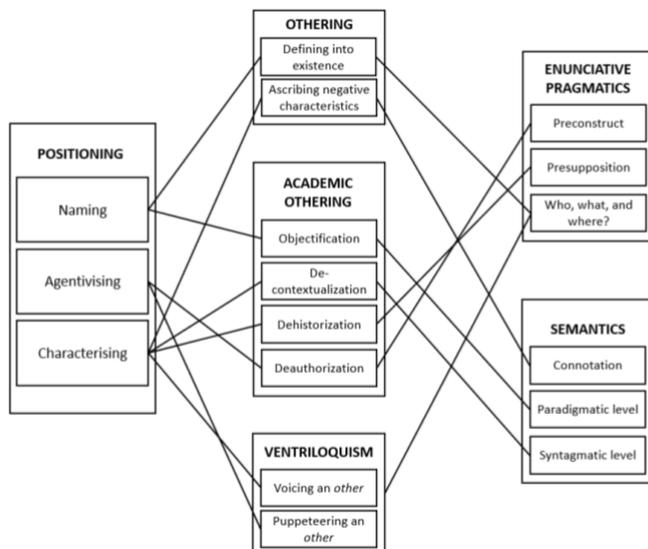


FIGURE 1. The strongest connections between the aspects of positioning, theoretical concepts, and concepts utilized in qualitative analysis

RESULTS: TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING RESEARCH “DOING” OTHERING

Names of the migrant student

“Migrant student” is mentioned in total 502 times in the two investigated documents. In these mentions, the migrant student is addressed with names which combine one or more of various name components (Table 1).

Some name components include (obvious) references to the migrant student being young (e.g., student, child, youth), or them having migrated with different legal labels being used (e.g., migrant, immigrant, refugee), which defines into existence (Jensen, 2011) the target of this project – the migrant student. With these names, the migrant student seems to be objectified (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), reduced to their migration history, age, position in a school, and / or their language. Undesirable characteristics are also associated with them, by naming them as, for example, “disadvantaged.”

TABLE I. *Frequencies of name components, thematically categorized*

Thematic category	Name component	N	Category total
Migranthood	migrant	359	577
	newly arrived / migrated	138	
	[of a certain] background	43	
	minority	11	
	immigrant	11	
	born [somewhere]	6	
	[of 1st / 2nd] generation	5	
refugee / asylum seeker	4		
Age	student	334	432
	child	73	
	young person / youth	25	
Characteristics	disadvantaged / facing barriers	9	16
	diverse / different / special	7	
Other	group	9	24
	learner	6	
	language / linguistic	6	
	population	3	
Total		1049	1049

The migrant student is revealed as an ambiguous social category in the attempts to define them (Excerpt 1), where the migrant student is denied self-determination – a process which occurs through a passive and deauthorized voice attributed instead to an unnamed entity.

Excerpt 1

Students of migrant background are defined as newly arrived/first generation, second generation or returning migrant children and young people. Their reasons for migration (e.g. economic or political) and their legal status may vary – they may be citizens, residents, asylum seekers, refugees, unaccompanied minors or irregular migrants.

The authors make use of the term “migrant background,” which has been criticized for its ambiguity and lack of relevance for research (e.g., Vietze et al., 2023). In this instance it carries notions of arrival, generations, and

return. As such, migranhood is constructed here as not only tied to migration, but also inheritable and irreversible, as birth or citizenship in a country does not dissolve the migrant student of their label. A category this broad includes people with an extensive range of life and migration experiences. The authors however limit the interpretations by drawing the reader’s attention to specific aspects of migration (economy, politics, legality) and to a specific type of migrant, thus objectifying them. With the names presented here, the authors also ascribe negative characteristics to the migrant (see Jensen, 2011). “Refugee” and “asylum seeker” (as well as names that appear elsewhere, such as “[students] facing linguistic barriers” and “disadvantaged [students]”) introduce the migrant student through their perceived disadvantage or need for help. Additionally, the “where” of an utterance (Angermuller, 2014, pp. 1–3) is revealed in the names, as an asylum seeker can only be a non-EU citizen, thus revealing the EU extraterritoriality of the migrant student. Notably absent in the documents are positively connotated names related to migration, such as “expatriate” or “labour migrant,” both of which are often associated with higher economic status (Kunz, 2020). With this paradigmatic decision, the authors appear to create and promote a figure of the migrant student that seems to fail to fulfil the position of a neoliberal and capital-producing subject (see Brown, 2015).

Excerpt 1 is a prelude for similar generalization and differentiation processes that are to follow in the two documents under review. In Excerpt 2, we witness how the document authors rather skilfully navigate the syntagmatic axis to homogenize migrant students under the pretence of recognizing their heterogeneity:

Excerpt 2

It is also important to note that they are not a homogeneous group. They have many and varied characteristics, such as their linguistic and cultural background and the socio-economic status of their families. However, they are all at risk of facing similar challenges in successfully integrating into the school environment and achieving their academic potential.

While the text, in line with social justice (Bell, 2016), directly denies homogenization of the migrant students, the subtext has the opposite effect. Firstly, by negating the word “homogenous” instead of using its antithesis “heterogenous,” the stereotype of homogeneity is introduced into the conversation, rather than deactivated (Dyvik Cardona, 2022, p. 288). Secondly, by listing the students’ “varied characteristics,” the authors single these out as worthy of mention. The selected characteristics – language, culture, and socioeconomic status – make frequent

appearances in the investigated documents to specify the ways in which the migrant student is to be understood as “diverse” or “different.” Notably, these are characteristics migrant students have, rather than actions they take. But this leaves little room for recognition of their self-determination, independence, or agency (see Bell, 2016). Thirdly, the authors claim that risks related to integration and reaching academic potential, which may be understood as behaviours associated with a neoliberal subject (see Carroll, 2022), concern all students who migrate. The generalization of the last utterance from the excerpt is an example of dehistoricization (see Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). The migrant students are detached from their individual histories, and the implications of these histories are ignored. Dehistoricization and detextualization serve to portray the behaviour as without reason (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p. 300). The reader is left to associate this behaviour with the only other information provided, namely, that migrant students are linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse. Although it would be naïve to ignore this important element, the overemphasis on difference, rather than, for example, difference-similarity, between the migrant student and other students, could easily lead to a differentialist bias (Dervin, 2016), an ideological perspective that can easily blind scholars and teachers in front of the other and lead to further othering.

The names of the migrant student, even when detached from the context of enunciation, indicate that the “who,” “what,” and “where” (see Angermüller, 2014, pp. 1–3) of the migrant student are seen through the eyes of the authors. This is prevalent in many names related to migration, such as “people born abroad,” “immigrant,” and “newly arrived migrant.” Attention is here brought to spatial difference: The migrant student is born “abroad,” not the “here” of the authors / readers. The “here” is where they “arrive.” In contrast, the word “emigrate” makes no appearance in the investigated texts. The migrant student is defined into existence as the other that complements the same (Jensen, 2011).

The locations of the “here” of the author / reader and the “abroad” of the migrant student are not specified. Yet, neither are they entirely absent. The project is an EU project, located geopolitically in a legal entity where most people share the same supranational citizenship (EU). It is thus not clear if the word “migrant” as used in the documents refers to EU citizens migrating to another EU country or if this only has to do with citizens from outside the EU – who have different rights and identification features. Names such as “refugee” and “asylum seeker” perhaps most notably hint at certain locations. This vagueness around the migrant student contributes to their academic othering by, for example,

decontextualizing them (see Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). By detaching the migrant student from their location, they may also be detached from the political, socioeconomic, and symbolic structures that surround them. Instead, the authors may then present factors of their choosing (such as linguistic and cultural background and socio-economic status in Excerpt 2) and allow the reader to make the connection by themselves.

The names of the migrant student, in short, demonstrate both aspects of othering as outlined by Jensen (2011): distinguishing them from the ingroup, and associating what could be described as negative characteristics to them. Earlier we noted that, according to the definitions provided by the project document authors, migranhood may be inherited and irreversible, applying these potentially negative characteristics then to a wider population than just those who migrate. Similarly, the frequent use of names such as “children” and “youth” expands the context in which these characteristics ought to be associated with the migrant student to that outside of the scope of the project, namely outside of schools. This is perhaps most relevant to the teachers partaking in the type of teacher education and training offered by the project, who are called to see the migrant student as holistically disadvantaged. Although it is common in everyday conversation to refer to students as “children” or “youth,” we believe that it would be more appropriate to consistently use the term “students.” Referring to them as such helps avoid reinforcing assumptions – such as passivity or incompetence – that may follow them both inside and outside of school, regardless of whether they were born in an EU country or not.

Agency of the migrant student

The social justice framework utilized in this study (Bell, 2016) refers to the recognition of individuals’ independence, ensuring their equal treatment and encouraging the development of a sense of agency and social responsibility. Ahearn (2001) defines *agency* as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112). In dealing with an imaginary entity, the migrant student, we restrict our analysis to how the document authors deauthorize (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012) themselves and agentivize the migrant student to act. In other words, what does the ventriloquized migrant student do, and to what degree of independence?

The phrase “migrant student” appears in an agent or object position of a sentence 502 times in the documents. They fulfil the agent position, that is, are the one who are empowered to act, in 28.9% ($N = 145$) of instances. The verbs of these 145 instances were investigated in terms of how much action they imply on behalf of the migrant student (Figure 2). In 25.5% of

instances their action indicated no action on behalf of the migrant student. These include instances with the verbs “have” ($n = 11$), “are” ($n = 11$), “lack” ($n = 4$), “belong” ($n = 2$), “lack behind” ($n = 2$), “reside” ($n = 2$), “benefit” ($n = 1$), “include” ($n = 1$), and “need” ($n = 1$).

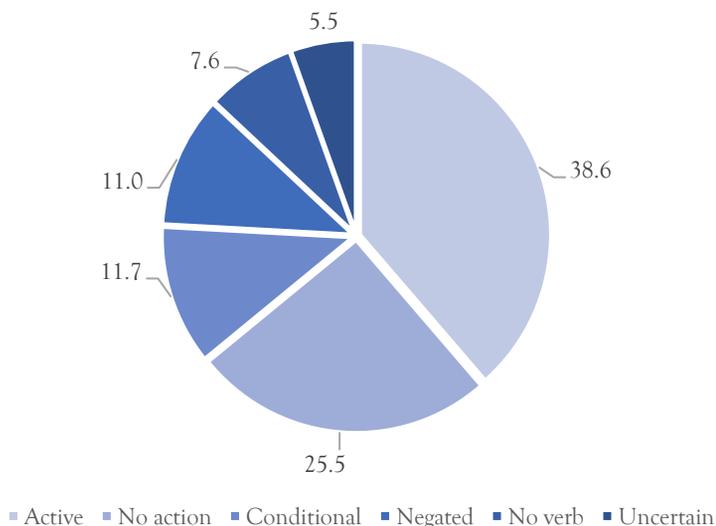


FIGURE 2. Percentage distribution of actions of the migrant student per activity level

In 11.7% of instances their actions were conditional, in that the migrant student was implied to only be able to perform the action with the help or allowance of another actor, as in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3

[The project] aims to increase newly arrived migrant students' autonomy, by allowing students to explore sciences without the restrictions of language.

Quite common (11.0%) were also instances where they were constructed as not doing anything (e.g., “[Migrant] students do not yet share a language”), and in 5.5% it was implied that their success was uncertain (“[Migrant students] may or may not have the right to participate”). In 7.6% of instances their action was reduced to word classes other than verbs (e.g., “lack” in “their lack of competences”). In only 38.6% of instances where they are in the agent position are they represented as a clear-cut actor. This makes 11% of the entire 502 instances. It follows that the

migrant student as agentivized by the authors of the documents is more likely to make an appearance as either an object of action, or unable to participate successfully without the project’s intervention. Such portrayal is in contrast to the social justice approach (Bell, 2016), which would see the independence, agency, and social responsibilities of the migrant student recognized and stimulated.

TABLE 2. *Frequencies of actions and objects of utterances with active agency, categorized thematically and connotationally*

Category	Negative				Neutral				
	n	Action	n	Object	n	Action	n	Object	n
movement	19	leave [early]	10	training	3	arrive	8	[unspecified]	4
				education	3			country	3
				school	2			school	1
				previous life	2			migrate	1
interacting	15	[struggle to] integrate	2	educational system	1	access	5	education	5
				system	1	participate	2	education	2
						go through	2	assessment process	1
								grade placement process	1
						enrol	2	education	2
						enter	1	education	1
						attend	1	class	1
outwards action	4	perform	1	worse	1	provide	1	feedback	1
		show	1	tendency	1	answer	1	quiz	1
change	3	lose	1	motivation	1	acquire	1	skill	1
							attain	1	grade level
struggle	17	face	16	challenge	7				
				barrier	3				
				obstacle	2				
				hardship	1				
				housing	1				
				lack	1				
				stressor	1				
				deal with	1	experience	1		
Total			32				24		

The instances of what we call active agency, in which the migrant student both is in the agent position of the sentence and the verb in its context

undeniably implies action ($n = 56$), were further investigated as to their connotations. These instances can be found in Table 2, categorized thematically into negatively, neutrally, and positively correlated instances. Negative and positive here are understood in terms of agency, competence, and outcome: Negatively connotated instances imply challenges in completion (e.g., “deal with”) or result in a negative outcome (e.g., “lose”), while positively connotated verbs imply the task is completed successfully (e.g., “achieve”) or with ease / pleasure (e.g., “explore”). Neutrally connotated instances make no note of the manner or outcome of action. The context of enunciation may however change the connotations of the verb (e.g., “unlikely achieve”). Categorization was made with context in mind, and some verbs may thus appear in both negatively and neutrally connotated columns. With context in mind, no positively connotated instances were identified in the entire data.

Of these actions, the neutrally connotated ones relate to the process of migration and interacting (attending, entering, etc.) with the school system. Their actions within this system on the other hand are negatively connotated: They face various challenges and, when they do act, they perform worse than their peers and lose their motivation in the process, eventually leaving education and training earlier than their peers (Table 2). Foregrounding unfortunate circumstances and challenges faced draws the attention to how the migrant student constructed here is not equally treated within this school system, and their social responsibility to attend school is also recognized in (neutrally connotated) instances, which seems in line with the social justice framework (Bell, 2016). However, as the majority of instances imply poor or non-existent success, the agency and independence of the migrant student seem to go unrecognized.

Characteristics of migrant students

In previous sections we addressed how migrant students are defined into existence (Jensen 2011), and agentivized in a manner that seems to undermine their agency and independence (see Bell, 2016). The characteristics that are ascribed to them (see Jensen, 2011) are consistent with these findings, and relate firstly to difference / diversity and secondly to disadvantage, incompetence, and being a challenge to both their immediate surroundings and the society at large. Excerpt 4 demonstrates all three characteristics:

Excerpt 4

The project aims at the permanent educational inclusion of newly arrived migrant students in an effort to combat the current negative situation which is characterised by lack of motivation on the behalf of migrant students, high rates of drop-outs and lack of the sense of “belonging” which is considered essential for the educational and social inclusion of the target group.

In Excerpt 4 the migrant student, in particular their “inclusion,” is characterized as a challenge. This is indicated most prominently with the word “combat.” The migrant student is then characterized, not through their qualities, but the lack thereof. Unmotivated, they fail to adjust to the schools they eventually drop out from, risking their future as a productive neoliberal subject (Carroll, 2022). The lack of inclusion is also decontextualized from, for example, political and symbolic structures (see Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Rather, what the document authors frame as “essential” for inclusion are the student’s feelings of motivation and belonging – which they lack. The migrant student is also characterized as different from non-immigrant students, particularly through the terms “belonging” and “inclusion”: It is presupposed that the migrant student should become a part of this society, not just to the outside eye, but to feel so as well. However, in their current state they are unable to, and remain not included and not belonging, separate from the rest.

The characterization of the migrant student is overwhelmingly negative at times in the documents. In fact, only one instance exists in which positive characteristics are ascribed to them:

Excerpt 5

This is why [the project] aims to help newly arrived migrant students with tasks appropriate to their skills, so they may feel as competent as they actually are.

The caveat here of course is that the feeling and recognition of competence requires the intervention of the project. In other words, the migrant student is first preconstructed as not feeling competent so that the project may emerge as a solution that needs to be funded by the EU.

By the use of various strategies addressed in previous sections, negative characteristics are associated to the migrant student. They are characterized as disadvantaged, mostly due to factors beyond their control, such as their cultural / linguistic background, or their “lack of host language skills” (e.g., Excerpt 2). Frequent use of verbs that imply no action, such as “lack” ($n = 11$) and “need” ($n = 15$), frame the migrant student as deficient. The migrant student is also characterized as incompetent – that is, if actions are attributed to them, they are unable to

complete them successfully, or without help (e.g., Excerpt 3). Not only does the migrant student face challenges, they also *are* one (e.g., Excerpt 4). The reader is to understand the difference, disadvantage, and incompetence of the migrant student as a challenge to the migrant student themselves, their teachers, schools, the society (and, at the same time, the EU) at large. Additionally, by decontextualizing their negative circumstances (see Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), the authors leave the reader to associate these with the migrant student, rather than their surroundings.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This special issue focuses on undoing and redoing teacher preparation for diversity in the neoliberal and neoconservative “North.” In this article, the North was discussed within the framework of an EU-Finland project and initiative related to educating / training teachers to work with the migrant student. Based on our analysis, it can safely be said that the migrant student produced in the project documents under review is othered (Jensen, 2011). Through naming, (de)agentivizing (speaking for and over), and characterizing the migrant student, the authors seem to differentiate them from their local, national, and EU ingroups, and generalize their outgroup. The migrant students are also dehistoricized, with their varied histories ignored. The other that remains appears to be objectified and reduced to disadvantaged and problematic characteristics. Indirectly, migrant students are deemed particularly problematic because they fail to fill the position of an adequate neoliberal subject – to perform, graduate, and obtain employment (Carroll, 2022). Real-life students commonly oppose othering practices and encounters, to the extent that their less powerful position allows them to (e.g., Wickens et al., 2020; Wischmann & Riepe, 2019; Worthman & Troiano, 2019). The migrant student here is however removed from the neoliberal context they inhabit, decontextualized (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), and their predicament seems to be attributed instead to their characteristics, or the lack thereof – a stance they cannot object to themselves. It begs the question, if the migrant student was instead not positioned as disadvantaged, if their predicament was a fault of their own, would it not be a sign of the meritocratic system functioning as intended? Or, if the migrant student was instead positioned as competent, active, and empowered, would such a project as the one discussed here be either formulated or designed otherwise? So long as the migrant student remains unable to change their circumstances, the utterer creates space for the emergence of a “saviour” – a position the project may fill (see Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017). And, so

long as their predicament appears a bug in the neoliberal system rather than a feature, teacher education and training will appear as an adequate solution to ensuring the equal treatment of all.

We argue that the glocal othering of the migrant student is encouraged, if not necessitated, by a neoliberal framework. Niemczyk and Rónay (2023), as well as Woelert et al. (2021), maintain that, because universities are not exempt from competitiveness, pressure on academics to publish frequently and in esteemed publications persists. Meanwhile, funding may be difficult to obtain. This has created a demand for courses, articles, and other sites where academics may learn the ropes of “grantmanship” – sites where writing norms are upheld (Roumbanis, 2019). These norms include convincing the funder of the need, significance, and executability of the project (Serrano Velarde, 2018). It is then no wonder that the situation constructed here is one in which the migrant student needs the project, as do the teachers that this project aims to train. This need is presented as one of social justice, particularly in terms of ensuring equitable treatment, in the project. However, as the mixed-methods analysis of excerpts and frequencies in the analytical sections show, the project’s efforts to ensure equal treatment for migrant students are primarily focused on shaping them into successful neoliberal subjects. This means an emphasis on helping them achieve their potential, improve performance, and acquire the skills and competencies needed to remain productive. As the neoliberal potential of the migrant student may only be realized with the implementation of the project, they must remain discursively oppressed in the interim.

It is precisely here that the contradiction between social justice and neoliberalism is the starkest. For how equitable could an initiative be if it reinforces linguistically the inequalities it claims to dismantle? This project, completed in 2024, aimed to reach at least 80 teachers in the EU and to be disseminated to many more. We maintain that the social justice claims of the project could fall ultimately short, as it urged these teachers to reduce the students in their class to a potentially disadvantaged, incompetent, and passive other – as it called teachers, researchers, and funders alike to other individuals who are denied a part in this knowledge (re)production.

Not only is such an approach harmful due to its potentially unethical and unempathetic nature, but it may also be ineffective. Particularly decontextualization and deauthorization (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), by detaching the issue from the relevant context(s) and the utterance from its utterer(s), may present solutions ill-equipped to solve it. This should be of

great concern to funding organizations if, as suggested by Serrano Velarde (2018), they value significance and executability in the projects they fund.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The special issue aims to “enhance a critical stance against neoconservatism, neoliberalism and the myth of the neutrality of schools, all of which obscure cultural and linguistic hierarchies, power relations, and other mechanisms that reinforce social inequalities.” With this article, we wish to raise awareness and acting against othering in neoliberal (supranational) projects related to diversity and teacher training / education. To resist neoliberalism (and neoconservatism), we believe that, in Nordic teacher education and elsewhere, attention needs to be brought to the ideologies and power relationships that present themselves when discussing others in both research and education. This entails recognizing and acting against academic othering on various relevant levels of academic knowledge production.

Our first recommendations concern how to ethically approach the figure of the migrant in educational research in general. Our primary concern has to do with the monolithic use of the very word in English and other languages. For example, during the course of the project assumptions were made about a shared understanding of this figure, despite the variance in migration histories, policies, and discourses between EU member countries, which undoubtedly informs project members’ and future project users’ understanding. While some definitions were offered, they were rather broad, only excluding people whose family line in their birth country is “long,” and who have never lived elsewhere, even temporarily. This definition encompasses such a broad sample of individuals that their lived experiences or the “challenges they face” are bound to differ. It is in this absence of precision and clarity that the reader must turn to subtexts to decipher whom the project truly wishes to reach and for what purposes. As this article has shown, while the data define the migrant student as a vague and contradictory social category, the subtexts reveal biases which call the reader to imagine a very specific type of person who migrates — namely, a disadvantaged, somewhat incompetent, and culturally and linguistically different person. In opposition to the abundance of victimizing and othering messaging, the broad definitions lose significance. Alternatively, the contradiction between the concrete texts and subtexts could call the reader to associate this subtextual characterization to all those who fit the definition provided by the authors of the analyzed documents. This ambiguity and contradictory messaging may lead to confusing incoherencies, as interlocutors (e.g., teachers

partaking in the training offered by the project) struggle to find solutions for vastly different issues. Additionally, by normalizing these discourses of all who migrate or whose family has migrated as incompetent and disadvantaged, we may also witness worsening treatment of those othered into a migrant student – in education and elsewhere, and in different contexts of the Nordics and the EU.

We also suggest that the power of, for example, scholars and teacher educators to ventriloquize and other should be more widely recognized, for they are active partakers in glocal knowledge production. It should thus be recognized that assignment of a label, such as “migrant” or “student,” may act as the first sign of othering. When labels are necessary, they should be informative, relevant, and social justice-oriented (Vietze et al., 2023). Particularly when addressing people who are not present, discussion ought not to rely on a shared understanding on the meaning of the label assigned to them. Rather, meanings should be negotiated, and any potential agreement on a definition must remain changeable. These discussions are valuable, as they carry a potential for critically examining biases that may otherwise remain undiscovered. Further, in international projects, multilingual conversations could help “un-otherize” the other and further connotational understanding of multilingual discourses. However, when utterances are written, rather than spoken, the possibility for negotiation is reduced. Thus, special care should be given to the ethical representation of the other in writing. Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) make stimulating recommendations for ways to resist othering in writing. They ask researchers to consider the following methods:

- (1) narrative, which enables contextualization, historization, and the retrieval of the subjectivity of the Other; (2) dialog, which acts against objectification and dehistorization by bringing the presence of the Other’s personal history and knowledge; and (3) reflexivity, which acts against the authoritative stance of the text or the researcher. (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, pp. 300–301)

Empathy should serve as the basis for writing of and discussing the other. This empathy to us means above all the recognition of their complexity.

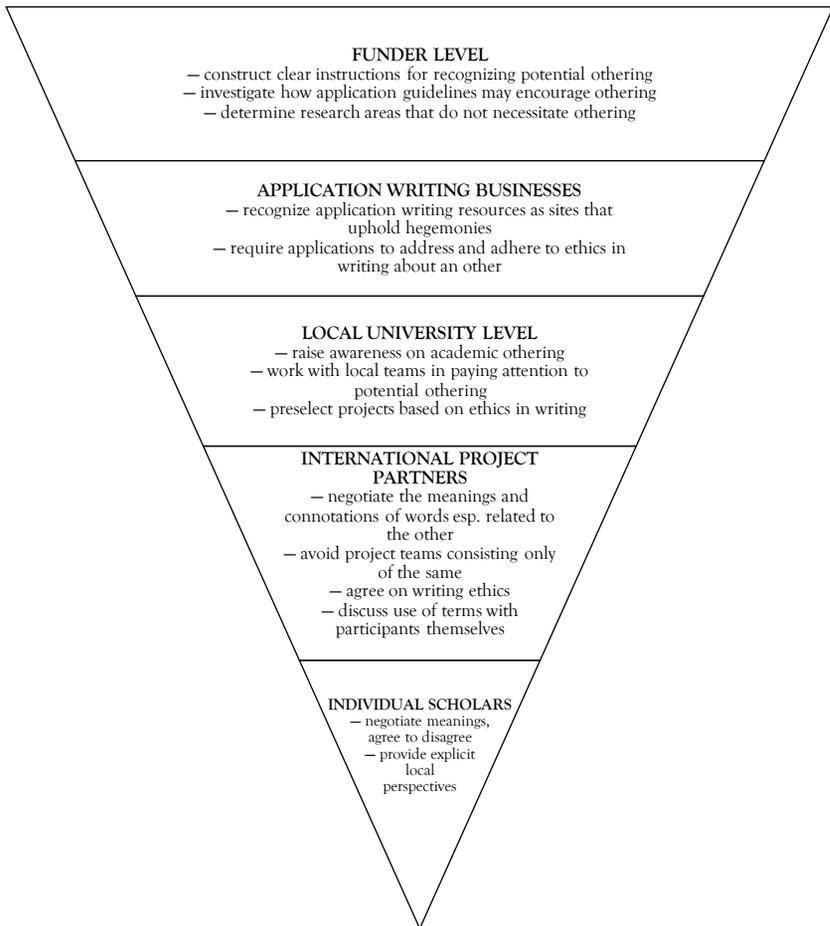


FIGURE 3. Recommendations for entities on levels of educational research for addressing and avoiding (academic) othering

As our article concerns an international intervention project, we would also like to direct some recommendations towards similar initiatives. Firstly, although we recognize the significance of concrete results that reflect the original proposal, we would urge relevant parties to elevate the renegotiations of the central figures of the project on the list of priorities, despite the risk of alterations in the project plan. This may lead not only to more opportunities to reduce and dismantle othering, but also results

and methods that are more relevant to the objectives, as shared knowledge is negotiated and expanded during the lifetime of the project. Secondly, guidelines that account for ethical writing practices should be provided for international application reviewers, application writing course organisers, and universities that select projects to put forward in, for example, EU application rounds. In Figure 3 we suggest concrete recommendations for these various levels involved in decision-making concerning international educational research projects.

These ethical criteria should include a demand for sensitivity, possibility for renegotiation, and an emphasis on the importance of wording in relation to potential othering (Dervin, 2023). In Table 3 we briefly suggest some questions that may aid in recognizing academic othering, focusing on the naming, (de)agentivizing, and characterizing of the other, tying them together with othering (Jensen, 2011), ventriloquism (see Authier-Revuz, 1984; Dervin, 2008), and academic othering (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

TABLE 3. *Questions related to naming, (de)agentivizing, and characterization of entities and their connections to (academic) othering and ventriloquizing*

	Ask	Recognize
Naming	Which entities are named?	Othering (defining into existence)
	How are names and the context of their enunciation connotated?	Othering (differentiation, ascribing negative characteristics)
(De)agentivizing	Which entities act and talk?	Ventriloquism
	Which entities do not act and talk?	Deauthorization
	Which entities are the object of action?	Objectification
	Are the actors able to execute actions ascribed to them? How are actions connotated?	Ventriloquism, othering (ascribing negative characteristics)
	What is offered as an explanation of behaviour of entities?	Decontextualization
Characterization	How are the same and the other described?	Othering (ascribing negative characteristics)
	Are entities' individuality and complexity recognized?	Dehistorization

These, we hope, will help recognize projects which approach social justice with a much-needed understanding of how to resist othering created by

neoliberal educational research and practice. The way the project is described and implemented was negotiated, co-constructed, and agreed upon by academics in all the participating countries. Although Finland is not the sole focus of the project, it plays as much of a central role as the other participating member states. This EU project reminds us that looking into a country’s (teacher) education and training, such as in Finland, requires going beyond country and region specifics to include broader supranational influences which also shape its education. The neoliberal and neoconservative aspects which related to this special issue find their roots in this central cross-border, international, and glocal perspective (Biesta, 2020).

NOTES

1. This article partly builds on some of the findings from this study.

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