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To cite this article: Miitta Järvinen & Tiina Suopajarvi (10 Jul 2024): Differences in the Classroom: Gender, Race, and Trauma as Affective Hotspots in Finnish Education for Adult Migrants, NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, DOI: [10.1080/08038740.2024.2367753](https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2024.2367753)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2024.2367753>



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Published online: 10 Jul 2024.



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# Differences in the Classroom: Gender, Race, and Trauma as Affective Hotspots in Finnish Education for Adult Migrants

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we examine the affects that become constructed in Finnish education for adult migrants. Our point of departure for analysing the research material—educators’ interviews—is in the everyday situations where educators’ and students’ emotions and life experiences meet with the institutional conditions of education. In the educators’ narrations of these situations, the affects are constructed in patterns attached to intersectional categories of difference. The most affectively intense categories are gender, race, and trauma. With the first two being the classic subjects of feminist analysis and the latter less traditional, we argue that utilizing affect theory can produce new knowledge of these categories and of educators’ work. Our analysis shows that, whereas the affective patterns of gender and race become rooted in cultural and structural factors, the pattern of trauma is more difficult to grasp. We also show that understanding the affective patterns of educators’ work can disclose how to encounter differences in the classroom.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 December 2022  
Accepted 7 June 2024



## KEYWORDS

Hotspots; intersectionality; educators; migrants; trauma

## Introduction

So, can I really talk about things like this? In a way, I sort of have to. [...] I told them that no, definitely not, Finland is not a country where there is no racism. [...] this is a racist country [...] Of course, as a part of this society, I don’t see it. And I live here in my own middle-class, highly educated, green-leftist bubble [...] And I feel that this is a very sensitive topic, because there are enough discouragers in this world and this society. I think our culture likes to discourage people a lot, and if a person, who’s spent their whole life just being beaten—if they really want to get vocational training in Finland and find employment. So, is it really my role to say that “Well, you won’t find a job, because a Finn will take it, anyway?” [...] I don’t do that, because I think it’s wrong. (p=Participant 15)

In this article, our aim is to understand the affectivity of the educators’ work in education for adult migrants: integration training, basic education for adults and literacy training in liberal adult education. We analyse the educators’ reflection on their everyday encounters with their students. Furthermore, we aim to understand the meaningful differences constructed through this affectivity. Finnish policy for migrant integration emphasizes the role of education because of Finland’s reputation for providing equal opportunities through education (Masoud et al., 2021, p. 52). Although the educational branches examined here are in the outskirts, or in case of integration training, outside, the Finnish education system<sup>1</sup> (Kekki et al., 2023), they share its cross-cutting objectives of promoting civilization and equality (Basic Education Act 628/1998).

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In the opening quotation, the ideal of equal opportunities is brought crashing down by an educator. While teaching the language and other contents, such as basics of Finnish society, educators encounter their students' varying backgrounds, personal relationships, and different life situations. These encounters make the educator—student relationship not merely an institutional and rational one, but also personal and emotional. Our analysis is based on interviews with the educators of these educational settings. The starting point of the analysis is the everyday situations in which the educators engage. As in the quotation above, the descriptions of the situations are emotionally loaded, and with the idea of *affective patterns* (Wetherell, 2012) and *the circulation of affects* (Ahmed, 2014), we look at the compositions and movements of affects in these situations.

Further, *intersectionality* steers us towards analysing categories such as gender, race, education, and class, which often intertwine and overlap (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 6). It helps us identify emotions and affects, which are often attached to these categories. In the interviews, gender, race, and trauma seem to have particular affective significance in classroom encounters. Based on Yep's (2015) idea of "thicker intersectionalities," Mortensen and Milani (2020, p. 420) argue that the focus on affect can result in a more contextually sensitive analysis of the intersectional categories. Following them, we propose that affect theory can produce new knowledge about the intersectional categories of gender, race, and trauma. In our study, we ask what kinds of emotions are attached to these categories, what these attachments tell about the classroom situations, and further about instruction as affective labour.

## Instruction as Affective Labor

According to Wetherell (2012), affects form in *patterns* in which discursive and material experiences, histories, and cultural elements come together. Affective patterns can be both personal and impersonal, as well as imposed or "thoughtless" actions (Wetherell, 2012, p. 16). For educators, affects are not only constituted by their subjective emotions, but also how they are defined in a specific social context, such as institutional conditions and student interactions.

In our understanding of what affects *do*, instead of merely thinking of what they are, we follow Sara Ahmed's (2014, p. 208) notions on affecting and being affected. Ahmed uses the concept of emotion because of, first, the English word's reference to motion; thus, emotions move and make things move. Second, she uses the concept to show its everydayness (Schmitz and Ahmed, 2014). We follow her idea of emotion and affect as parts of the same phenomenon, but for analytical clarity, we use emotion to describe a named feeling, such as frustration or discomfort. When we discuss these emotions and their entanglement with structures, we use the concept of affect.

We regard instruction as emotional—and, as such, affective—labour: many kinds of emotions, including joy, empathy, frustration, and unease, are at play when educators encounter their students (Ahmed, 2007, p. 245). In educational institutions, these encounters and emotions are linked to different power relations and social structures, and for the past few decades, there has been increased interest in teachers' emotions (Nias, 1996; Schutz et al., 2007; Zembylas, 2003). According to these studies, teaching is by nature highly affective labour, and emotions have a significant bearing on teaching activities, interactions, and teacher identities.

Earlier research has focused on the emotions of individual teachers and their impact on teacher identity and well-being, whereas we focus on emotions as performative and discursive cultural practices (Ahmed, 2014). This means analysing how, in the circulation of affects, we move towards and/or away from each other, leave impressions on each other, and, how through these impressions, cultural practices start to formulate (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 44–45, 54). In our analysis of educators' interviews, these practices become firmly attached to gender, race, and trauma. We ask what kinds of emotions form in the classroom situations narrated by the educators and what these tell about instruction as affective labour. This labour is positioned between the cultural/institutional structures of education and everyday interactions with the students. As Arendt (1958) has suggested,

educational institutions are interposed between the domain of the home and the world, or more generally, private and public. The educators, in turn, represent the public by committing to its preconditions, like legislation and core curricula, in spite of their personal views and ideas (Arendt, 1958). Wetherell's (2012) understanding of affect's entanglement with the discursive, material objects, bodies, and institutions, guides us in considering the "in-betweenness" of the educators' position. Finally, we discuss how through the affective movements, socially and culturally organized practices related to gender, race, and trauma come into being in the interviews (Ahmed, 2014).

### Intersectionality: Affecting Differences

In feminist studies, the impacts, co-constitution, and overlapping of various social positions have been examined from the perspective of *intersectionality*. Intersectionality marks the point in individual and collective lives where different socio-economic and cultural positions meet or intersect. In research, different positions can be labelled under categories such as gender, race, class, education, health, and (dis)ability; which are not merely individual identities, but being socially constructed, their reproduction causes inequality (McCall, 2005, pp. 1773–1774).

Following Leslie McCall's tripartition (McCall, 2005), we understand the intersectional categories *anticategorically* as social constructions that produce differences both between members of the same group and between social groups. We analyse the diversity in the educators' interviews, *between* the migrant students using a so-called *intracategorical* approach, but we cannot neglect the *intercategorical* dimension of intersectionality that is made up of the differences between the Finnish educators and their students (see Järvinen, 2023). This means that both educators and their students are invested in some of the categories, whereas only students are invested in others.

The interpretation of differences, as well as the inequalities underlying them, always reflects one's position in existing power dynamics (Collins, 2015, p. 14). This is an important notion because we focus on the interpretations and experiences of the educators, who have an authority relationship with their students. We examine gender, race, and trauma because they are the most affectively intensive categories in our material. The first two are at the core of the original American feminist analysis, but we examine their formations in the Finnish context.

Trauma, however, is not one of the traditional categories of difference in intersectional studies. Although (mental) health is often included in the lists of the differences that matter in intersectionality, the intersections of gender, race, and class with mental health have mainly been studied in psychology and medicine (Keith & Brown, 2018). Research on mental health and other significant categories, as well as their cultural and social implications, is still scarce.

### Migration, Integration and Education Policies in Finland

Finland has a relatively short history of receiving migrants. Having mainly been a country of emigration, Finland began its policy-based reception of migrants during the 1990s. The first act on immigrant integration in Finland took effect in 1999, and the act was reformed in 2010. The reformation of the current act has been in process from 2022 to 2024.<sup>2</sup> In 2021, there were 470,000 persons with foreign backgrounds living in Finland who themselves, or their parents, were born abroad. The most common countries of origin are the former Soviet Union area, Iraq, Somalia, and former Yugoslavia, which are also reflected in the most often spoken foreign languages (Russian, Estonian, Arabic, English, and Somali).<sup>3</sup> The most common grounds for positive residence permits in 2021 were work, family relations, and studies.<sup>4</sup>

In Finland, statutory integration measures begin after a migrant receives a residence permit. Wellbeing services counties<sup>5</sup> and/or the municipality in which the newcomer has settled, carry out an assessment on the competence, education and service needs of a migrant, to promote their integration, and further, employment. Necessary services, including suitable education, are recorded in an integration plan. The newcomers who are unemployed, register as job seekers,

except for those who are full-time students or absent from the labour market for allowable reasons, like old age, sickness, or parental leave. (Integration Act 681/2023.) People in the asylum-seeking process, however, are not included in the scope of these services that require valid residence permits (Masoud et al., 2020, p. 102).

For adult migrants, education ranges from literacy and basic education to language and competency training for skilled professionals. Here, we focus on integration training, basic education for adults, and liberal adult education. *Integration training* provides language and civic education for people who have completed their basic education earlier and have literacy in the Latin alphabet. People with little school history and who lack literacy usually attend *basic education for adults*. *Liberal adult education* provides language and literacy training for low-educated persons who cannot attend full-time studies (e.g. stay-at-home mothers) (Finnish National Board for Education [FNBE] 2012; 2017a; 2017b; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). These all give instruction in Finnish as second language (S2) and general knowledge about Finnish society. They also share the basic values of Finnish school system, which are founded on democracy, human rights and equality (Kekki et al., 2023, p. 91).

The curricula of basic and liberal adult education are based on the concept of lifelong learning. However, based on a vast research material of official documents of the EU, OECD and UNESCO, Heikki Kinnari argues that during the past decades, the conception of humanity in the policies of lifelong learning has shifted from a humanist perspective of emancipation, democracy and solidarity into the current self-regulation and entrepreneurial citizenship (Kinnari, 2020). In the case of adult education, the aim is to fill the language and education gap between the student and further studies and/or working life. In addition, adult education has a stronger emphasis and connection to working life, as opposed to education for students in the mandatory school age. (FNBE 2012; 2017a; 2017b)

The scope of the people attending adult education for migrants is diverse; for example, both unemployed EU citizens and people receiving international protection can attend integration training in the same classroom. However, in basic and liberal adult education, students usually have backgrounds as forced migrants.<sup>6</sup> What makes these settings noteworthy is how the diversity of the students challenges the official, labour market inclined presuppositions of the curricula (FNBE 2012, 2017a, 2017b).

## Interviews, Participants, and the Analysis

The methodology of the present paper is based on an analysis of interviews. In 2021, the first author conducted one-on-one expert interviews with 16 educators. Additionally, in 2022, two focus groups of earlier participants were gathered to further discuss some of the central themes. The interviews, which were conducted in Finnish, were transcribed verbatim and thematized, and the sections analysed in the present paper were translated into English. The educators worked in integration training ( $n = 8$ ), basic education for adults ( $n = 5$ ), and liberal adult education ( $n = 2$ ). One participant worked for a private education provider.

We refer to the participants as “educators” instead of “teachers” because of their varying educational backgrounds and job descriptions: most of them who worked in integration training and liberal adult education were subject teachers in mother tongue and literature, with qualifications to give instruction in Finnish or Swedish as a second language (S2 teacher/educator). In basic education for adults, the majority had qualified as class teachers of primary education, meaning grades 1 to 6. Because there are no specific qualifications for teaching Finnish as a second language in labour market training, a few the participants did not have formal teacher training. All of them were white Finnish nationals, university-educated, and—bar one—(presumed) women.<sup>7</sup>

The aim of the interviews was to discuss the ways in which diversity is present in instruction work. Curricula that steer education, represent a unified idea of man [sic] that is in fact a product of national scientific, religious, political and economic interests (Rajakaltio, 2011, p. 41). To challenge

these presuppositions, the thematic style of interview was supplemented with a prompt interview (Törrönen, 2017): the interviewer presented diversity-themed extracts from the current core curricula of adult education for the educators to comment on. The goal of the prompts was to allow the interviewees to discuss the possible gaps between the ideals of learning, learner and instruction, and the realities of everyday life.

The picture of diversity has been drawn from the educators' narrations, but the stories they convey are usually not their own. The students' lives constituting the diversity originate in our study from a relation between educators and their students. Through what is said about the "other," we can read what is said about the "self" (Hjelm, 2021, p. 272)—an ethical notion that dates back to classic ethnographers, such as Clifford (1986). Thus, while the educators talk about their students, they construct mainly narrations of themselves and their affective, institutional, and privileged positions (Fathzadeh, 2023, p. 44).

While interviewing the educators, the first author noticed that their narrations could not be approached only through rational or even discursive means. The narrations required attention to the moments when the traditional methodological tools and arrangements did not seem to apply. Educational scientist MacLure (2013) calls these unsettling moments in research *hotspots* that can occur both in the field and while analysing the material. Hotspots demand attention, they "glow," and we need to follow them to understand their meanings. In our interviews, the hotspots are mainly attached to the educators' descriptions of emotionally intensive everyday work situations. The hotspots could be read, for example, from the atmosphere conveyed to the researcher or from discursive or nonverbal expressions of emotion. Using these situations as the point of departure, we seek to analyse how both emotions and affects and their consequences are essential in educators' work.

Consequently, in our analysis, we follow Wetherell (2012) and Ahmed (2014), who do not separate mind and body when analysing affects and emotions in qualitative research materials. Instead, they see language as capable of expressing emotions (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, p. 5). This means paying attention to the discursive and "what lies beside" it (Mortensen & Milani, 2020, p. 420). Thus, our understanding and interpretations of affects include language and embodied emotions expressed in the interviews as entangled together.

## **Affects in the Instructors' Narration of Differences**

### ***Gender As a Cause for Worry and Frustration—And Hope***

In the interviews, the category of gender constitutes a binary of men and women. Through this hotspot, the educators especially reflected on their female students' possibilities and choices, here from the position of white, Finnish, highly educated, and middle-class women. This further complicates the category of gender, making it not only an intracategorical complexity between the students but also intercategory because both the students and educators may belong to the category of "women." The educators found it difficult to accept the perceived inequality in their students' marriages and family lives. Their narrations were often affective, with expressions of worry and frustration. There was also a sense of powerlessness in not being able to affect their students' continuous pregnancies or other responsibilities in family life.

In one interview, there was an interesting example of affective talk about migrant women and violence:

A student sends me a message that she can't come to school and that she is ill. And a couple of days later, I received a message written in really good Finnish: "I'm coming to school tomorrow, but my eyes are all black, please don't worry, educator." [...] And the message ended with "best regards" and the name of the student, with "The message was written by her husband" [...] So we had just had [a] domestic violence case, and I heard terrible alarm bells ring, thinking about black eyes and the husband sending the message. What is going on?

Then, she just slipped into our breakroom. [...] And there she was, in the back corner, holding her belly, hunched. I thought that she was crying there. And I rushed in and went on, “Oh, no, what’s wrong, can I help?” She doesn’t say anything. And then she begins to pray—kneeling on the floor. [...] So, I mean, it was such an embarrassing, embarrassing moment. That’s when I realized that [...] if you are kind of on the wrong frequency, then it easily goes wrong. (P2)

The description of the incident and reactions it sparked point to an affective pattern consisting of factors that are often present in work with migrant women. The educator’s legislative obligation to promote equality (The Finnish Constitution 731/1999) and, consequently, interfere with abuse is imposed, thus becoming a conscious component in the affective pattern. The sense of obligation overlaps with her assumptions and perceptions of the previous events in the school environment. Above, the educator recollects her interpretation in embarrassment, as her professional obligations, recent events, and suspicion of abuse “tuned” her to view the situation as a “problem to solve” and the student “in need” of help (Fathzadeh, 2023, 44.).

Another part of the affective pattern formed around gender and equality in a focus group, where the educators discussed the gender segregation that directs migrant women and men to different sectors of society. Finland has received attention on policies leading to the exclusion of migrant women (OECD, 2018), as well as criticism of the gendered and racializing educational processes affecting them especially (Kurki et al., 2019). Based on the interviews, the educators are aware of the criticism and tried to contribute to changing the issue. Simultaneously, they found it irritating to be responsible for trying to break down persisting social structures while simultaneously respecting their students’ own knowledge and interests:

FG1: [T]he important thing is that they usually, all students, have something they want to do. [...] But maybe more so, because people are adults, you have to treat them as adults.

[...]

FG2: And yes, of course, when I talk to a group, I try to pay attention to [saying] that, of course, everyone has the opportunity to do anything, and I try to pay special attention to that, talking like that. But when you’re alone [with a student], you notice that it’s just that women tend to go into the care and education sector and men into technology, mechanics, and construction. That’s how it is. But of course, it is also the case that men may have more room for choices in it.

This excerpt demonstrates the in-between position of the educators. They recognize the gendered patterns of the labour market, as well as assume cultural models of suitable occupations for men and women but find both difficult to change, especially when trying to guide individual students. The choices might not be the ones that they wish for their students, but they also feel unable to push their students to less gendered vocational branches. Still, the interviewees agreed that “it stings,” especially when women’s pursued plans fall through because of a husband’s or the community’s disagreement.

The principle of lifelong learning also guides educators to acknowledge students’ prior skills and knowledge, experiences, age, and cultural background in their education and guidance (FNBE 2012, 2017a, 2017b). The principles tie into the remarks about treating students as adults who have knowledge and ideas about their future. “Treating them as adults” does not erase the fact that, in providing overall guidance, all possible options should be made visible, as the first interviewee states.

Simultaneously, because the educators were worried and frustrated over gender inequality in the family and labour market, they also genuinely believed that education could provide agency and inclusion—especially to women. According to the educators working with illiterate students, literacy enhances their students’ feeling of capability and boosts their self-confidence:

It was wonderful when I once had some very quiet and even silenced women studying [in the group], who started out as really humble. And then, at some point in the year, they had gone, these three women, together to get some laboratory tests. Something like that would have never happened before; they would have always needed to go with a man [...] That was a big step. And that comes partly from the socialization and social relationships made possible by school, but also from the self-esteem that grows from the fact that you become

more self-reliant. The kind of confidence that you can do it yourself [...], and it's really important for an adult that you are somehow self-reliant. (P5)

Learning a language is usually seen as the key element for integration. For the educators, the reason was not only its significance to interaction and participation in society, but some also associated learning language with the possibility for the students to understand themselves in a new way:

[E]specially, women want to know what their genitalia are called. And I think that's great. Once again, it gives you control over your own life! Being able to go to the doctor and say that I have a sore throat. [...] And you get words and names for things that you may not have heard of in your own language. It's like empowerment! It's so important to me that at least someone in the class [...] would understand that "I'm a great chick! I can do this myself; I can take care of my own business." [...] But I want them [women] to be able to become part of society and act outside the home. That's probably something that helps me cope, especially when I'm working with these slower-paced groups. (P15)

Although changing the women's family conditions or the inequality of the labour market was out of the educators' reach, these things were something they felt they could influence. This kind of inclusion is not tied to measurable outcomes of integration, such as entering the labour market or further education; instead, it has more to do with agency and empowerment in women's everyday lives. Everyday involvement (e.g. through children's activities) can be a significant motivator for migrant women's language learning and participation (Järvinen, 2023). Even though handling themes related to body and sexuality with adult migrants could feel awkward to the educators, they hope it might impact their students' autonomy and sense of self.

In this section, we have considered an affective pattern forming around gender and (in)equality. In Wetherell's (2012, p. 16) terms, this pattern is partly imposed (in the documents that steer education), and it is partly an active way forward (as a cause for hope). Thus, gender equality is an objective, and the educators have specific emotional reactions to it: worry surfaces in reaction to their interpretation of male domination over women's lives, frustration when battling against gendered structures of society, and hope as the educators witness positive change in their (female) students' agency.

## Discomfort and Silence Around Race

In what follows, we refer to "race" when discussing the category being constructed. However, when we analyse the process itself, we use the term "racialization." The most common outlook on race in the interviews was racism between students. According to the educators, discrimination in the classroom could be based on race/ethnicity, but also on educational background or language skills. The educators often described feeling strongly about these situations (Järvinen, 2023.) Nonetheless, very few educators spontaneously brought up the racism that their students face in Finnish society. This created silence and discomfort hotspots around the category of race in the interviews.

When asked how much the educators discussed the issue with their students, the answers were somewhat divided. Some argued that their students do not want to complain or otherwise discuss racism in what, in principle, is a nondiscriminating school environment. Others, however, found it important to provide space for discussing the experiences of racism. One interviewee announced that almost every new week begins with the students' recollection of recent events; even with their limited Finnish, they understand the racist remarks on the streets and public transport.

Some of the educators occasionally expressed their explicit discomfort about addressing racism with the students. While doing so, the educators need to engage in affective work that often includes conflicting emotions:

P15: [...] in my opinion, we also shy away from racism quite a lot.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

P15: Well, it's really difficult to start talking about it; after all, it's a very sensitive, terribly sensitive subject. [...] But is it a reason to keep quiet? Because I find it difficult? No, it's not a reason to keep quiet. [...] but if

I concentrate too much on it, will I be closing off some opportunities for this student? Or am I causing them more harm than good?

The educator feels conflicted about talking about racism in Finland because, by doing so, she does not want to discourage her students. Declaring Finnish society as free of racism would be dishonest because racism affects so many immigrants (FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). Nevertheless, this does not correspond to the picture of Finland as a land of democracy, human rights and equality. This discrepancy between the ideals of education and the students' lived reality (cf. Arendt, 1958) positions the individual educators in an emotionally challenging situation. In a same vein, many educators express puzzlement about supporting their students when they experience racism and discrimination:

I think it's really difficult to teach [someone] that if you send 70-something job applications, and receive like a clearly semidiscriminating answer for all of them, that we do not want you—so how can I teach [anyone] to take it somehow well? In a way, it feels like shit—excuse me—honestly, even if there were means of dealing with it [racism]. I don't know, I think it's difficult. (P2)

As noted in the extract above, even the means of dealing with racism do not remove the emotions that it arouses. Though being sympathetic with their students, some educators have also recognized the gap between their experiences. As a native and highly educated Finn, one of them contemplates the blind spots that her position may produce:

I mean, overall acknowledging that I don't necessarily see it all, the fact is that I have to sort of acknowledge it and say out loud that I believe it's true, but unfortunately, I don't see it that way. But that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. I think it's important to validate it in such a way that we talk about it, and they can tell me and that I believe it and take it seriously. (P11)

In this way, the educators reflected on their own social intersection and its limitations. Their position added to the discomfort, but for some, it was also a way forward when dealing with racism: recognizing personal blind spots, listening, and taking students' experiences seriously can be an act of support, but also a starting point to allyship: antiracist work necessarily includes learning, self-reflection, and confronting old understandings (Alemanji, 2016, p. 61).

Some of the interviewed educators felt that discussing racism would require more advanced language skills than the very basic ones that their students usually have. Despite the students being beginners in their language studies, communication in class seems to be strongly based on verbal expression. This might reflect many educators' positions as language teachers, where the emphasis is often on spoken expression.

Based on the interview material, the affective pattern of race and racism can be a cause for different kinds of action. Some educators thought it best not to talk about racism because their students must face it enough outside the educational institutions anyway. They were also insecure when trying to interpret whether or how their students would prefer to discuss the matter. Others felt obliged to discuss racism, even though they found it personally challenging. What these approaches have in common are the emotions of discomfort and unease. They both verge on shame at racism in Finnish society, which, for some, can be a cause of action.

## Coming Across Trauma

In this section, we analyse the hotspot of trauma, which occurs as cautiousness pertaining to the educators' engagement with their students' experiences. We do not approach trauma on a medical or psychological basis (i.e. *trauma-specifically*, see Alessi & Kahn, 2023). Instead, we understand trauma as a broader social category formulated in the educators' reflections of the experiences their students have shared with them and the situations in which they surface. The so-called *trauma-informed* practices that are applied both in clinical work, as well as in research, recognize the

widespread effects of trauma not only on individuals, but also communities and populations (Alessi & Kahn, 2023, p. 131). Formal teacher education, or the curricula, pays little attention to these matters, leaving educators quite unequipped to deal with trauma-related issues.<sup>8</sup>

Imposing the category of trauma on all students in education for adult migrants would be both incorrect and victimizing. The educators are not privy to their students' medical information (e.g. PTSD or other diagnoses). Neither do they diagnose individual students. What constitutes here as trauma depends on what has been shared in the classroom interaction, and our intention is not to medicalize or pathologize migrants' experiences (Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2015, p. 78). Here, we mainly discuss the war-related trauma that prevails in groups of forced migrants. However, residency statuses based on administrative categories never truly convey people's underlying life conditions (Hiitola, 2021). This illustrates the intersectionality of the groups because trauma intersects with students' nationality or ethnicity and causes of migration.

The educators seem to balance between being present to their students and simultaneously being aware that processing traumatic experiences is outside their expertise:

I always want to listen—or try to. In a way, I feel that I have the means, but on the other hand, I always don't, because I haven't experienced anything like that. I feel that I can't say, "Yes, I understand" because I don't understand; [...] I haven't been to any war zones—I haven't experienced the kind of violence or fear that many people have—if we're talking about refugees. [...] But on the other hand, I try to understand. I mean, as a human being to another human being in a way. And that's why I want to listen, but I also draw boundaries, because I can't carry all that. It's not my job. [...] I'm not a professional in that field; I have a master's degree in languages. [...] So I think about what I can do. Yes, listen, but on the other hand, "We have the class now, everything is fine here" and "We're studying Finnish," try to focus on what we're doing, what our task is at that moment. (P1)

In this extract, trauma is present in many ways, and it induces different kinds of action: the interviewee expresses her effort to understand the person—although because of the gap between her own and the students' experiences, she acknowledges never being able to fully understand. Nevertheless, she wants to offer empathy through listening "as a human being to another human being." She also tries to affect the things she can, like making students feel safe in the classroom and focusing on studying. She separates her job as a language educator from that of medical or social professionals. This is a way of drawing boundaries so that she does not have to carry those experiences herself.

The educator has made the distinction between what belongs to her expertise and what does not. Another educator remembers earlier being deeply affected by the things she was told, but because of more experience, she could filter out some of them:

[L]et's say that at the beginning of my career; it was extremely stressful sometimes, the things I was told. Now, I know how to—how should I put it, I'm not a colder person nowadays, but I can filter things out. Maybe I've heard so many different stories and life stories and things like that, that somehow [...] I don't know what the wording is. I can't say that I'm numb to it, I'm touched by it. But maybe not in the same way—they don't keep me awake at night anymore, maybe that's it. Earlier, I used to lose sleep but not anymore. (P4)

As in the examples above, the educators admit to being touched by their students' stories, though not being able to fully understand them. Their affective involvement in the situation, like the emotion of empathy, in psychologist Silvan Tomkin's terms, represents *affective resonance* (Tomkins, 2008). Affective resonance does not produce understanding in someone else's terms but is rather a form of empathy that is aware of its own limits (Gibbs, 2013, p. 132). Simultaneously, being able to draw the boundaries between hearing people's life stories while not being too affected by them personally can be seen as a part of the educator's professionalism: it is something that they need to work through.

Because educators need to learn how to deal with hearing their students' stories, they may also have to adjust their instruction accordingly. Classroom activities, including content and exercises, might activate memories of experienced trauma. One educator describes a situation where she played different sound recordings when practicing weather—related vocabulary:

I had a group of Syrian refugees, and they didn't say anything, but I could see that they really flinched at the sound of the water. And then I realized that they must have come by boat, that they must have come from

somewhere, and that this triggered some trauma. [...] After that, I stopped playing the water sound. So, in that way, of course, I take their backgrounds into account. (P5)

In this example, the educator interprets the sound of water as a trigger for past trauma. Her interpretation is not based on her students' recollections, but rather on her perception of their bodily reaction. The transmission of affect, not articulated in the situation, causes her to stop using the water sound in the future. This ties into the intersectionality of the students: the same exercises might not fit everyone, and educators may have to adjust them according to their students' experiences.

In the previous case, a sensory trigger set the emotions around the trauma in motion. On another occasion, a textbook exercise caused a recollection of similar experiences:

I had a group of students with refugee backgrounds, and we had a textbook question, studying the past tense: "What you did do this and then, and where you [...] five years ago?" I didn't think about censoring that question—my lips already start trembling, thinking about the situations they have been in. And one woman told me that five years ago, she was on a rubber boat in the Mediterranean, and she couldn't sit. She was standing there, on the lifeboat, holding on to her children and crying all the way—and I start crying when I think about the woman, how she has been screaming and crying there. [...] And then, there they are in front of me, and I will nag about the ending of the partitive. But in these situations, people will tell you, and it was that sort of group that when someone opens up, it usually opens the dams in a good way. [...] They are usually pretty difficult situations—I mean where to stop. I do not have [...] that kind of social skill, any more than any individual, on how to do it. As a rule, this affects the group somewhat therapeutically. (P13)

Here, we see an example of the circulation of affect. In the classroom, practicing the grammar of the past tense with an innocent-looking question about the students' lives five years ago prompts a female student to share her refugee story. After that, other students started to open up about their experiences, too. Participating in these situations leaves the educator unaware of how to react or how to move on, even though the effect of the conversation might be therapeutic for the group. In the interview, thinking back to her students' stories makes her emotional, so the affect continues its work beyond the situation itself, with the embodied emotion of empathy.

The affective pattern of trauma is linked to the emotions of empathy, insecurity, and cautiousness. They are emotional responses to the students' life stories and their perceived tragedy. The affects that come to be this way also activate different ways forward: drawing professional boundaries, focusing on the present moment, and adapting the classroom activities. They can also work as a hindrance when educators feel insecure of the proper response or how to move on.

## Conclusion

In our study, we have identified three categories that invoke the most intense emotions in the interviews when educators talk about their work in the classroom: gender, race, and trauma. The affective patterns of these categories are formed especially in the educators' narrations on the lives and experiences of their students.

*Gender and (in)equality* are mainly seen as problems arising from the patriarchal migrant communities/cultures. The educators' ability to act on this issue is twofold: they feel frustrated because they cannot affect this gendered work and family life, but it also gives them hope because by their teaching they can strengthen the agencies of their female students. On the contrary, *race and racism* are constructed in the Finnish society. As a problem that is coming from the "inside", racism is a failure that causes discomfort with the educators. Despite their personal antiracist sentiment, this emotion can make them to shy away from dealing with racism. It can, however, form a basis for an ally relationship where educators recognize the blind spots of their own position and create forums for their students to discuss their racial experiences. The category of *trauma* constitutes an ambivalent issue: the educators recognize yet are unable to fully grasp it. They are usually not aware of their students' medical diagnoses or previous life events unless the students share these with them. Classroom activities can trigger the experienced trauma which makes the educators to feel

insecure in these profoundly affective situations: they do not have proper means for dealing with them, or they try to set boundaries to protect themselves from becoming emotionally overloaded.

In our analysis of educators' interviews, the affects around race and trauma stem from their interpretations of the experiences and emotions of their students, whereas with gender, affects are mainly related to the educators' own reactions and values. These intersecting differences also bring about different modes of action. As opposed to race and trauma, gender—more specifically, “woman”—is a category that most of the educators, as women, recognize as belonging to. The intercategorical nature of “woman” produces the most affective hotspots in the interviews because the educators can reflect their observations of the female students' lives to their own experiences. The Finnish approach to promoting equality is closely tied to education and providing information, which has also been criticized (). Sociologist Keskinen (2022, pp. 17–18, 21) calls this kind of gender equality—based sense of superiority *racial nordicization*. It is, however, problematic that migrant women, in particular, are introduced with the Finnish idea of equality, without considering the racializing and gendered structures of Finnish society (, 389–391; Fathzadeh, 2023).

With racism and trauma, some educators explicitly state that they do not have such experiences and, thus, are not able to fully understand them. Racially motivated incidents harm the core of a person's selfhood, making racism and trauma intersecting categories (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). What makes trauma especially complicated is that the educators cannot trace it back either to their own experiences or to cultural or structural factors, as with gender and racism. Therefore, there seems to be less they can do about it. The unease and caution around racism and trauma indicate that educators need better means for dealing with these issues, such as antiracist and trauma-informative pedagogy. Yet education relies much on set curricula in which these approaches are not sufficiently included (Ilyas, 2019 2019, p. 73). This especially true in integration training where the structural frameworks position the educators under market pressure: they are responsible for guiding their students towards qualification and/or employment (Kurki et al., 2018).

As Paulo Freire argues in *Pedagogy of Hope* (2021[1994]), hope is the ontological precondition for liberation of the oppressed. Hopelessness, in turn, is a paralysing force (ibid, 17): the racial dynamics of Finnish society, or labour marked driven policies, may work this way. Challenging these dynamics, however, is a heavy task for an individual educator. Thus, we suggest that an intersectional approach that recognizes—but is not limited to—the effects of gender, race and trauma should be included in all levels of education, not to mention teacher training. In the spirit of our argument of instruction as affective labour, we emphasize that these approaches do not only consist of information, but also of emotional work that includes dealing with privilege and power. Freire, too, refuses to separate the cognitive and affective in the human existence: hope and knowledge are both experiences of the entire body, involving emotions (c.f. Webb, 2010, p. 239).

From the perspective of affective labour, the implementation of antiracist and trauma-informative pedagogies has a dual purpose for students and educators, as it may strengthen the capabilities and positive working culture for both (Brunzell et al., 2021, p. 102). Thus, these pedagogies should be brought into the core of education (Alemanji, 2016, pp. 58–59), including teacher training, which—based on our analysis—does not adequately meet the classroom reality. As we have described, subject teacher qualification in Finland emphasizes the substance of the discipline in question, like Finnish language in the case of S2-teachers.

As students enter the classroom with their experiences, educators need to engage with them. The majority, in this case Finnish, culture's recognition of these experiences can serve as a basis for social resilience (Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2015, p. 78). In Freire's terms, this demands “a sincere, fundamental respect on the part of the subjects engaged” (Freire 2021[1994], 121). It also corresponds to the existing curricular principle of acknowledging adult learners' prior knowledge, background, and experiences (FNBE 2012, 16; 2017a, 16 & 2017b, 19). The outcomes of such encounters are unpredictable, but they are necessary to make the classroom a safer space and more responsive to the students' experiences (Kubala, 2020, pp. 193–94). Such a space would facilitate discussion on racism and other difficult issues—even with less advanced language skills.

In this article, we have argued that affect theory can provide new knowledge about intersectional categories and instruction as affective labour. Our analysis shows that the differences constituting diversity are not only observed, but also felt and experienced in classroom interactions. That is, the educators, too, are affected and, thus, emotionally tuned when they come across their students' life situations. Working in situations where strong emotions, like discomfort and hope, circulate, makes them do small everyday political actions, which can especially support their female students' futures in Finland. Therefore, we need new ways of understanding the processes in which students and educators affect and become affected, as well as the consequences that these processes have for both individual lives and different collective contexts. Furthermore, understanding emotion as cultural practices means that curricula and teacher education should consider the political and affective aspects of instruction to grasp its multiple effects on the students.

## Notes

1. Integration training can be organized both by public and private institutions, based on the public tendering of services (cf. Kurki et al., 2018, p. 235).
2. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, <<https://tem.fi/hanke?tunnus=TEM100:00/2019>>
3. Statistic Finland's Immigrants and integration, <[https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/index\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/index_en.html)> The effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine are not included in these statistics.
4. Finnish Immigration Service <<https://migri.fi/en/-/immigration-statistics-2021-a-record-high-number-of-applications-for-residence-permits-on-the-basis-of-work>>
5. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: Wellbeing services counties are responsible for organizing healthcare, social welfare and rescue services in the area. <<https://stm.fi/en/wellbeing-services-counties>>
6. The term "forced migrant" refers to people who have applied for international protection in Finland, including asylum, subsidiary, and humanitarian protection, or as victims of human trafficking (Hiitola, 2021).
7. Teacher qualifications.  
Class teacher: <<https://www.suomi.fi/services/qualification-of-class-teacher-finnish-national-agency-for-education/e7edc207-359e-4f51-9315-d3c616343edf>>  
Subject teacher: <<https://www.suomi.fi/services/qualification-of-subject-teacher-finnish-national-agency-for-education/663860b8-fcc6-41f8-b3cf-9f9b64352176>>  
Teaching Finnish as second language: <<https://www.suomenopettajat.fi/opiskelu-suomen-opettajaksi/kel-poisuusvaatimukset/>>
8. Of the three curricula, only the one for basic education for adults (FNBE 2017a, 46) refers to students' possible traumatic experiences and the support they may require. In the other two (FNBE 2012, 2017b), references are vaguer e.g. acknowledging students' backgrounds or previous experiences.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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### Interviews

All research material is in the first author's possession. In the future, the anonymized transcriptions will be archived in the Archives of the School of History, Culture and Arts Studies (SHCAS Archives), University of Turku.

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