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The Learning Trajectory of Emigrants during the Experience of ‘Floating’. Towards the Meaning of Intercultural Counselling

The author of the article discusses stages of the learning trajectory of emigrants who go through a period of *floating*. The experience of emigration, called a *trajectory of floating* (biography of floating), is not identical with the *trajectory of suffering* (F. Schütze). Introduced by A. Bron, the category of floating redefines this experience as emancipation and an educational process of learning. Studying the ways and methods of emigrants’ learning may help organise intercultural counselling for the already settled foreigners, newcomers from other cultures as well as those planning to emigrate.

Key words: trajectory of learning, Polish emigrants, ‘floating’, intercultural counselling

Being an emigrant

Forced to choose or freely selecting diverse social spaces, modern man lives in confusion, confronting unfamiliar, distant and incomprehensible life worlds culturally and geographically different from those he was born into. Freedom to create one’s own life and the sense of unlimited mobility are inevitably coupled with ‘uncertainty’, destabilisation, risk, living in an ‘expanding’ timeframe (Szlendak 2010, p. 95) and succumbing to ‘the terror of pleasure’ (ibid., p. 95). They also involve equally painful ‘self-inflicted uprooting’ and ‘rash’ planting of oneself on the foreign soil.

Living an emigrant life is a new situation, in which a person can hardly foresee the potential difficulties to be faced. Being an emigrant is generally regarded by emigrants themselves as a stressful circumstance, a ‘ripping out’ from a familiar, understandable and predictable daily reality, which forces an emigrant to act, behave and function in new ways. In a foreign country, one experiences doubts, helplessness, loneliness and alienation. Managing the new conditions demands that one master special routine different from the routine of daily life in one’s homeland. Peter Alheit underlines that in lifelong learning

emphasis is put not on situational acts of learning by individual people, but on learning as a (trans)formation of structures of experience, knowledge and action in the context of people's life history and their reality, that is, in the context of all aspects of life (Alheit 2002, p. 64; cf. Alheit 1995).

Enmeshed in the whirlwind of life, an emigrant seems, thus, to have no influence on its arrangement. S/he is affected by a trajectory whose character, structure and rules 'in force' must be confronted, understood, analysed, but also modified and constructed anew. Such tasks require activeness and maturity, especially in life-long learning, which entails liberating oneself from one's programmed trajectory.

Defining the trajectory, Alicja Rokuszewska-Pawełek highlights its oppressive character, dubbing it a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' or 'fate' that directs and determines situations and experiences. An individual's life course is decreed by fate and destiny, which shape its biographical path as a fixed, inert consequence of events. In A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek's opinion:

trajectories (Verlauskurven) are a response to being entangled in situations and events independent of an individual's will and beyond his/her control (...) This brings about biographical situations in which an individual, overwhelmed by external forces, faces new circumstances (e.g. a sudden serious illness, death of a loved one, war). And as they are unrelated to his/her intentions, the individual freedom of action is being progressively diminished (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, p. 49).

Fritz Schütze (1997) adds that such a negative and fatalistic trajectory is influenced by the social reality perceived as overwhelming, obstructive and offering biographical paths 'saturated' with suffering and difficulty. Such biographical space seems to be mucky, clogged and beset with barriers, blockades and schemata. It is inaccessible; it cannot be mastered or made sense of. Commencing one's journey down one of these life paths is the equivalent of slipping down a steep slope. Additionally, the insecurity inherent in such situation is enhanced by deficiencies in one's skill to interpret the surrounding world. F. Schütze writes:

situations in which we live and navigate are dense with symbolic meanings, and as a rule we perceive the structure of this symbolism, along with a complex layering of latent expectations, as obscure; in result, we often fail to understand what we think we do understand – or, framed by the routines of daily life, our comprehension is merely "superficial" and unreflective ... (Schütze 1997, pp. 11-12).

Later on, Schütze highlights the chaotic nature of reality:

in their symbolic dimension, situations are not only a manifestation of a social and cultural order, but often also an unexpected result of the experienced biographical and social disarray, an anomy (ibid., pp. 11-12).

Emigrants experience the trajectory of suffering in the receiving culture. Confronting reality, emigrants initially experience confusion, helpless inability to change their lot, complications and entanglement in the infinite loop. However, their biographical paths show that the suffering experienced can (and, indeed, should) be re-forged into instructive, shaping and developmental experiences.¹ This transgression, exceeding one's own limitations and giving the trajectory a 'positive' dimension are made possible by a wider reflection on the emigrant world. The emigrant space, however, is not free of complications. It comprises many traps and ambiguous situations. They require an educational effort and an active involvement in learning, which counteract fatalism and endow one with sagacity, autonomy, development, subjectivity and self-determination. Viewed in this way, an emigrant life can be perceived not only as a hardship, but also as a chance which calls for hard work, educational effort and fighting for oneself – for one's new *hybrid identity* (Bauman 2011). An emigrant is challenged to follow his/her own trajectory of integration, instead of completely assimilating to the receiving culture. Danuta Mostwin takes a similar stance:

An individual cast amidst new, alien values perishes if he does not adapt or change. Being uprooted is a stress factor that leads to crisis, and crisis is a call to battle. It can be joined or shunned. There are three paths to choose from. The first – refuse to fight, close one's eyes to what is new, isolate oneself in loneliness; the second – reject the past, cut oneself off from the burden that hampers adaptation to the new environment, accept its values, become similar to those around and lose oneself. And the last path – choose the Third Value. Confronting the challenge, overcoming the crisis, which in releasing energy can commence the process of creative changes. These changes mean coining for oneself a New Name that will be unknown to everybody except the one who has fought for it. (...) However, for the Third Value to emerge and expand, uprooting must take place first. This change proceeds through loss. The loss can be the uprooting from a familiar, friendly environment, or it can be the loss of a loved one by death or separation (Mostwin 1998, p. 68).

Agnieszka Bron discusses one of the *liberating and educational trajectories* of emigrant coping familiar to Poles. My argument is inspired by her conception of overcoming the difficulties encountered in a new culture. In this paper I analyse emigrant's learning to conclude that studying its paths and ways can help organise counselling for the already settled foreigners, newcomers from another culture as well as people planning to emigrate.

According to A. Bron, the character of the biographical situation and emigration trajectory can be defined as 'floating'. Floating consists of four subcategories,

¹ See: unpublished doctoral thesis – Aneta Słowik, "Biographical learning of Polish emigrants in England", written under the supervision of Prof. Józef Kargul, DSW, Faculty of Education, Wrocław, 2011.

which I will refer to as stages of emigration. In her opinion, *moving to a new country is, in fact, the start of learning project* (Bron 2000, p. 7).

A. Bron has developed the notion of ‘floating’², using methods of biographical (re)construction with the shifting time perspectives and taking into account the consequences of an individual’s ‘migration’ between cultures (Bron 2000, pp. 7-8). In her opinion, this category *presents the emigrant sailing on a boat without a helmsman. The boat sails in various directions. The emigrant seated on the boat knows not in which direction s/he is going. Unfortunately, the boat cannot be abandoned as it is located on the open sea* (ibid., pp. 7-8). ‘Floating’ consists of four subcategories:

- 1) Subcategory I – The emigrant has second thoughts about the decision s/he made. Often, s/he feels guilty about leaving Poland. At this stage, moments of doubt and self-accusation occur. S/he often ponders on friends and family left behind – ‘Feeling uneasy with the decision’.
- 2) Subcategory II – Emigration is bound up with the loss of security. The emigrant’s world must be constructed anew. S/he faces entirely new situations in which things, people, language, culture, interpersonal relations and symbols are incomprehensible, unpredictable and surprising – ‘Losing security’.
- 3) Subcategory III – The emigrant tries to face up to the new challenges. His/her life in emigration undergoes numerous crises. S/he may form a negative self-image, which causes sequent effects and attempts to find a place in the new reality. Often s/he fails to see his/her life as meaningful. Lacking the sense of belonging (to the country, to oneself) and having existential doubts, the emigrant ‘floats’ between two worlds. However, it is at this stage that s/he takes hold of the helm of his/her life and starts to mould it into a new shape– ‘Facing a crisis’.
- 4) Subcategory IV – At this stage, the emigrant selects a strategy of managing life and learning. His/her life experiences change, which can be discerned in the way s/he communicates with others and in the initiatives and activities s/he undertakes, such as learning a foreign language, finding accommodation and a job on his/her own, making friends with locals, planning his/her future and setting long- and short-term goals for himself/herself – ‘Trying to cope with the situation’ (Bron 2000, pp. 7-8).

Conceived of in such terms, emigrants’ ‘floating’, hereafter referred to as a trajectory of ‘floating’ (biography of ‘floating’), is comprised not only of ‘suffering’. Undeniably, confrontation with and adaptation to the reality of emigration generate pain, sadness, despair, confusion and insecurity, yet these feelings are indispensable elements of ‘drifting’. They are preconditions for the change to take place and for emigrants to experience it, understand it and remain sensitised to the inaccessible

² Below, referring to the concept of ‘floating’ I will interchangeably use the terms ‘drifting’, ‘floating’ and ‘balancing’.

reality. I believe that without the trajectory of suffering experienced especially harshly during the first two stages of 'floating', an individual cannot achieve maturity necessary to undertake educational activities in the following periods.

That 'floating' can be legitimately treated as *a trajectory of learning* can be inferred from P. Alheit's concepts, who argues that

education and formation do not take place in organised institutional forms alone. Some of them occur in the course of everyday experiences, life history, transitions and crises lived through. Thus, learning in all spheres of life is permanently bound up with the context of a particular biography. On the other hand, this is also the primary condition or medium in which biographical constructions are created and modified as reflective forms of experience (Alheit 2011, p. 13).

This is why in each of the stages (subcategories) of 'floating' I will attempt to outline the process of learning characteristic of the given subcategory.

The emigrant enters the trajectory of learning in 'floating': the 1st stage of 'floating'

At the first stage, learning is intertwined with moments of doubt and self-accusation. The emigrant is distressed about the decision s/he has made. S/he accustoms himself/herself to the sense of longing and comes to terms with his/her choice. Mentally still rooted in his/her mother culture but physically functioning in the receiving culture, s/he learns to live in regret and uncertainty. At this stage, the emigrant is displaced and constantly in motion, shifting from some environments (emigration niches) into others. At the same time, however, his/her functioning in society does not change inertly or passively. In the dynamic change, understanding and reflection 'lag behind' the intensity of experiences lived through. At the first stage, the emigrant is attacked by the novelty of the receiving culture's world. The surrounding space is perceived as unique, 'colourful', unusually attractive and interesting. As Tomasz Szlendak (2010, p. 100) puts it, in *a multi-sensory space daily reality is viewed as if through film frames* (ibid., p. 100).

At this stage, however, regardless of reasons behind emigration, the individual goes through a profound cultural shock in which s/he personally experiences otherness, ambiguity and difficulty interpreting the surrounding reality. S/he enters *the trajectory of suffering*, in which his/her expectations, dreams and hopes clash with the daily reality of emigration that often fails to fulfil them. Reality disappoints the emigrant, puts him/her through ordeals and causes physical and psychological acculturation stress. The emigrant becomes aware of his/her own otherness, defines it, diagnoses differences, seeks 'new' meanings, but also interrogates those 'derived' from biographical knowledge accumulated in the home country. S/he notices the impossibility of adjusting to the receiving culture like a jigsaw-puzzle piece. Steeped

in the reality of emigration, s/he realises that combining all the pieces into the complete picture requires not only continued attempts at adjustment, but also modifications in the configuration of basic elements. This difficulty is aptly grasped in the method of biographical structure analysis presented by A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek, who states:

a biography can partly progress according to a deliberate plan and partly be determined externally. At the same time, a biography comprises both biographically ordered sequences arranged in biographical action plans and patterns as well as sequences involving chaos and disarray (a trajectory with its unpredictability and loss of control) or surprise (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, pp. 49-50).

At this stage of the trajectory of 'floating', we can distinguish fixed mechanisms of an emigrant's educational activity, the 'specific learning' in emigration. An emigrant's biography contains a previously acquired and partially developed *learning disposition*. This disposition is developed on *the path of the unintentional processes of learning, which get underway at life's beginnings, both within and outside of institutional borders* (Alheit 2011, p. 13). In P. Alheit's opinion, in this process *not only do we establish individual experiences as components of the social world, but we also develop an 'appropriation system'* (ibid., p. 13). Additionally, an emigrant possesses an innate, imprinted capacity for biographical narration, which I understand as a socialised manner of viewing and interpreting the social reality. Namely, as Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz writes,

an individual's world is narrative-like. It is a universe of meanings, i.e. of meaningful structures that require constant interpretation and meaningful references that we establish in this world as a result of our activities. Interpretation consists in constant deciphering of events, situations, and both our own and others' fate. It is in the form of stories we interpret and narrations we receive that we make sense of what is happening with ourselves and others (Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2011, p. 38).

At this stage, the emigrant enters the trajectory of suffering and becomes ensnared in events occurring independently of his/her will. Their dynamic is also affected by the emigrant's learning disposition that evolves in the receiving culture. Without clear guidelines and a bit haphazardly, the individual staggers through the daily reality of emigration, yielding unwittingly to acculturation stress and related defence mechanisms. The learning process in this subcategory consists in grappling with divergent interpretations, the self-constructed ones and those offered by the media, other emigrants and the family. The 'floating' emigrant does not fully trust the ready-made interpretive messages received from others. S/he questions the legitimacy of viewpoints and stereotypes, since in such cacophony it is difficult to find the single correct voice worth heeding. The 'emigration noise' deepens the sense of confusion, as in the multivalent emigration space, messages conveyed by

signs, symbols and the people surrounding the emigrant are divergent, while the emigrant's own impressions can be completely different from all of them. As Roland Barthes puts it, *one participates in a ceaseless tailoring of reality, including accepting 'false truths' as one's own* (Barthes 2008, p. 27).

Some emigrants are unable to handle such received reality. They submit to the trajectory of 'floating', going with the flow, living with the sense of mental split, blaming themselves for inability to adjust to the new order (cf. Mostwin 1998, p. 68). They are drawn into the whirl of 'floating', into limiting interpretative frameworks, and ensnared in networks of dependency and passivity. This is aptly expressed by F. Schütze, who writes that:

Affected in their trajectory by a constant tide of detrimental events, they react from situation to situation in increasingly inappropriate ways (first overly violently and then with growing discouragement, lethargically in a way). And their own actions additionally reinforce the mechanisms inherent in the trajectory of suffering, decline and disintegration. Fate now takes on a life of its own; those affected by it cannot now imagine that they may be able to influence the course of events or even take control over them; as a consequence, in their life orientations they become more and more impoverished in spirit, and in their life activities – more and more passive (Schütze 1997, p. 22).

At this stage, learning occurs when the emigrant rejects the 'enforced' interpretive framework and opposes the ('self-diagnosed') oppressive structure of suffering that offers alienation, suspension, isolation and destruction. Breaking out of this spiral is possible if one undertakes educational activities which initiate the process of independent construction of meanings. Furthermore, the emigrant sets out to 're-forge' experiences from the trajectory of 'floating' into the formative, important, constructive and developmental ones. This stage is important as long as that it makes the emigrant aware how distressing his/her sensually and physiologically experienced 'floating' is. Preoccupied with his/her suffering, the individual displays and manifests it. At this stage, the world of emigration loses its 'colourfulness' and slowly becomes an object of deeper reflection.

The emigrant loses security: the 2nd stage of 'floating'

Learning in the trajectory of suffering at the second stage of 'floating' is bound up with the loss of security. The individual proceeds from an emotionally experienced enthrallment with the new reality to an in-depth 'objective' diagnosis of his/her position, in which *nothing is certain, threats abound and many things are unforeseeable*. The emigrant has completed the stage of 'exciting' observation of the new culture. Attention is now transferred from analysis of one's self and doubts and

self-indulgence onto self-reflection and reflection on the surrounding reality. The emigrant sees his/her life as divided into the 'before' and 'after' emigration phases.

The previous stage was typified by 'picking at the wounds' of the past, adherence to the patterns of the mother culture, regrets about the decision to emigrate mixed with exciting fantasies about life on the foreign soil. At the present stage, in turn, the individual 'objectively' notices, registers, collects and stores new situations from the daily reality of emigration. Not only does s/he start to construct new biographical knowledge, but s/he also compares old meanings with those received from other members of emigrant communities. The emigrant is aware of what is going on, can name the conditions experienced, and discerns the realities of emigrant life with increasing clarity. This 'objectified' perception of one's own incompatibility with the new order, as well as awareness of the receiving culture's requirements, not only perpetuates the uprootedness felt in the first stage of 'floating', but also leads to insecurity characteristic of the second stage.

At this stage in the trajectory of suffering, one is forced to act, to offset passivity and to construct a safe, reliable world. The decision to oppose fate comes just in this phase of 'floating'. Not all emigrants, however, are capable of doing so in order to change their position, with some bogging down in it for long. Unable to see a way out or to take 'shortcuts' along the trails blazed by emigrant pioneers, they surrender to despair. Many, nevertheless, accept the challenge and interrupt the trajectory of passive submission to fate. They diagnose, survey, plunge into new situations, experience the world, dispute, notice their own deficiencies, assess them, and – most importantly – establish for themselves new goals, tasks and steps to minimise the sensation of 'drifting'. This is the decision to choose the Third Value (Mostwin 1998).

The individual can assign a certain value to the suffering experienced. S/he can recognise it as a signal warning about homeostasis and almost atavistically urging to find ways out from oppressive situations. It is possible only in case of those emigrants who set out to produce qualitatively new meanings. And those can derive from independently (and coincidentally) generated self-knowledge combined with that received from others in various milieus of the receiving culture and mother culture. The emigrant strolls through the 'loops and strands' of numerous emigrant networks created and expanded by members of several waves and generations of emigrants. S/he experiences failure and exploitation in independent and often lonely exploration. S/he notices the adaptive difficulties and mistakes made in the new place. Yet it is due to these very experiences that s/he comprehends that it is necessary to learn, leaving his/her dead end.

In this particular type of learning, the emigrant underlines the importance of learning in various life worlds. S/he experiences life-wide learning: learning in various life roles, forms, places and stages. The emigrant not only registers, catalogues, and arranges learning actions s/he finds important, but also comes across various learning environments, their rules of 'knowledge acquisition' and learning

pathways charted by other emigrants. At this stage, s/he also becomes aware that not only his/her own *learning disposition* (Field 2000), but also the quality of his/her *biographical stock of knowledge*³ (Alheit 2011, p. 13) influence the choice of educational activities in the trajectory of 'floating'.

Without the suffering experienced at the first stage and the collision with the 'walls' of emigration, it is extremely difficult to independently construct 'durable' bridges. This type of reflective self-diagnosis is crucial for understanding one's own shortcomings, failures, deficiencies and barriers to growth that emerge and take on distinct shapes only in direct contact with the new culture. Simultaneously, such situation provides fertile ground for maturing into the decision to reconstruct the two components of learning (learning disposition and biographical stores of knowledge) in order to make them useful in a different socio-cultural context.

P. Alheit points to two programs for learning that an individual undertakes in the course of his/her life. The first is *regulated by goals of formal education and qualifications acquired in its course (curricular learning)* (Alheit 2011, p. 9), and the second should be understood as *learning in the context of life history proceeding in accordance with other biographical principles that cannot be fully dissociated from the previously mentioned framework. There is tension and conflict between those two dimensions, but they are mutually dependent on each other* (ibid., p. 9). Thus, also at this stage, the emigrant becomes aware that to successfully complete both programs, s/he must face up to his/her 'floating' condition. Having realised this, s/he can *biographically compensate for the experienced cognitive deficits and satisfy unfulfilled educational desires* (ibid., p. 12). Furthermore, P. Alheit adds that *such biographically rooted motivations can be an impulse to order one's life through decisions, changes and processes of learning* (ibid., p. 12).

Losing security, the emigrant repeatedly analyses motivational goals, modifies plans and designs a learning strategy in three spheres (formal, informal and non-formal) of education. When deprived of security, the emigrant paradoxically obtains an insight into the 'realities' of everyday emigrant life. Gaining such insight into one's own situation requires patience and self-composure. It is a process which involves anabolic and catabolic actions. As educating oneself becomes a task, an

³ P. Alheit notes that 'in everyday activities (...) we consciously focus on a given „problem“, merely on a small fragment of our stores of knowledge and experience. At the same time, we resort to the vast areas of our knowledge (and ignorance) in a routine manner, without enquiring about the activity itself. In a sense we "move" through our biographically acquired landscapes of knowledge without being aware of each step, each curve on the trail and each sign on the road. In many cases, we pay no heed to such elements of our biographical background knowledge until we get lost, find ourselves at a crossroads, or feel the ground shift beneath our feet. We are at least theoretically capable of recovering large portions of pre-reflective knowledge for the here and now, openly process it, or even change the structures of the whole landscape we find ourselves in. Such reflective processes can be interpreted as moments of self-education' (Alheit 1993). They are the basis for organising each individual's learning processes and motivate the claim of *biographical nature of all educational processes* (Alheit 2002, p. 70).

imperative, an obligation, the individual makes first chaotic and anxious steps of learning to diagnose experiences s/he lives through. Increasingly aware that *everyday life has become 'unordinary'* (Siarkiewicz 2010, p. 173), the emigrant does his/her best to create, construct and conjure the domesticated one up for himself/herself. Beginning anew, initiating a slightly chaotic activity, abandoning passivity and despair make up the first stage of learning from one's own experiences.

Peter Jarvis (2006) names this type of learning *existential learning*. In his opinion, a person's 'being' and decision-making should constitute the core of human learning. He remarks that learning is a process. And in this process, what the learner has learned is less important than what commences in effect of his/her activity, thinking and experiencing 'being in the world'. This notion of learning is connected with new forms of activity, which can ensue from reflection, critical events and unexpected changes in one's life course. Qualitatively, they are new experiences, and in the unavoidable confrontation with them an individual is bound to choose innovative strategies to reorganise his/her life. For P. Jarvis, learning begins with a transformation of experience. Re-defining learning, he states that

human learning is a combination of processes that cause the whole person – his/her body (physical, biological, genetic), as well as his/her mind (knowledge, abilities, attitudes, values, emotions, senses, beliefs) – experience the social situation. A person 'registers' elements of the world s/he finds himself/herself in. These elements are subjected to cognitive, emotional and practical transformation (or are a combination of those) and make up the integral whole of his/her biography (Jarvis 2006, p. 13).

Defined in such terms, emigrant learning encompasses also construction of a prism through which to interpret the surrounding reality and generate individual biographical knowledge. This is one of the stages in which the emigrant forfeits his/her safety mechanisms, as the 'new reality' (with or without his/her consent) 'strips' him/her of the familiar coping strategies acquired and developed over many years in his/her homeland.

It is this painstaking search for solutions to the difficulties of emigration that 'frees' the individual from the trajectory of 'floating'. Yet, on this path the emigrant cannot rely solely on experiences accumulated in his/her motherland. Applied unreflectively in the familiar everyday reality, they produced an illusion of self-growth and led to what actually was "drifting" in the uninspiring pattern of his/her life. Novelty cannot be unreflectively assimilated, either.

While the rule *never fall in love with your own airplane* applies also to emigration (Eco 2006, p. 118), Daniel Goleman warns against an instantaneous and unreflective switch to other, newer models, discussing the *battle for people's hearts* (Goleman 2006, p. 152), which is underway also in the space of emigration. In the unfamiliar emigration milieu, the individual regresses into a child who must learn a language in order to comprehend the new reality and consciously explore

the surrounding environment. Repeatedly finding himself/herself helpless, the emigrant again depends on others. S/he is forced to ask questions and again must struggle for recognition of his/her own subjectivity.

It is also this stage that the individual realises that s/he has to defend himself/herself against being labelled, classified and forcefully inscribed into the story of an emigrant from a given cultural region often misrepresented in the local media. In undertaking educational activities, s/he defies reproduction of typifying and stereotyped national characteristics. The emigrant fights for his/her own individuality to avoid being swallowed up, washed away, and melted down along the collective trajectory typical of a given emigrant group.

At this stage, some emigrants notice the oppressiveness of the receiving culture, which digests, grinds up, fails to sort the wheat from the chaff, forces into the 'recycling spiral', and makes one dependent on *the illusory mobility* (Mach 1989) and on the fantasy of emigrant success fabricated for those who remained in the home country.

In this maturation process, the learning emigrants begin to consciously participate in creating their individual identities. 'Painting and sculpting' their own trajectory in emigration, they go beyond the canon of familiar formulas, often paying for it with loneliness and alienation. These emigrants have the courage to abandon life on *a see-saw* (Jaźwińska, Okólski 2001), which could permanently fix them in the trajectory of suffering. They do so for the sake of reflexive, biographical learning. Their being in the emigrant reality is not a chaotic rocking back and forth. They feel that 'floating' can be halted, examined, inspected with a 'filmmaker's' eye. The film reel on which important emigration experiences have been recorded can be rewound and projected again. And the *see-saw of floating* can be set in motion anew but at a different pace, and perhaps be abandoned forever.

If the trajectory of 'floating' is conceived of in such terms, the individual becomes an active participant who resents being 'steered' by others and, taking hold of the helm, navigates independently. This enables the emigrant to evade the ritualised appearances, loops, the individual trajectory of suffering, and the 'helpful' migration paths indicated by others as patterns to follow. The latter option is particularly conducive to dependence on those who pass on such knowledge, give guidelines and provide advice. They indicate 'direct' paths that one needs so much to regain security, but behind the assistance they offer there can be hidden agendas grounded in manipulative perfidy. Such material and psychological exploitation can imbue the emigrant with learned helplessness and ensnare him/her in a mesh of dependencies, including criminal abuse (human trafficking, slave labour in work camps, blackmailing, thievery, extortion, fraud, etc.)

Therefore, the emigrant networks (spreading across emigrant groups and generations) can become an ambiguous educational space. On the one hand, they make individual learning possible, while on the other they can harm, hinder and block personal growth. They can also cause one to give up learning or to submerge

oneself in the world of emigration. Brutal, harsh and unpredictable, they discourage independence and push individuals into emigration ghettos and the bogs of the trajectory of suffering. 'Floating' emigrants do not make an educational effort. They live their mimetic and parasitic lives in webs weaved by other people, by emigrant circles and clans that charge exorbitant fees for 'renting' a room (not really) of one's own in the emigrant space.

At the same time educationally beneficial and fraught with risks, the emigrant's loss of security constitutes an integral part of the biological learning process in the situation of 'floating'. Learning takes place as a result of experience of contradiction not only between various learning worlds (*life worlds*), but also between learning contexts (*life contexts*) in various spheres of learning (formal, informal and non-formal). The dynamics of such learning is presented by P. Alheit, who maintains that one should not concentrate on the individual dimension of learning, but

on the differences, the interpenetrating levels which are a source of the discrepancies that a given individual experiences biographically and to which s/he must find a pragmatic solution (Alheit 2011, p. 16). This includes a programmed character of lifelong learning, which creates new patterns of behaviour and interpretations, subjectively experienced both as an onerous pressure and as a biographical opportunity (ibid., p. 16).

Evidently, at this stage the emigrant experiences tensions on two different levels of biographical learning. The difficulty of the situation is aggravated because the various learning contexts and environments form the mother and the receiving cultures blur, merge and shimmer. The emigrant faces a dual task, as s/he begins to negotiate modes, methods and forms of biographical learning, combining those acquired in the native culture with those 'alien' but universal in the receiving culture. To actualise the new world and to make it real – or to cite Erving Goffman (2010, p. 18) to have *realised sources* – the emigrant must carry out educational activity in *sustained processing and re-incorporation of his/her own educational history, in a truly lifelong process of biographical construction and reconstruction* (Alheit 2011, p. 16).

The emigrant searches for balance: the 3rd stage of 'drifting'

The emigrant achieves full capacity for reflective education and integrates various educational environments from two different cultures in the next (3rd) stage of floating. *The trajectory of floating* becomes in all respects *a trajectory of learning*, as the emigrant chooses coping methods and strategies as well as educational pathways and roads. Undertaking to translate the emigrant world, explain it and give it meaning, the emigrant acts in accordance with self-appointed goals. S/he makes connections and weaves new threads in his/her personal emigration network, combining it with others' networks. In this way, networked structures of a higher order

have come into being in multi-generational emigrant communities. The emigrant finds places and environments in which s/he can and wants to put down roots. To define this form of activity I would resort to Ryszard Łukaszewicz's coinage, *provocative education*,⁴ in which one not only goes through experiences but also entices, provokes, stimulates them and elicits their educational sense.

The trajectory of learning developing at this level also demands that emigrants wrestle with themselves; it is a path of struggles, of readiness to enter the *boxing ring or the marathon track*. Emigrants engage in these contests not only for themselves, but also to prove to others that *I can manage, I deserve recognition, I am not lost*. They set for themselves the task of breaking free from the 'asinine' reality of the mother culture, and this gives them the strength to resist 'being inscribed' in the Gombrowicz-esque, constraining and imposed forms in the receiving culture (Gombrowicz 2001).

At this stage, the emigrant begins to act in order to regain security and achieve stability, balance and homeostasis. Yet, as R. Łukaszewicz insists, this (emigrant) education needs not only 'wings' but also 'feet' which physically feel the 'blisters of change', e.g. walking kilometres in search of work or accommodation or feeling pain in the back and in swollen legs during the study of the receiving culture's signs. In this way, learning emigrants become aware that their 'wings' need to be modified, cut to size in order to match the flying skills they have and the geographical conditions of the emigrant destination. 'Flapping the wings' and looking for suitable stopover locations in one's own emigration network also require biographical work and *working through* (Goffman 2010, p. 64) initiatives, reflections and activities one undertakes. However, this is only possible

if we acknowledge biographical learning as a series of autonomous, autopoietic accomplishments of active individuals, accomplishments in which these individuals on the basis of their own reflections 'organize' their experience in order to achieve cohesion and identity, in order to make their life meaningful and to create a communicable, socially useful perspective directing their activities (Alheit 1995), (cf. Alheit 2011, p. 16).

I believe that emigrant learning in 'floating' is also situational, as the individuals engage in educational activities in various communities (emigrant milieus, chains and networks). According to Mieczysław Malewski, practice (*apprenticeship*)

exposes the central role of the individual's activity in learning and shows that knowledge and learning are context-dependent, situational and enculturational. Learning involves the entire person, and as an integral element of daily, routine practice, it 'happens' in relationships with other members and is inseparably

⁴ The quotations come from Prof. R. Łukaszewicz's paper, delivered on 7 December, 2011, at the conference 'Dilemmas – awakenings – hopes', held at the University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław.

bound with the socio-cultural context in which these relationships are always located (Malewski 2010, p. 97).

As a result of practice emigrants engage in at the 3rd stage of 'floating', their identities are deconstructed and composed anew in keeping with the rules of specific emigrant communities (e.g. of colleagues, friends, acquaintances, generations). Identity transformations can be discreet and unwitting. The emigrant simply imitates members of a given group and begins to resemble them, seeking acceptance, support and membership. Emigrant identity is the 'product' of the (formal and informal) rules given community/group observes. At the same time, entering a given community, a newcomer 'studies' the rules; s/he can unreflectively accept and acknowledge them as his/her own, but also question them and their legitimacy.

Following Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), we can assume that learning in the *communities of practice*, the emigrant revises his/her previous knowledge, analysing the meanings derived from the practices s/he engages in the new culture. The qualitatively different interpretations of oneself and the surrounding world, as well as the floating emigrant's learning activities, prompt identity changes. In this way, the emigrant matures and realises that to initiate them is his/her responsibility and to shape his/her life course is a viable option.

In turn, interpretation of the structure of the community emigrants try to belong to determines whether this environment is viewed as stimulating, floating, blocking, developing, encouraging or conducive to education. In addition, the commonly accepted, adopted and acknowledged codes of conduct upheld in various emigrant communities of practice provide socio-cultural ramifications for individual educational activity. It depends on their standards whether or not the emigrant achieves balance and stability in the context of 'floating'.

The emigrant achieves full autonomy in 'floating' through learning

At the last, 4th stage of the trajectory of 'floating', the individual consciously and deliberately selects educational activities to engage in. The emigrant situation has been diagnosed and assessed. The decision to choose a particular learning strategy has been made. At this stage, the reality of emigration is intensely explored. The emigrant functions in a chosen, independently constructed network, selectively and reflectively attaching and adding new threads to the personal network. The configuration of this network can be changed, re-arranged, suspended or expanded in different directions.

At this stage, the individual selects one of the trajectories of learning, relying on the prior experience of 'floating' and, submitting to assimilation, either remains in the emigrant ghetto or leaves it. S/he can integrate with the receiving culture or choose to relinquish both the old and the new cultures. The emigrant has already stopped 'strolling' around in the new reality and treats it as his/her own. With

increasing boldness and courage, the individual connects his/her network with those of others. S/he modifies the initial structure, especially its horizontal dimension, in which links are established with people from other cultural realms external to the emigrant community. At this stage, emigrants know who they want to be; they have biographical projects and plans which, as A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek does, can be called *biographical action schemes*.⁵ She writes that:

they correspond to the principle of intentional, perspective planning of one's own life course, as well as to successful or failed attempts at carrying out the individual's plan. We deal here with a situation in which the individual acts in order to achieve the objectives s/he formulated herself/himself, objectives specifically and directly pertaining to his/her person (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, pp. 47-48).

Emigrants continue to acquire biographical knowledge from their own experiences, yet in this process they reject or dump what they see as a useless burden. Some emigrants commit a transgression against their own biography, called *flooding-out* (Goffman 2010, p. 44) by breaking the network woven by the emigrant community. The network is for them a mere 'springboard', a kind of emigrant bonding known as *bridging* (Putnam 2007, pp. 143-144), which they treat instrumentally until they fully immerse in the higher-rated and more promising receiving culture.

The emigrant's personal network of such multi-dimensional structure becomes a chosen home erected on the foundations of biographical experiences acquired while learning in 'floating'. At this stage, the emigrant continues to construct meanings of and for his/her life, which started at the previous stage. The meaning of life is forged in coping with identity crises, difficult and painstaking efforts of integration and training in intercultural competences. Beyond that, the emigrant uses various coping strategies to manage the recurrent *acculturation stress* (Kownacka 2006, p. 42), *emigrant depression* (Piotrowska-Breger 2004; Korczyńska 2003) and the pitfalls of *hybrid identity* (Bauman 2011).

At this stage, some emigrants still endeavour to break free from the vicious circle of the trajectory of 'floating'. Generally, however, at this stage one disentangles oneself fully from the snares of incomplete migration which causes 'floating'. Having chosen learning milieus in which to put down roots and made formal educational

⁵ A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek distinguishes many variants of biographical projects. In her opinion, 'they can concern plans for achievements (e.g., getting an education, setting up one's own company, learning a foreign language, etc.); initiatives aimed at changing one's life situation (e.g. changing job, becoming independent, emigrating, etc.), „trying something new”, i.e. causing change without a clearly specified goal or purpose (e.g., changing social circles, moving to another town, taking up a new sport, or any other episode that can later be important biographically); undertaking actions which exceed the routine ways of problem solving and causes important consequences (e.g., a journalist engaging in activities on behalf of a person or a group that was previously the subject of his/her professional interest). There are also action plans in advance assumed to have a limited duration and to cause temporary suspension, but not long-term biographical processes (e.g. implemented by chronic patients as part of work on their trajectory)' (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, pp. 47-48).

decisions, the emigrant achieves equilibrium and regains security. Completing a course or graduating from a school, namely, is for many a key to professional and social advancement.

The emigrant's educational activities in this phase of 'floating' should, I believe, be viewed as modes of existential learning. In its course, the individual processes and modifies information received from the emigrant space. These changes pertain to lifestyles, experiences, strategies and learning pathways. Only the modified version of all received and self-reflectively analysed content and modes of learning is fed back into social interactions. Individual biographical experience becomes a source of reconstructed knowledge, including knowledge about learning. Thus, learning in this phase of emigration is a resultant of educational activity an individual engages in while 'becoming someone' in his/her individual socio-cultural context. Furthermore, in this subcategory of floating the emigrant matures and begins to consciously include elements from the social world into his/her learning trajectory. In this way, s/he accumulates biographical experience more and more consciously. S/he produces various representations of the (emigrant) world, which manifest the multi-contextual nature of biographical knowledge. During this learning process attitudes, behaviours and identity, i.e. constituents of a new biography, undergo change. Citing J. Lave & E. Wenger (1991), P. Alheit aptly depicts such learning process:

the worlds of learning are rooted in historically conditioned, interactive and biographically 'constructed' life worlds which are integrated and formed in educational processes, but which cannot be artificially generated or managed (Alheit 2002, p. 71).

Concurring with this view, Ewa Kurantowicz adds that:

on the one hand, 'worlds of learning' support and reinforce order, structure, and social and cultural continuity; on the other hand, they allow one to anticipate and manage difficulties and problems as well as enable one to come to terms with unpredictability (Kurantowicz 2007, p. 7).

It is at this stage of emigrant life that biographical metamorphoses take place, which, according to A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek:

correspond to the radical positive transformation in the life course caused by unpredictable, new and enriching life possibilities one comes across. The appearance of a previously non-existent – or discovering the previously unnoticed – potential for action (e.g. when one inherits a substantial sum or realises that they are talented) lead to identity transformation. Such change can also be an unexpected effect of completing a biographical project (e.g. during therapy); it can be related to attempts at replacing one processual structure with another (e.g.

coping with addiction); it can be a stage of biographical work along a trajectory (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2002, p. 49).

The qualitatively new knowledge comes from the individual's active participation in various learning environments. This daily practice is, however, peculiarly elusive: it is difficult to pinpoint and depict. How to describe and assess the dynamics of biographical learning in the emigrant trajectory is a hotly debated subject. P. Alheit highlights this controversy:

in Germany neither the system of education, nor the system of employment, is actually prepared to acknowledge and integrate skills and competencies recognized in an individual biographical process, especially if they were acquired in the course of non-formal biographical learning or – as is the case with immigrants' biographies – in other cultural and national contexts (cf. Alheit 2011, p. 11).

Both researchers of lifelong learning, as well as politicians and educators, are convinced that it is necessary to study the process of learning undertaken by those excluded from public debate on the role and structure of lifelong education. The formal education system marginalises those who are unable to fully participate in it because they are unprepared or financially/mentally deprived. The optimal or perhaps even the only chance for them to change their lives lies in biographical learning; and they eagerly use the chance.

Emigrants transgress and break free from the trajectory of suffering outlined by F. Schütze (1997). They walk this path of life in the first two stages of 'floating'. However, in the following two, they revolt against such life course, freeing themselves through engaging in the process of learning (at the same time existential, biographical, situational and lifelong one). This emancipatory change is produced by their educational activities and work of 're-forging' the trajectory of suffering into a trajectory of learning. This allows them to progress from being a 'plaything' at the mercy of fate to being a self-determined individual capable of changing his/her fortunes.

Although I have described the situation of 'floating' as a specific emigrant *learning trajectory*, it would be a mistake to treat it as a pattern, a paradigm applicable to every emigrant's biography. It should by no means be easily overgeneralised as always valid and evident. I believe that to expand our knowledge of emigrant experience of learning in 'floating', we must continue to analyse specific individual biographical paths. In each biography, one can see the educational effort and the individualised character of the learning trajectory with its vivid, multidimensional and transgressive structure.

I think that the process of learning while 'floating' should be treated as crossing the *open thresholds of experience* and not as a *static right of passage* (Nowak-Dziemi-anowicz 2011, p. 43). The modern world is marked by fissures and ruptures; reality (including the emigrant reality) is subjected to *the tyranny of a moment* (Eriksen

2001) and has the structure of *wired life* (Jonscher 2001). M. Nowak-Dziemianowicz describes this reality in the following way:

the space of life remains distinct from what we refer to as a place (...), people lose the sense of safe familiarity so common and obvious in traditional orders', and then 'the space of life is dissociated from the influence and significance of the individual's bonds with others. The trajectory of the individual's life depends more frequently on his/her individual plans, choice' (Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2011, p. 43).

Emigrants live through the drama of recognition, especially when acknowledgement of their learning trajectory is at stake.

The potential incompatibility between the life we strive for and the life others are prepared to grant us gives rise to the drama which commences when emigrants aspire to self-definition, especially an original one. We insistently demand the space of recognition; others, however, can refuse to give it to us (ibid., p. 44).

It is in learning that emigrants find their chance of winning the battle for recognition and subjectivity. The difficulty inherent in such education is all the more aggravated because the structure of emigrant reality is highly complex. The effects of the culture of event (Szlendak 2010, p. 92) and the *global risk society* (Beck 2011) additionally complicate the learning enterprise. The state of 'floating' is experienced in every space of modern life, in the local, neighbourhood, national and global space. I believe that this most deeply affects emigrants. However, the dynamically changing world does not slow down for anybody and forces people to brace themselves up for 'floating', for being cast into the trajectory of suffering, for a life of stress. Everybody is compelled to be alert at moments of enforced reflection on how to use knowledge acquired in a particular experience. Collecting points that constitute a biographical potential, Bauman's '*big banks*⁶', means accumulating experiences and sensations. If individuals productively utilise them in learning, one should have no misgivings about it. If the situation of 'floating' truly is an important 'big bank' in an individual's life, the belief in the modern man's aptitude for learning at any time and place is indeed well grounded.

Such conclusion may also be the starting point for an intercultural counsellor's work. The counselling situation in which one offers assistance to an emigrant is also

⁶ The quoted passage comes from Zygmunt Bauman's lecture *Education in the face of challenges of liquid modernity* delivered (20.09.2011) at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław. Bauman defined the life of modern man as stretched in a *pointillé* time, where each point (episode, experience and situation) can become – as he put it – a 'big bank'. Each of the big banks is saturated, rich and pregnant with different knowledge. These points are randomly distributed across the life course. Individuals analyzed 'up close' seem to live 'their own lives'. Yet, taken together and 'reflectively' interpreted, they turn out to form a cohesive whole. The problem – as Baumann further stated – consists in the fact that an individual lives in unceasing 'tension', as one never knows when one will use the 'value' of the collected points.

a situations of learning. This is an episode that should be a sort of 'big bank' for the counsellor. If the counsellor knows how the advisee experiences 'floating', they can together work on the client's experiences, sensations and impressions. And this can help counselling to reinforce the trajectory of emigrant biographical learning.

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