

The Story of Neema and Kaisa: a non-discriminating and culturally sensitive approach to teaching immigrated women Finnish as a second language

There are many challenges in the teaching Finnish for immigrated women, which are not fully taken into account by the existing teaching materials. These challenges have to do with non-discrimination, cultural sensitivity as well as empowerment.

I have found solutions to these issues from my own field of expertise, anthropology and explicitly from the anthropological theory of cultural change.

I have been teaching immigrated women since 2016 at MONIKA - Multicultural Women's Association, Finland. Since the fall 2019, I have written my own material for a discussion group for advanced students and used my own method in teaching. This fall of 2020, I have also started teaching a beginners' course, also using my own material. These materials, and the method I am using, are based on my expertise as an anthropologist and my knowledge of Tanzanian culture. Neema and Kaisa are fictive characters. Neema is a young immigrated woman from Tanzania and together with Kaisa, a Finn, she learns about Finnish cultural environment.

The main idea behind my work is thus based on the theory of cultural change of an American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. His idea is that cultures change according to their own internal logic and I argue that integration can be seen as cultural change at the level of the individual. Keeping this in mind, for the teaching of Finnish as a second language not to result at the worst in alienation, every student should be able to tell their own (cultural) story and to openly relate to the Finnish culture accordingly.

I claim that if the theory of cultural change is at the centre of the teaching material and method, a culturally sensitive and non-discriminatory touch is achievable.

The sound of the term anthropological theory should not scare anyone in a teaching position. The teacher does not necessarily have to be an expert in different cultures, but to be open to cultural differences and listen to the students. In the end, it is the students themselves who create a multicultural and open atmosphere in a class, if they are allowed to do so.