

## Provisional house

Some food for reflection and conversation

## Provisional house

I am leading a language café for migrant women. They are following regular courses to learn Dutch and do the required exams. This café is an extra, practicing the language in conversation. A small group of women from all over the world (Afghanistan, Tunisia, Syria, Kenya) is present. We read all sorts of Dutch texts, stories, newspapers and literature. This time we read a poem by Ceciel Boudewijn, titled "Provisional house"

*She builds*

*Builds herself a house*

*Of paper*

*She befits letters to stichworts*

*Roof and doors*

*To inhabit it*

*With her words*

*To live there with language*

"That is me", says Asefa. She recognizes the living experience of every migrant woman. She experienced the huge transition when moving from Afghanistan to the Netherlands. As a young girl, she wasn't allowed to go to school, learning to read and write Farsi came later in her life. She did not only have to find herself a physical place to live, she is also rebuilding her identity, in a new house of language and images.

## Tiny houses

I am at a conference on *Social economy and higher education* at the University of York, UK, presenting a poster on creative learning and development of empathic imagination. There I meet dr. Miwon Choe, professor of Art Education at the Kentucky University in the US. She is there with some Cuban partners to tell about the Tiny House project that she did in their country. In this project, children draw images of their house, their memories of places where they belong.



Her image of the *tiny house* and mine of the *provisional house* as a metaphor for the process of identity connects us, both as professionals and as researchers. We talk about the importance of art and imagination in intercultural communication, about the importance of creating a transitional space to learn.

We start and continue a learning conversation. It leads to a joint workshop with an international group of girls at the conference of UN Women in NY, March 2018, followed by a presentation by Miwon at the INSEA 2017 on Education through Art in South-Korea and a workshop by me at Progressive Connexions in Vienna. After this, we will work on a joint publication.

### **Learning in conversation**

Every migrant makes a meaningful transition when moving to another place to live. Actually, every human being will recognize this experience at some point in their life. You not only have to find yourself a physical place to live, you are also rebuilding your identity, in a new house of language and images. Mastering the language of your new place to live is also rebuilding your own inner house, reframing your identity to a new setting, built on fundamentals of what's already developed through your life till that point in time.

In the process of learning a language, you have to explore and (re)envision your inner spaces, the different rooms of your house. You develop knowledge of yourself and in the educational process you get more rooted into society by building relations with teachers, other students, coaches, peers. This process works twofold: you explore both the inner house of the other and of your own.

Doing so you develop a deeper understanding of different cultural realities. By enlarging their own inner world, both 'student' and 'teacher' enhance their skills for emphatic imagination. They are more competent to imagine themselves being in the shoes of the other, a vital competence for intercultural communication.

This exploration needs to be facilitated in a proper way, providing a space for experiential learning. *Conversational learning* a book by Baker, Jensen and Kolb gives ample practical and theoretical framework.

### **Governing your house**

By enlarging your own inner world, both 'student' and 'teacher' enhance their social and entrepreneurial skills. In today's world, working relations become more and more fluid; places to work and content of jobs is changing swiftly. We are becoming more and more nomadic workers who need to develop new professional skills, especially entrepreneurial ones. You need to be a literate agent in the world of work, someone who is able to find swift, flexible and adequate words to describe who you are and what you have to offer.

The word economy essentially means: governing your own house, taking care of yourself and others. To be a socially and economically empowered person you have to be able to find your own words, to keep on building and rebuilding your own provisional house.

***Ine van Emmerik, November 2017***