

Key Questions Regarding the Quality of Educational Media in Migration Societies



Migration Lab
GERMANY



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Educational Media in Migration Societies

Human migration is generally defined as the voluntary or involuntary movement of people between different countries and regions. Within this broad context, there are many different experiences of migration, including forced migration (e.g. in the era of European colonialism and during World War II), labor migration (e.g. when one country recruits workers from another country, usually because of a labor shortage in the former), and flight-related migration resulting from war, poverty, climate change, persecution, and the violation of human rights.

These and other forms of historical and present-day migration shape our society in many ways. Indeed, the shifts and transformations associated with migration are relevant for everyone living in Germany today, regardless of whether or not they have a personal or family-related history of migration. Our everyday lives are characterized by cultural and religious diversity, different origins and migration histories, networks of cross-border relationships, multiple affiliations and multilingualism. The concept of a “migration society” (Mecheril 2004) draws attention to precisely this state of affairs; it acknowledges the fact that migration has a considerable impact on our society as a whole – both historically and in our present day.

It is hardly surprising, then, that social and political debates about migration are equally diverse and intense. Among the questions raised are: What criteria determine whether a person belongs or not? Does belonging depend on a person’s place of birth or where their parents were born? Does it depend on a person’s residency status and/or citizenship in Germany? When it comes to spaces of education and culture, who is represented where and who is deemed

welcome in a tangible way? Which religions and languages are considered desirable in society? Which are given attention in schools? What causes the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between people with a (family) history of migration and those without such as history, for example, on housing and labor markets and in the education system? The essence of the debate ultimately centers on the question: Who belongs and who doesn't?

These questions apply in the realm of educational media as well. When we speak of educational media, we are referring to all forms of analog and digital media used to create and implement processes of learning and education. These include traditional school books and literature but also performance, theater, digital games, podcasts, videos, etc. The key factor when deciding if something constitutes educational media is whether it can be used to prepare knowledge for pedagogical and communication practices. Educational media are able to confront us with a diversity of lifestyles and world views, thus opening up different approaches to the subject of migration. Educational media also arrange stories and perspectives, thus offering multiple interpretations. For these and other reasons, it is essential that educational media be scrutinized in ways that reveal the messages contained in them.

In other words, education practitioners in migration societies must undertake a critical examination of the educational media they choose to use. This involves exploring a multitude of narratives and viewpoints in a critical and constructive manner – starting first and foremost with the practitioners' own stories and perspectives. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to examine social norms, processes, and narratives by means of the following questions, among others: How can we avoid reproducing existing prejudices? Which terms

*migration
has an
impact on our
society as a
whole*

are racist, antisemitic or in another way offensive to the people being addressed? How can we avoid looking at marginalized people from a white German perspective? How can we avoid making marginalized people the object of observation? In short, how can we achieve migration-related diversity in the educational processes of migration societies? How can this diversity be communicated and reflected upon?

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It is only through this kind of approach – one that is sensitive to the power structures involved – that educational work oriented towards migration societies can sustainably open spaces that enable solidarity and allow for the equal participation of all people. In this sense, all educational and cultural practices carried out in migration societies would be well advised to engage in critical reflection when selecting and making use of educational materials.

The key questions provided below offer practitioners working in the cultural and educational sphere a tool for critically scrutinizing the content and messages of the materials they are using in their practice. The goal of these questions is to support practitioners in the process of selecting suitable educational media and in working creatively with their selection.

In formulating these key questions, the Migration Lab is eager to contribute to the current – and urgently needed – discussion of the criteria used to assess quality, while at the same time to inspire and foster the creation of new educational media in migration societies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND
BEST-PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF
EDUCATIONAL MEDIA, VISIT
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Key questions and tips for scrutinizing educational media

Visibility: Who is seen? Who is speaking?

Educational media in migration societies play an important role in determining who sees themselves as a part of that society and who doesn't, whether in the form of a narrative voice, a video-game protagonist, a performer on stage, or the like. Among the questions to be asked in this context are the following: Do I see myself reflected in the material? Are my experiences reflected in the material? Is my story worth telling?

The point here is not merely to determine whether minorities are visible; the task is also to determine and reveal the perspective being taken. All too often, immigrants themselves are not the ones seen and heard speaking about their own experiences: instead, these media often feature individuals talking about immigrants and



their descendants. In such media, immigrants are often reduced to the culture, religion, and origin ascribed to them. At the same time, migrants and migrantised individuals – that is, people who have an actual (family) history of migration and those people to whom a migration background has been attributed, whether it exists or not – are often blamed for social problems such as housing shortages and social welfare cuts.

When this kind of perspective is assumed, it sets the white German biography – one that has no history of migration – as the standard. In consequence, migrants and/or migrantised people are portrayed as deviating from the standard and forced into the role of ‘other’. Within the logic of this standard, migrants are seen as not truly belonging in Germany. As a result, instead of strengthening cohesion, this only serves to reinforce prejudice and discrimination. In turn, this affects, in particular, people to whom a migration history has been ascribed based on their appearance – regardless of whether they have a migration background or not.

For this reason, it is essential to scrutinize educational media by asking the following questions: Who is being seen? Who are readers reading about? Who is speaking? Are they speaking for themselves or also for others? Are they describing experiences from their own perspective? Who is being listened to? Whose voice carries weight? Who is at the centre of the action? Who is deemed to possess knowledge? Whose knowledge counts?

People who hold responsibility for creating educational media – as well as the practitioners working with these media – have the power to depict migration societies in which many voices are heard and where marginalized people are rendered visible. Only in this way will people with a history of immigration be seen as equal and unquestioned members of society on the same level as people with no history of immigration. What’s more: in this way, German society is experienced as a migration society.

How are people with a personal or family history of migration portrayed?

The lived realities of people's lives are complex and multifaceted. This applies to people with a personal or family-related history of migration just as much as to non-migrants. Practitioners tasked with depicting migration histories should be able to do justice to these complexities. This involves refraining from engaging in simplifying, homogenizing, stereotyping, and dehumanizing portrayals. When attributes are ascribed to entire groups, it simply serves to (re-)produce existing stereotypes. It should be a matter of course that the internal diversity of all groups as well as the different life stories and realities of their members are depicted.

This includes the fact that that all people belong to different groups simultaneously and thus have corresponding experiences. In this context, it is possible for different forms of discrimination to intertwine, for example, for someone to experience simultaneous discrimination as a Black person and as a woman. This is the phenomenon captured in the term intersectionality. The act of recognizing this phenomenon alongside the acknowledgment of the existence of multiple identities in one person can be a valuable resource for anti-racist educational and cultural work.

In this situation, the following possible questions emerge: Does the educational material convey the interaction of characteristics – including gender, age, and migration status – that leads to forms of discrimination? Does it shed light on the connection between social in-

equality and migration? Is social diversity conveyed using both cultural-specific and cross-cultural codes? If there is an emphasis on a particular set of (external) characteristics, does this emphasis serve to convey the internal diversity and complexity of individuals or does it merely put these differences on display?

It is also essential to carefully scrutinize any images or concepts used in one's own pedagogical and artistic work. In this context, the following questions can be helpful: What associations are evoked by these images and concepts both in the practitioner and potentially also in the target group? What role do immigrants and their descendents play in the material under scrutiny? Is it possible that certain (stereotypical) characteristics are being emphasized or attributed to a specific group? Are any racist terms and/or foreign appellations being used? Is care being taken to ensure the use of self-designating terms and concepts drawn from the communities themselves?

In an ideal scenario, this process of scrutiny – including, if necessary, any subsequent adjustments – would lead to a situation in which the people being depicted see themselves as authentically reflected, as having agency, and as having a say in their own depiction.



Are global stories of migration presented as interconnected and variable?

Migration-society phenomena are also diverse and complex. It is essential to illustrate this and, in the process, also to determine whether there are any historical connections and continuities, for example, in relation to European colonialism. Indeed, migration stories are often closely intertwined with social developments in the countries of origin and in the target states.

At the same time, societies are in a constant state of flux. For this reason, it is essential to make space for social developments, possible transformation processes, and adaptability, for example, with regard to cultural practices and lifestyles.

The following is a list of possible questions that can be posed in this context: Is migration being considered in isolation or are its historical, social, economic, and cultural dimensions being taken into account? What is the nature of the socio-cultural and economic impacts being conveyed? Does the medium generate a multifaceted representation or a one-dimensional image? Are migration-related themes depicted in a problem-oriented manner or in a resource-oriented way? Does the medium thematise stories of oppression and violence suffered? Are stories of resistance also thematised? Does the material under scrutiny address specific social challenges? If so, to what extent is this carried out in a differentiated manner? Are any potential solutions and/or future scenarios identified?

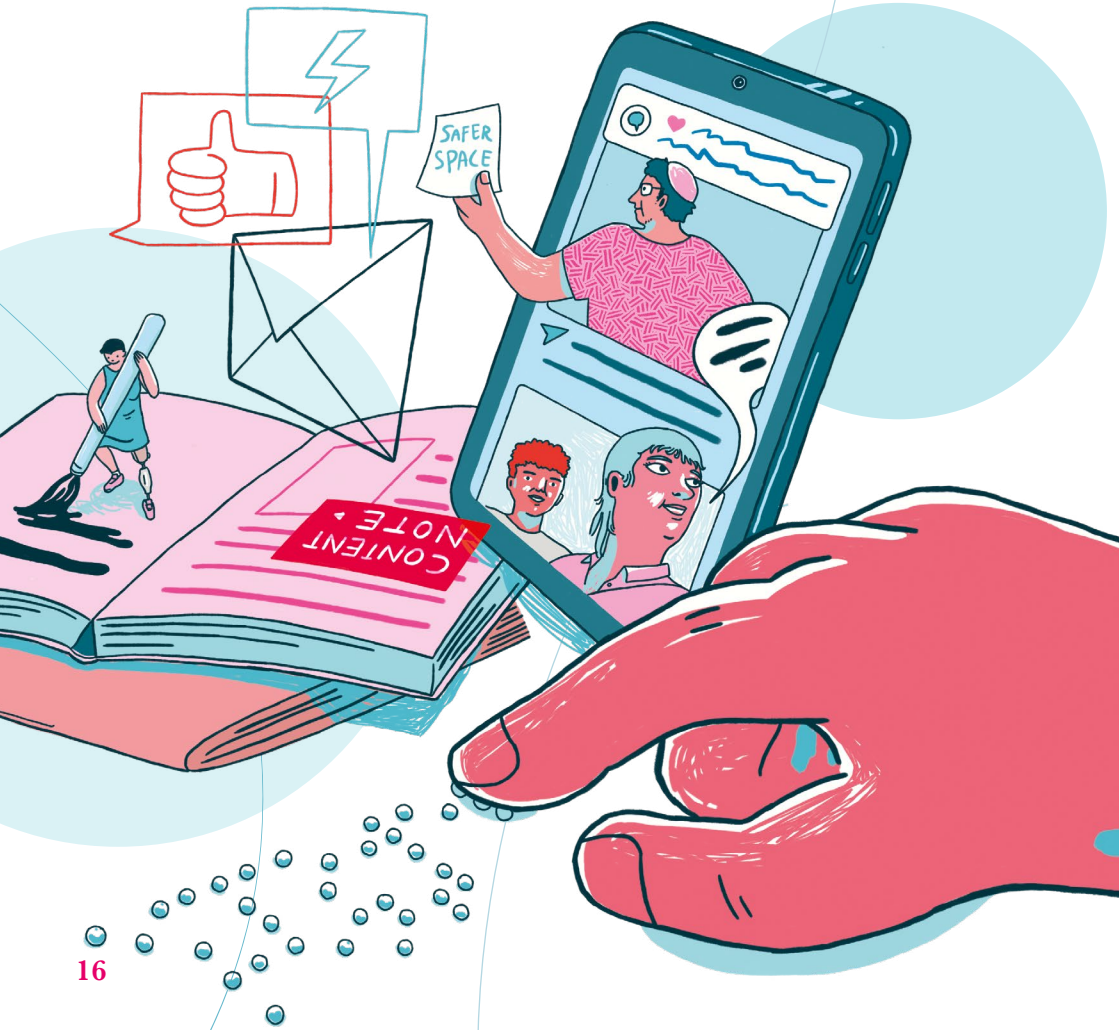
Does the medium leave room for controversies?

Migration is a popular topic of conversation – and one that is often discussed in controversial tones. For this reason, it is essential that any discussion of migration and mutual coexistence in migration societies be conducted in a democratic manner. A goal of any such discussion will always be to foster the ability for self-reflection among learners. This approach strengthens learners' ability to situate themselves in the migration-related discourse and to think in alternatives, rather than merely reproducing ideas of inequality. In this spirit, educational media should also include space for current debates, for example, concerning such issues as desired vs. unwanted migration, the processing of asylum-seekers and the planned relocation of this processing to the EU's external borders, integration capabilities, and cultures of remembrance.

At the same time, it must be remembered that we all tell stories in different ways and remember events differently. The things we consider to be worthy of remembering can also vary from person to person. In other words, it is possible for educational media in migration societies to comprise simultaneously conflicting and contested memories. The key questions in this case would be the following: Is this characteristic taken into consideration and is space given to these conflicting and contested memories?

Who is being addressed?

The goal of taking time to examine who exactly the educational media is aimed at is to ensure that the media attends to the needs of learners and addresses their life worlds both in terms of content and focus. This also includes the act of taking seriously the realities of their lives in migration societies.



Educational media can be aimed at all learners, but also at specific groups of learners, such as, for example, people negatively impacted by racism or white people. In each case, it is important to be aware of the potential impact and risks of using educational media for different learners or groups of learners. Practitioners can use the media in a targeted manner that is specifically adapted to different educational settings.

In this process, it helps to ask the following questions: Is the heterogeneity contained within the group of learners being taken into account? Are the different languages, language levels, and language styles of the target group being taken into account? Does the material empower people impacted by racism? Does the medium encourage a critical reflection of a learner's own whiteness? Are people who benefit from racism encouraged to engage in reflection?

People who are negatively impacted by discrimination are able to contribute specific knowledge and experience to learning processes; however, they also bring a greater vulnerability. To what extent does the medium take into account this vulnerability experienced by people impacted by racism? What elements contain the potential to trigger memories of traumatic experiences? Is there another way to speak about the subject? When is it appropriate and/or necessary to introduce trigger warnings and content warnings? How should these warnings be formulated and where should they be placed?

The ways in which people deal with different subjects vary considerably. Among other things, it depends heavily on the learner's personal relationship to the subject. For this reason, it is necessary to provide the opportunity for learners to withdraw, take a break, and give critical feedback so that they can protect their own boundaries.

Who is doing the showing? Who is shaping the presentation? What are their sources and interests?

Representations are the product of selective processes and often reflect the perspectives and interests of dominant groups. This makes it all the more important to engage in a critical analysis of the context in which the educational medium was created and to take a look at the perspectives conveyed and norms presented. The following key questions can be useful when seeking to better assess the interests, credibility and relevance of a medium:

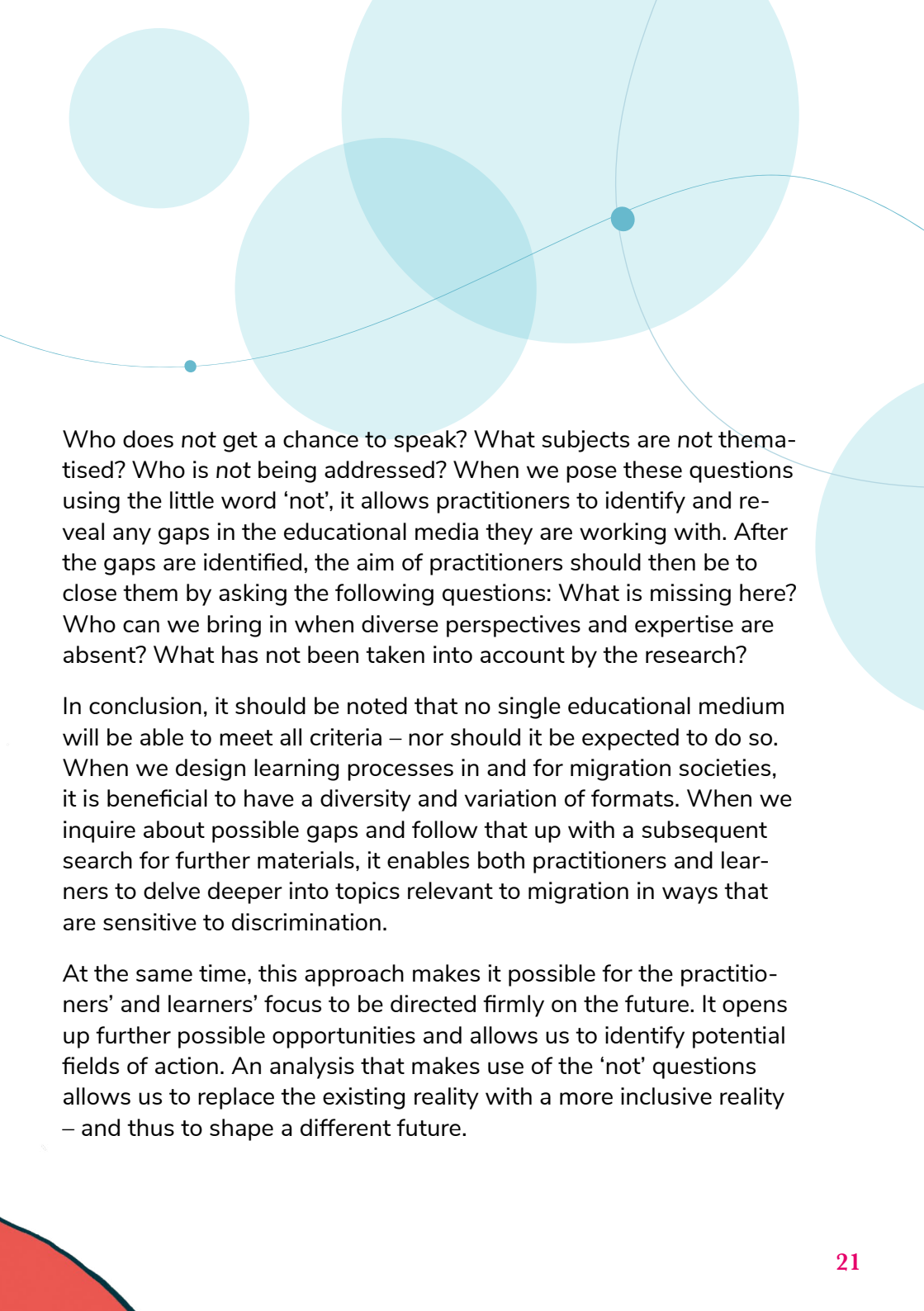
What is the nature of the context in which the medium was developed? Who created the medium? How up-to-date are the sources and information used in the medium? Does the presentation have a broad foundation that can be confirmed by various sources? Was there any specific funding associated with the development of this particular educational medium? If so, which private or public institutions, foundations, etc. were involved?

It can also be helpful to research the extent to which the people and institutions in positions of responsibility are networked and to find out where they are institutionally connected. When images are used, it is also important to ask how they were created. In other words, what societal power structures and codes of violence were in place when the image was taken? Is this information reflected in and/or commented on in the educational medium?



Shaping the future with the “not” question!





Who does not get a chance to speak? What subjects are not thematised? Who is not being addressed? When we pose these questions using the little word 'not', it allows practitioners to identify and reveal any gaps in the educational media they are working with. After the gaps are identified, the aim of practitioners should then be to close them by asking the following questions: What is missing here? Who can we bring in when diverse perspectives and expertise are absent? What has not been taken into account by the research?

In conclusion, it should be noted that no single educational medium will be able to meet all criteria – nor should it be expected to do so. When we design learning processes in and for migration societies, it is beneficial to have a diversity and variation of formats. When we inquire about possible gaps and follow that up with a subsequent search for further materials, it enables both practitioners and learners to delve deeper into topics relevant to migration in ways that are sensitive to discrimination.

At the same time, this approach makes it possible for the practitioners' and learners' focus to be directed firmly on the future. It opens up further possible opportunities and allows us to identify potential fields of action. An analysis that makes use of the 'not' questions allows us to replace the existing reality with a more inclusive reality – and thus to shape a different future.





Further reading

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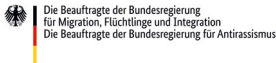
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The background is a solid teal color. It features several overlapping circles of varying sizes and opacities, some in a lighter shade of teal. There are also several thin white curved lines that sweep across the page, with small white dots placed at various points along these lines.

This manual is also
available online at the
following address:
www.migration-lab.net



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