NARRATIVE INQUIRY: A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING GERMAN MIGRANT TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIAN CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Despite their significant contribution to Australian school life, there has been little research into migrant teachers in Australia. The few studies which are available report difficulties with cultural adaptation for migrant teachers in areas related to pedagogy, language, and classroom management. However, research in Australia has mainly investigated experiences of teachers of Asian backgrounds, while teachers from western European countries have thus far been under-researched. As part of an ongoing research project into the experiences of German migrant teachers, this paper presents the analysis and discussion of survey data recently collected from ten German teachers. The study has used narrative inquiry to provide important insights into the teachers' experiences of adjustment to the Australian school system. The teachers' narratives revealed new perspectives on the cultural dimension of teaching practices and its effects on the individual in cross-cultural classroom situations. The exploration of these problem areas was especially detailed thanks to the narrative inquiry method, which allowed for in-depth and rich comparative data. The findings may inform teacher education courses and orientation programs for overseas-trained teachers, as well as stimulate debate about school policy in Australia and Germany.

Introduction

Over the past three decades there has been an increased interest in teaching as teachers themselves see and experience it. Carter & Doyle (1995, p. 162) note a "virtual explosion" of studies of teachers' "practical knowledge" (Clandinin, 1985), their lives and experiences within the classroom. This marks a significant shift away from the former predominantly theoretical concepts of learning, teaching and curriculum. Traditionally, educational research focused on the development of teaching methods that promised high scores for students in standardised academic tests (Carter & Doyle, 1995). By this means, researchers observed classroom practices in large scale studies and compared these with students' test scores in order to predict the effectiveness of particular teaching practices. The results of the research were to inform teacher training programs.

This focus shifted in the late 1980s, influenced by the use of life stories in psychology and later on in other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, and philosophy (Atkinson, 2007; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). At this time, an awareness of the narrative approach and the use of life stories and personal narratives as new ways of understanding began to develop in education. Clandinin's pioneering work (1985) is evidence for this new interest. While not strictly narrative in design, her

longitudinal interview study with two teachers can be seen as a template for the developing methodology of narrative inquiry in education (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007).

In her study, Clandinin (1985) conceptualised a teacher's knowledge as composed of a theoretical knowledge in the form of concepts, theories and facts of learning, teaching and curriculum acquired through teacher training and a practical knowledge, "in the sense of knowing children" (Clandinin, 1985, p. 361), which are merged by the teacher's personal background and experiences.

> "Personal practical knowledge" is knowledge which is imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of, a person's experiential history, both professional and personal. (Clandinin, 1985, p. 362)

With this focus on teachers' personal experiences, this was a novel perspective in educational research, which called for the application of new methods of inquiry. Understanding teachers' actions as the expression of their personal practical knowledge, Clandidnin (1985) used classroom observations in conjunction with narratives of experiences in order to give meaning to observed practices. By doing so, she drew attention to the personal nature of teachers' classroom actions and highlighted the importance of experiences for an understanding of teaching practices.

Since these beginnings, recognition of narrative and its "contribution to educational research" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 361) has developed. Scholars such as Webster & Mertova (2007, p. 14) underscore the advantages of narrative inquiry, when they argue that narratives are able to "highlight those understandings often not revealed by traditional modes of inquiry". This makes narratives "ideally suited to address issues of complexity and human-centredness", Webster & Mertova debate (2007, p. 14). Similarly, Elbaz-Lubisch (2007, p. 359) emphasises the need to "pay attention to teachers both as individuals and as a group, listening to their voices and stories they tell about their work and lives", in order to understand teaching.

Today, a growing body of narrative research and literature on the methodology of narrative inquiry is available. Clandinin's *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry* (2007), which is also directed at other disciplines than educational research, is one example. There, narrative inquiry is defined as qualitative research that asks participants to tell their personal accounts of events. Because the emphasis in narrative inquiry is on understanding the circumstances and perspectives of the participants, researcher and the researched develop a unique relationship over the study. Typified by its equal and collaborative character (Carter & Doyle, 1995), this partnership allows both parties to learn from the encounter. For that reason, Clandinin (2007, p. ix) argues, narrative can be understood as both, the "process" of telling the story, and the narrative "product" itself.

Narratives of diversity in teaching

In narrative studies of teaching and teacher education, a broad range of themes and concepts has been explored. Yet, particularly in the context of cultural diversity working with narratives offers unique possibilities (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). Studies in multicultural classrooms, for example, consistently report cross-cultural issues. Research has shown that differences in beliefs and perceptions toward authority, discipline, and appropriate classroom behaviour can lead to potential misunderstandings between teachers and students with different ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Simkin, 1991; van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman, & Wubbels, 2009; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004).

Here, narrative inquiry offers a particular "powerful" approach (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 372). The narratives of migrant teachers "hold significant potential" for understanding schooling and teaching for all students and teachers "through a process that sets in motion the interaction of the strange with the familiar" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 372). In her study of the life stories of migrant teachers in Israel, Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) explored the teachers' process of finding a place in the new environment. Listening to migrant teachers' stories, she argues, "teaches us about schooling in the

'host' culture and allows new questions to be asked about that culture and its arrangements for learning and teaching" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 372).

Stories of migrant teachers in Australia

In Australia, classrooms are characterised by the rich diversity of a multicultural and multi-faith society. Statistics show that 24% of the Australian population are born overseas (Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; Australian Government. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007). Yet, there is a significant lack of research into the implications of ethnic diversity of students and teaching staff in Australian classrooms (Sharplin, 2009; Simkin, 1991).

Further, persistent teacher shortages have led to recruitment campaigns to fill teacher vacancies with overseas-trained teachers and migrants with teaching qualifications (Kato, 1998; Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2001, 2004; Seah & Bishop, 2001; Sharplin, 2009). For instance, in Western Australia teacher demand and supply projections predict a major shortfall in teachers in primary and secondary education from 2012 to 2017 (Government of Western Australia. Department of Education and Training, n.d.). This problem is being alleviated by qualified teachers from overseas, who supply an additional source of educational staff in Australian classrooms (Australian Government. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007; Kato, 1998; Seah & Bishop, 2001; Sharplin, 2009).

Despite this significant input of migrant teachers in Australian classrooms, there is only limited research about overseas-qualified teachers (Sharplin, 2009). The few studies which are available report difficulties with cultural adaptation for migrant teachers. Challenges faced by these teachers are generally related to pedagogy, language proficiency and classroom management (Kato, 1998; Peeler, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Seah & Bishop, 2001; Sharplin, 2009). For example, after interviewing and observing eight teachers with Japanese backgrounds working as Japanese language educators in Australian schools, Kato (1998) reports these teachers often face problems dealing with their students.

> For NESB [non-English speaking background] teachers who received their education overseas, adapting to local school culture is a major task, and their quest for constructing their "identity as a teacher" involves cross-cultural issues. (Kato, 1998, p. 1)

Kato (1998) identified two areas which exacerbated difficulties with classroom communication for the teachers. Based on the Japanese teachers' stories, Kato found that linguistic and pedagogical factors contributed to the problems the teachers experienced in Australian classrooms. The linguistic factors (appropriateness of classroom language, assertiveness, self-expression, and explaining logically) can be explained with the non-English speaking background of the teachers. Pedagogical problems (teaching approaches, standard of discipline, teacher-students relationship and teacher status, and credibility as a teacher), Kato concludes, are the result of differences in school culture between the two countries Australia and Japan.

> Not having experienced schooling in Australia, it was naturally difficult for the JNS [Japanese native speakers] to grasp the nature of Australian schools, students and classroom culture. Such "culture" includes: teaching approaches, standard of discipline, teacher-student relationship and teacher status. (Kato, 1998, p. 9)

Likewise, Seah & Bishop (2001, p. 1) emphasise the "cultural baggage" migrant teachers bring with them. Using interviews together with observation, they explored the negotiation of value conflicts of two migrant teachers during their process of professional socialisation. They found that attitudes, beliefs and values of these teachers regarding teaching and mathematics education varied from the corresponding concepts in Australia. Therefore, the teachers encountered value differences and conflicts when they stepped into Australian mathematics classrooms (Seah & Bishop, 2001).

In order to teach effectively, familiar ways of knowing need to be negotiated with current work

practices. Peeler (2002, p. 2) describes this process as articulating "points of intersection" while common ground is discovered. This includes gaining the necessary sociocultural knowledge, understanding the local perspective and the development of a new teacher identity (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Peeler, 2002). That this can be a difficult time for migrant teachers is highlighted by Peeler (2002). She draws attention to the tension migrant teachers' experience, when they navigate between their former ways of knowing and local practices. Using narrative interview methodology, Peeler (2002) explored shifts in the two migrant teachers' self-perceptions and understandings.

> Migrant teachers who work in local educational contexts face vague, abstract, and culturally laden concepts often unfamiliar to them. Such knowledge embraces intuition, sentiments and values that are innate and unspoken within educational communities, and for migrant teachers new to this system of education it is unfamiliar, unknown and mysterious. (Peeler, 2002, online abstract)

Learning that workplace tensions have the potential to alienate migrant teachers from their school community and the teaching profession, Peeler & Jane (2005) investigated in a later study the benefits of mentoring programs. Based on migrant teachers narratives of "bridging" their professional practices, Peeler & Jane (2005) underline the advantages of mentoring relationships for overseas born teachers and assert the development of strategies for assistance.

Sharplin (2009), who investigated the experiences of six "imported and overseas-qualified teachers" appointed to rural and remote schools in Western Australia, similarly found that migrant teachers' difficulties with cultural adaptation can let them turn away from their profession. Using interviews, she learned that particularly teachers from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds were challenged with the language transition and adjustment to Australian school culture. In Sharplin's (2009) study, this resulted in two of the six participants resigning earlier from the teaching program. In order to ease migrant teachers' transition and to retain them in Australian classrooms, Sharplin (2009) advocates effective induction and high levels of collegial and administrative support.

These studies highlight the need for more extensive knowledge about the experiences of migrant teachers in Australian classrooms. With continuing demand for overseas-trained teachers, more needs to be known about their process of "professional socialisation" (Seah & Bishop, 2001) to Australian school culture. However, existing research in Australia has mainly investigated experiences of teachers of Asian backgrounds (Kato, 1998; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Sharplin, 2009), while teachers from western European countries have thus far been under-researched. Yet, labour agreements (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2004) between Australia and a number of western European countries (the Netherlands, Malta, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway) call for research into the experiences of teachers of these backgrounds.

Study of German migrant teachers' narratives

Personal experiences as a German migrant teacher in diverse Australian secondary schools initiated this research. Further, anecdotal evidence of classroom management issues and study reports (Jung & Boman, 2003) of problematic student behaviour in Australian German language classes necessitated investigation of this issue. In the following, narrative research as method of inquiry for studying German migrant teachers' experiences in Australia and the analysis and discussion of survey data is presented. The aim of the study is to shed light on the experiences of teachers with German backgrounds in Australian classrooms. Based on problem areas identified in previous research on teachers from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, this study is concerned with questions regarding issues of cultural diversity in teaching methods and classroom management, as well as problems of language transition. The analysis of the narratives, recently collected from ten German migrant teachers, will identify unfamiliar aspects and, at times, problematic experiences of German migrant teachers in Australia.

Method

This study has used narrative inquiry to gain insights into German migrant teachers' experiences in the Australian school system. This methodology was particularly suitable due to the researcher's own background as German migrant teacher. As researcher and the participants develop a unique relationship over the course of the study, the researcher's own personality, interaction skills and access to particular community groups critically influence the research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). For instance, Elbaz-Luwich (2007, p. 372) argues that in narrative studies with migrant teachers, the researcher's "reflective involvement", whether or not the researcher is an immigrant, is crucial to the study.

In this study, my involvement in the Western Australian community of German teachers has significantly facilitated the research. First, most participants were found through existing network contacts, from which further participant contacts followed in a "snowball" pattern. Second, the majority of participants were contacted while attending a meeting of the *Teacher Association of German, Western Australia* (TAGWA) in February 2012. Here, the teachers' decision to participate in the study was certainly influenced by the researcher's existing association with the group. Further, during the interviews my own personal experiences as migrant teacher in Australia put me in a unique place as a teacher-researcher. This "in-betweenness" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007) undoubtedly helped to create trusted relationships with the participants. Moreover, as research has shown that teachers of non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds can struggle with language transition (Kato, 1998; Sharplin, 2009), letting the German teachers tell their stories in their native language, has enabled the capturing of natural and in-depth narratives.

Although the method of inquiry in narrative research is to listen to the voices of participants and the stories they tell about personal experiences, little attention thus far has been paid to issues of language and translation in cross-cultural narrative research. Yet, Temple & Young (2004, p. 5) emphasise the "importance of language in constructing as well as describing our social world". An early "domestication" of the research into English, they argue, can be to the disadvantage of people whose primary language is not English and the purpose of narrative research itself. An alternative is to let the participants tell their accounts in their primary language, especially when the researcher is also proficient in the source language, or with the assistance of a professional translator or interpreter. While this allows exactly for the unmediated and rich data desired in narrative inquiry, it raises issues of translation and interpretation, and as such the validity of the research report (Temple & Young, 2004). However, any process of understanding involves "translation" and a changing of "point of view". Therefore, access to two languages can be seen as an advantage to the research as it allows for specification and a level of analysis not available to monolingual researchers working with bilingual interview partners.

A total of ten German teachers with work experience as German language educators in Australian primary and secondary schools have participated in the study. Rather than conducting the interviews in the teachers' school, all participants were interviewed in the privacy of their home. Within these natural and undisturbed environments, all teachers intensively engaged in the interviews, which lasted between two to four hours. These prolonged sessions allowed for exceptionally extensive data collection about the teachers' personal practical accounts in Australia. While the interviews were unstructured and followed the teachers' narrative thread, their stories addressed issues of adaptation and cross-cultural observations during their working lives in Australia. The questions raised in the conversation approached the teachers' experiences regarding language transition, classroom management, and teaching methods.

All teachers interviewed in this study attended school in Germany, with one of the participants having attended secondary school in Australia. All participants were female and ranged in age from 30 to 64, with the majority 40 years and older. While this selection was unintentional, it represents the norm in language education in Australia. Statistics show that in this specialist area, female teachers outnumber

male teachers, particularly in the senior secondary years, and foreign languages teachers are often 41 years and older (Australian Government. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relation, 1999). All of the participants had work experience in the curriculum area of languages as German teachers at Australian primary and secondary schools in the government and independent school sector, with nine of the participants currently teaching. The teachers had work experience in Australia between a few months and 26 years.

Results

A large number of participants, particularly teachers with work experience in foreign language teaching in Germany, expressed their astonishment about how low foreign languages as a subject rate in the Australian curriculum.

> I think overall foreign languages have a higher significance in Germany compared to here in Australia. (Participant B1)

> I have to say, this was a new experience for me to have students who weren't interested in my subject. In Germany, I was a teacher of English as a foreign language, which grades determine the graduation to the next year level at the end of the school year. […] Now, I teach a subject that […] has approximately the same cultural value as wood works, music or arts in Germany, but is not a major subject and not important. (Participant E1)

In Germany, foreign language education starts from a very young age. Many day-care centres today, offer bilingual programs with native speakers as care takers for children only a few months old. This is followed by language programs from Year 1 to Year 5 in many primary schools (http://www.ofaj.org/paed/fruehenseigne/fruehsprech/fruehsprech.html) and the compulsory study of one or two foreign languages at secondary level up to Year 10 or 12. Additionally, many schools offer bilingual learning programs, with subjects such as Biology, Geography or Arts taught in English or French. How this different sense of worth and value of foreign languages influences teaching practices, was articulated by one former teacher of English. She explained how in Germany marks offer the necessary incentive for appropriate student behaviour, whereas in Australia:

> One has to motivate the students more intrinsically, because the extrinsic incentive doesn't work. The subject is not relevant. […] In Germany, I never had to threaten the students with bad marks, […], because they just knew. (Participant E1)

Due to the lower importance of foreign language study in the Australian curriculum fewer periods per week are allocated to foreign languages in student timetables.

> I also saw my students more often during the week [in Germany], which made teaching more easy. When you see a Year 8 class only once a week [as in Australia] it is only until the end of the term that you can develop a relationship with the students. It was much easier in Germany to establish a good relationship with the students because you saw them more often. (Participant B1)

How the allocation of less hours and the value of foreign languages in general impact on the students' perception of the subject and their classroom behaviour, was voiced by two participants with teaching experience as foreign language teachers in Germany.

> One has a significantly lower status compared to the classroom teacher, who is with the class all day. That was noticeable that I had to ask [the students] three times, before they listened and did what I asked them to do. Whereas the classroom teacher just asks once and the students do what they are told. I explain this with the fact that I only see them once a week. (Participant B1)

> For me it was the biggest shock here to start teaching, and [to realize] well, this student doesn't want to do German at all, so what do I do with him. He was just a total denier. And, when you have one of those in your class, and I had four of them in one class, that is where

> I really had difficulties […]. (Participant E1)

A German teacher, who had lived in Australia for more than 30 years, reports similar observations:

> Because languages aren't as important here, I find it very difficult for us as language teachers. (Participant C1)

Language Transition

Contrary to previous research findings (Kato, 1998; Sharplin, 2009), the transition to English as the language of instruction was not perceived as a big challenge by the German migrant teachers. This can be explained by different factors. Firstly, as discussed above foreign languages and their acquisition hold a great significance in German education. As a result, the majority of the German migrant teachers were adequately trained in the English language prior to their arrival in Australia. Secondly it seems that in contrast to other subjects, Australian students value the advantage of having a native speaker in foreign language education. Minor linguistic mistakes are used by some teachers as examples of their own language learning. Thirdly, particularly teachers who don't feel as fluent and articulate in English use German as their preferred language of instruction, which eventually can be an advantage for the students.

> I have always tried to speak German. My English will never be perfect. They often had a lot of fun when I made a mistake. That was actually never a problem. […] That often was the cause for laughter. (Participant B2)

However, some teachers and surprisingly the teachers with a teaching degree and work experience in English language education voiced that they feel limited when expressing their authority.

> Sometimes, when I was telling the students what to do […] I didn't know what the teacher authority language is. […] I can see that [Australian] teachers sometimes express themselves differently, and I wouldn't have known that and still wouldn't know. […] They have different expressions, for example this assertiveness, and say special phrases a normal person would not use but what is a specific teacher language. And if you didn't learn this during your practical teacher training, than you simply don't know. (Participant F1)

> One is not as glibly, as in German. That is a matter of practice. When I started last year in term 3 it was difficult. And I generally find it more difficult, no matter in which situation, to express myself adequately in English. Even though I have studied English and taught English, German as my native language is easier for me. I would say quick-wittedness is a matter of familiarity. It is an art, particularly in behaviour management, to address a student in a way that it doesn't escalate and you can put something right in a humorous way. (Participant E1)

Particularly when managing a class, knowledge of the adequate classroom language and an understanding of acceptable levels of language assertiveness are essential skills. The feeling of insufficient language proficiency led to feelings of uncertainty for some teachers and eventually affected their classroom management.

Classroom Management

The majority of the German migrant teachers had completed a teacher entry and orientation program (http://det.wa.edu.au/professionallearning/detcms/professionallearning/professional-learning-website/pl-register-modules/workforce-policy-and-coordination/teacher-entry-and-orientation-program.en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-11053022). This two-day program, organised by the education department of Western Australia, is offered to returning and overseas-trained teachers to familiarise them with current practice in Western Australian public schools. Topics of the course include classroom management strategies together with curriculum resources and directions, and employment with the Department. Two of the interviewed teachers had received their teaching qualification in Australia.

However, many teachers experienced difficulties when they finally stepped into their classrooms. Managing the students, particularly those with little interest in German, was often a challenge for the teachers. This was perceived as especially difficult by teachers with teaching experience in foreign language education in Germany. Also, at the beginning the teachers were unsure about the standard of discipline in Australian schools and local management strategies. Many teachers felt insecure and left alone, what impacted on their practice.

> I had no penalties. […] When my normal authority doesn't work, I don't have anything to assert myself. […] If I had known, what I am allowed, I would have been more assertive. (Participant F1)

> Discipline was a real challenge for me. […] I didn't have much support from the school administration. I had to deal with all this on my own, what is incredibly difficult for a beginning teacher. (Participant A1)

Also, cultural differences in perceptions regarding authority, discipline, and appropriate classroom behaviour can cause misunderstandings between teachers and students (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Simkin, 1991; van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman, & Wubbels, 2009; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004).

> My expectations regarding discipline, and what I expected from the students how they should behave, […] certainly was very German. That certainly was influenced by my experiences at school. That is why I think, at times, I made it a bit harder for myself because I thought this is how it should be. (Participant A1)

Teacher roles

How classroom management strategies are influenced by cultural role expectations and teacher status within the country is narrated by two teachers.

> In Germany, a behaviour management plan doesn't really exist at the schools. There it was somehow absolutely my decision what to do. On the other hand, there I was the classroom teacher. That means when I had the impression that it was getting difficult with one student, then I was the one who called for a teacher meeting and then it was me who organised that all colleagues came together and discussed what to do with the one student. Here it is more structured, it says when this happens than [the student] goes outside, and if [the student] still doesn't behave than he has to go to the deputy principal. It is all written down more detailed and set out more concrete in writing than it was in Germany. (Participant B1)

> In Germany, I think it is not that customary that you always have to assert yourself. Here [in Australia] you always have to refer to [some rules]. Whereas in Germany [the system itself is the incentive provider], you expect that you are the authority and the students have to accept this. (Participant E1)

Lack of support

Some participants were offered a mentoring program within their school, which helped them orientate themselves and assisted their adaptation. However, some teachers talked about their difficulties, particularly when no other foreign language teacher or German teacher was employed by the school, as they felt there was no one they could ask for advice.

> Being a teacher is a very lonely job. You are so lonely in the classroom. You have no time to consult with someone. You don't have anybody, except when you do your teacher training, and someone comes to your class. […] That was the hardest for me that I didn't have anyone to confer with. (Participant A1)

> At [that] school, there was no one who really looked after me. And I eventually had to find out everything on my own […] I think that was also a reason why I didn't like it there, there

> I felt absolutely left alone. […] At one point I simply gave up. I then realised I don't like it here and obviously no one takes interest in me and looks after me, and then I thought, well that is only a fixed appointment for one term and I do it until the end of the school year but next year I don't want to work here. (Participant B1)

Some of the participants said they were hesitant to ask for assistance and often embarrassed, as one teacher explains:

> I didn't want to show any weakness. Because then I thought I might lose my job or don't seem competent. And often it was just little things, and I didn't want to ask for help. (Participant F1)

Also, some teachers encountered a lack of understanding from colleagues and administration, when they asked for advice.

> When I went to the principal and said there is a student who doesn't do anything, then it was my incompetence or [I was told] one has to ask [the student] again. (Participant A1)

That lack of support has the potential to alienate migrant teachers from their school community and the teaching profession was shown in previous research (Peeler & Jane, 2005; Sharplin, 2009). One teacher in this study described a similar experience.

> I only went reluctantly [to that school]. And […] now that I don't have to do it anymore, sometimes in the morning I think, aww … I have to go there and then I realise, no you don't have to, and then I can relax. (Participant B1)

However, despite the portrayed difficulties, the large majority of German migrant teachers enjoyed their work as German language teachers in Australian classrooms and described their professional life as positive experience.

Conclusion

Using narrative inquiry to investigate German migrant teachers' experiences in the Australian classroom was an exceptionally successful data collection strategy. Particularly the researcher's own background as German migrant teacher facilitated the collection of rich information. Remarks such as "you know that yourself" (Participant A1) or "you can probably say that better" (Participant B1), which were made by the teachers during the interviews and referred to my own practical work experiences in Australia, show how comfortable the teachers felt to talk about their experiences with the researcher.

The study shows that language transition is not a big challenge for German migrant teachers, although when it comes to asserting one's authority verbally, many teachers felt not as articulate and glibly as a native-speaker naturally would. These feelings of insufficient language proficiency and a sense of unawareness concerning acceptable levels of language assertiveness can influence German migrant teachers' classroom presence and management. Also, a lack of local knowledge of appropriate student behaviour, common management strategies often aggravated classroom management for the teachers. Furthermore, teaching a non-compulsory and low-esteem subject required a much greater focus on classroom management. This was evidenced by many German migrant teachers voicing that the low value of foreign languages in the Australian curriculum influenced the students' behaviour towards the subject and to them personally, as the teacher. In addition, cultural differences in teacher role expectations and status led to misunderstandings for some teachers. Here, the necessary sociocultural knowledge needed to be acquired, what was experienced as a difficult process by some teachers. In this situation assistance from the school administration and colleagues, for example through mentoring programs, can benefit the adaptation process as some teachers described. However, many teachers reported a lack of support within their school community and often felt deserted in this situation. A specialised mentoring strategy implemented in the Australian school system might be an ideal strategy to ease the initiation process.

Despite their significant input in foreign language education and Australian classrooms in general, there is only limited research about German migrant teachers' experiences. With continuing demand, more needs to be known about their process of professional socialization. This on-going study highlights the need for more extensive knowledge about the experiences of German migrant teachers in Australian classrooms, and further research will emerge from these findings. This research has thus shown some very real problems but also identified some low-cost solutions. Informed mentoring programs offering the necessary local knowledge and much needed support have the potential to ease German migrant teachers' transition and to retain them in Australian classrooms.

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