



Diversity in the Teacher Force

Gains, Promises and Challenges from Practical Perspective

Position Paper

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0. Introduction

This document takes up an issue that is moving more and more towards the centre of attention: the mismatch in by far most schools in Europe between, on one side, the rapidly increasing social, cultural and linguistic diversity in the classrooms and, on the other side, the social, cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the respective teacher force. There seems to be an almost intuitive understanding that it is not an ideal situation when only middle-class, monolingual teachers of native ethnic origin teach predominantly working-class, multilingual pupils of most diverse ethnic origins. With the children of the first large wave of labour migration to Europe having come of age, we find slowly rising numbers of trained teaching professional who have roots in immigrant or ethnic minority families themselves. Moreover, in the past years, the facilitated recognition of qualifications obtained in foreign countries has, in principal, opened possibilities for immigrated teachers to become employed. Especially schools catering for neighbourhoods with relatively high shares of immigrant population and ethnic diversity are beginning to see the advantages of a more diverse teacher force.

At the same time, there are a series of problems: (a) in many European countries the teacher profession is not very popular among the children of immigrants and ethnic minorities, this leads to a shortage of professionals with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds; (b) schools reflect society in many ways, and that does also apply to reservations, if not stereotypes and racist attitudes towards persons of immigrant or ethnic minority origins. Corresponding remarks or actions towards teachers can come from pupils, but especially from non-immigrant parents and from other staff members. Many schools are not well-prepared yet as institutions to adequately deal with diversity in general; (c) educational systems in Europe generally do not have institutionally well-embedded and experienced mechanisms to deal with discrimination – at whatever level or intensity.

Since education systems in Europe vary as much as the immigration and diversification experiences in the different countries, regions and cities do, this document addresses the overall theme through an example – which we believe to be of prototypical relevance beyond the specific situation and experience described. The authors are mostly active members of the “Network of Teachers with Immigration History” from the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the first of a series of similar organisations all over Germany which represents a unique attempt for organising teachers of diverse ethnic and linguistic family backgrounds and giving them a voice and a lobby in educational policies. Moreover, Germany is not only the most populated country of the European Union, it is also facing particular challenges in regard to the incorporation and participation of immigrant children and the second and third generation.

1. Statement of problem

Similar to most Western European countries, German society currently witnesses a rapidly increasing linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity among children and youth. In the school year 2013/14, 34.8 % of the pupils in elementary schools in North Rhine-Westphalia came from immigrant families, similar numbers apply for Lower Vocational Secondary Education

(*Hauptschule*): 39.2 %, Middle Vocational Secondary Education (*Realschule*): 33.6%, and Comprehensive Schools (*Gesamtschule*): 35.0%. Only in the academic high school track *Gymnasium* the share is significantly lower: 18.8%. Especially in the bigger cities, numbers are even higher: in Cologne, for example, already in 2011 every second child younger than six years old had an immigrant background. These data from the official school statistics give a quite clear outlook to the demographic future of our schools.

Even though available data on the relationship between immigration and education are still fragmentary, some general trends can be described – and they are not positive: There are seven times more high-school dropouts among students with an immigrant background than among those without. The amount of students with an immigration background who accomplish a high qualified graduation is significantly lower, too. The results of educational achievements and acquired expertise in school have been improved, but only at a very slow pace.

Different kinds of studies have repeatedly shown that in Germany the most important determinant of educational success still is the socio-economic background of the family. But, there are additional influential factors: for example, the specific resources found in the families, such as educational aspirations and the willingness to invest in education, but also tenacity, flexibility, interconnectedness and willingness for effort. Of obstructive influence are especially negative attitudes in the institution, as described by the theory of institutional discrimination.

2. Teachers with an immigrant background: potential relevance and role

In most cases, due to the structure of labour migration to Germany, teachers with an immigrant background simultaneously serve as examples of successful upward social mobility through education. They do not only have specific bicultural and multilingual skills, but they can also act as role models for pupils of working class and immigrant background in schools.

For this reason, the aim that the diversity of pupils in school should be somehow reflected in the teaching staff has been formulated as a political goal on the federal state level as well as on the national level in the National Integration Plan. However, the reality in schools looks still very different: especially in bigger cities, not few schools have 60 to 70% pupils who are raised in immigrant families. By contrast, the share of teachers with an immigrant background is much lower: an estimated overall average of 4.6% (according to the report of the task force education based on micro-census data from 2010). But, to collect data about the teaching staff is highly complicated due to the application of German data protection laws to undergraduates, prospective teachers and fully educated teachers.

Experiences so far, and their evaluation have shown that intercultural competences of teachers with an immigration background, in combination with *professional* competences, such as teaching abilities, subject expertise, and practical and social skills, successfully create productive intercultural learning environments especially, but not exclusively for students with immigrant background. The ability for empathy and to balance closeness and distance with these students greatly facilitates that especially pupils from immigrant families become more easily be motivated. In combination with the potential of these teachers to act as role

models for educational success and social mobility, these competences allow reaching faster and more target-orientated the aim of helping students with an immigrant background to graduate at higher levels.

This does not only have positive effects for the students, but also a symbolic and psychological dimension for the parents. In a basically rather polarised situation in society in general, in which making a difference between “Germans”, on one side, and “foreigners” or “migrants”, on the other, teachers with an immigrant background create trust, convey a certain optimism, and also bolster those parents who – out of lack of knowledge or linguistic skills – can only provide limited direct support to their children.

Finally, teachers with an immigrant background can also have an important role within the teaching staff, since they can more easily and legitimately initiate certain processes among the colleagues, for example in regard to a change of perspective among the non-migrant teachers on the diversity and specific backgrounds of their students.

3. An Example from Practice: The Network of Teachers with Immigration History in North Rhine-Westphalia

Despite the potential gains, the still very small numbers and the observation that teachers of immigrant origin or family history frequently face particular obstacles, teacher students and teaching professionals of non-mainstream background rarely have a voice on their own. For this reason, a group of teachers in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia took the initiative to carry different impulses into different levels of the school system. The Network of Teachers with Immigration History represents a possibility to make a more systematic and “conscious” use of existing resources among teachers and teacher students for the creation of a school that is oriented by the needs of *all* students, regardless their origins and specific conditions. In the following, this project will be presented more in detail because it served as a role model for the creation of similar networks in other federal states in Germany – and might serve as an inspiration for comparable initiatives in other countries and at the European level too.

3.1 The Organisation

The “Netzwerk der Lehrkräfte mit Zuwanderungsgeschichte” was founded in autumn 2007 in the regional parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) by a group of about 30 teachers. The idea for this project had been developed at inter-ministerial levels between the regional Ministry of School and Further Education and the Ministry of Labour, Integration and Social Affairs. This fact illustrates the high importance of the topic on the political and administrative agenda. Today, seven years after its foundation, the network has more than 630 members from over 40 different countries of origin. The infrastructure of the Network is guaranteed by the regional government: Two full-time positions for the coordination are provided by the regional Ministry of Education, while the regional office is financed by the Ministry of Integration.

The Network, moreover, formally co-operates with the “Landesweite Koordinierungsstelle Kommunaler Integrationszentren” (Regional Coordination Office for Local Integration Centres). This means that it has access to broad and comprehensive expert knowledge and to stakeholder networks at the local level. The regional co-ordinators run the state office and they initiate, coordinate and accompany different processes on all levels of action. Every two years, the members of the network elect a speakers’ committee. This committee counsels and supports the co-ordination in its work and all kinds of activities. The network co-operates with all levels in the educational system, e.g. teacher unions and associations, schools, and the Centres for Practical Teacher Training (ZfsL), but also with immigrant organisations, universities, foundations and ministries.

3.2 Philosophy, Role and Priorities of the Network

“The State Government is going to promote intensively that schools approach and encourage teachers with an immigrant background to apply for positions. The state government is also going to encourage high-school graduates with an immigrant background to study the teaching profession” (Plan of the Integration Campaign of the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia, June 2006). The National Integration Plan from July 2007 confirmed the urgency of this matter and contained self-commitments of the federal states in this regard, and this is also supported by all teacher associations, a diverse range of experts, and by foundations and immigrant organizations. The regional state “red-green” government parties *SPD* and *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* declared in their coalition agreement: *“For the purpose of all-encompassing diversity management in schools, we are orientated by the approach of promoting potentials as formulated in the Law on Participation and Integration. We will systematically include the Network of Teachers with Immigration History into this process.”*

Teachers of immigrant origin or family history represent in person the main goals of inclusive education: equal chances for personal development and social upward mobility through education. Because of their biographical background, their social and cultural experience and their acquired bicultural and multilingual skills they can support the educational integration of children and adolescents with an immigrant background in various ways. Studies show that teachers with an immigrant background bring valuable resources into school. They can:

- motivate as role models for successful upward mobility through education and give more credible advice about career choices;
- contribute to an increased intercultural orientation at schools with important pedagogical, didactic and systemic impulses;
- use their multilingual competences and their cultural experience to make an easier connection with immigrant families;
- represent the factual diversity of German society, but also a school culture in which everybody is welcome.

The Network promotes a perspective which regards teachers with an immigration history first of all as professionals who teach the same subjects as their colleagues. Thus, they should not be reduced to being some sort of social workers for a “problematic group”. But, they also

have some additional skills at their disposal. They can have an impact on the dissemination of culture in schools. As role models that are closer to the everyday experiences of many of their pupils they show that it is worth performing well in schools. They contribute to increased diversity in teachers' lounges and school administration offices – and this diversity enables *everybody* to make better use of his/her whole potential, whether they have an immigrant background or not. Teachers with an immigrant background can contribute to a decrease in institutional discrimination and to the implementation of a culture of appreciation and welcoming through new intercultural perspectives on school culture and different didactics and methods of teaching.

3.3 Network Activities

Since immigrant and ethnic minority teachers are still a tiny minority in most schools, it is a central goal of the network to support them, bring them together, and to represent their interests. For this goal, the network offers a wide range of activities:

- **Gaining Potential**

Promoting the teaching profession and giving professional advice to students with an immigrant background. The Network presents itself at corresponding fairs and on open days at the Centres for Practical Teacher Training (ZfsL).

- **Teacher Education**

The project supports and is supported by a lot of network activities at universities in four different locations in North Rhine-Westphalia. Furthermore, an educational concept is being developed together with the ZfsL, with the idea that every future teacher has been prepared for dealing with the current and future heterogeneities in school.

- **Human Resource Development**

The project also addresses colleagues who already are in the teaching profession. Several multi-part advanced trainings are offered, for example “intercultural advising” and “intercultural education development processes”. Moreover, annual meetings are regularly taking place. In addition, it offers collegial advice for all kinds of conflictive situations.

The Network is also active in the area of the transition from school to work. A state-wide information campaign on the subject of “Integration through education, profession and employment” is conducted in co-operation with the “Elternnetzwerk NRW” (Parents Network North Rhine-Westphalia) and the “Zentralstelle für die Weiterbildung im Handwerk” (Central Agency for Advanced Training in the Skilled Crafts). Twelve events were conducted in 2014 in close co-operation with various immigrant organizations, mostly in their own locations. These events were visited, on average, by more than 100 parents and adolescents each. Especially the high interest and participation of parents shows that Network has a special access to and motivating impact on immigrant or second generation parents.

The project “Lehrkräfte mit Zuwanderungsgeschichte” puts great emphasis on implementing the aimed goals in partnership with a wide range of actors from completely different social levels. This strategy obeys to the conviction that the dissemination of culture in educational institutions is a collaborative task. It cannot be solved by only one organisation or institution, no matter which resources are respectively available. The diversity of the partners ensures that different aspects and approaches can have an influence. In doing so, the project frequently plays the role of a *third party*. There is today a broad agreement in North Rhine-Westphalia about the necessity of an intercultural opening of the educational system. But there are still numerous areas to which the Network could extend its activities in order to make full use of its potential.

Since 2012 the Network has become a highly professional organisation. Part of this is the intensive qualification work for network members – we had around 300 participants since spring 2014 alone – and the increased visibility of the Network among the different stakeholders in the educational system. The rising reputation of the Network is also reflected in a noticeable increase in being involved in various political and organisational processes, such as, for example, taking part in the series of socio-political dialogue events called “Education – Migration – Society” which discusses topics like “Islam” and “language support”.

3.4 Impact at National Level

In 2010, the Network organised a nation-wide congress with the purpose of spreading the idea and good practice to the federal level. It was well-attended by high-ranking academics, politicians and ministers. As a result, similar networks were established in seven other federal states with, in total, more than one thousand teachers as members: in Hesse, Lower Saxony, Bremen, Hamburg, Berlin, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. While everywhere the chosen form of organisation is a network, in almost all federal states we find slightly different structural configurations: they range from being completely independent, e.g. as a registered association in Bavaria, via being linked to the state institutions responsible for teacher further training and qualification, up to a direct connection to the corresponding Ministry of Education. Each of these constellations has its pros and cons, but it is very important that the chosen organizational structure ensures a maximum impact and success.

In this context, it would be of great importance to organise regular exchange activities at the federal level between the responsible persons in each regional network. For that purpose, the North Rhine-Westphalian network organised another national conference in December 2013 as a “kick-off” for more regular exchange. However, because of lack of resources, no further joint activities have been possible so far. Since the private sector represents only a very small proportion of the school system, far more than 90% of teachers in Germany are state employees or even functionaries – this offers a number of privileges, but also some limitations, such as the obligation to ask for special permissions for extra-school activities related to school. Teacher networks can also not that easily raise extra funds for their activities, while, at the same time, most federal states in Germany are reluctant in granting more resources than minimally necessary to make the respective networks operational.

4. Policy Recommendations

The rapidly increasing membership and the fact that the Network is a much demanded interlocutor not only in the state of NRW, but also at federal and even European level show that it fills a huge gap. For teachers, who in many schools are either alone or one among very few colleagues with a non-German ethnic background, the Network symbolises and acts as a community – it signals to them that they are not alone and can always ask for support or advice. This is extremely important in a situation in which discrimination and Othering or similar in many locations occur almost on a daily basis and frequently without a guarantee for institutional backing. At the same time, the Network can create public attention, e.g. in politics and the media, for this kind of situations.

The Network today is also a crucial element in the campaign for more teachers of immigrant or ethnic minority background by (a) presenting role models and success stories to higher secondary and higher education students from immigrant families, and (b) raising the awareness of crucial aspects among school principals and the educational administration. The Network can and should be considered a good practice example for the added-value and potential gains of giving immigrant and ethnic minority teachers a well-organised and audible voice – at least until some day in the future such a distinct voice is not necessary anymore.

For this reason, we strongly believe that this kind of networks or organisations should be present in all cities, regions and countries with sizeable immigrant and/or ethnic minority populations in Europe. In order to make sure that corresponding organisational attempts can succeed, a number of basic requirements need to be fulfilled:

- Guarantee of an infrastructure with adequate resources
- Systemic connection to those state institutions that play a relevant role in the educational system – while, at the same time, allowing it to have an independent voice
- Support from the highest possible political levels and from the ministerial administration
- Distinct awareness among policymakers of the immigrant or ethnic minority background of teachers as a resource that has a huge potential for the improvement of the development of individual pupils and schools, but also the educational system as a whole
- Constant and systematic training activities for these teachers
- Inclusion of the specific perspectives of teachers with an immigrant or ethnic minority background into every relevant development process – this requires well-functioning channels of communication for which teacher networks are a very efficient tool
- Well-established interconnections at local, regional, national, and EU level for the transfer of know-how and good practice
- Developing adequate means for internationally evaluating and disseminating good practice and supporting the initial ignition for similar, but locally, regionally or nationally adapted initiatives in other countries

In a situation in which children from immigrant and ethnic minority families and/or coming from working-class families still lack the same opportunities and chances, networks of teachers with an immigrant or ethnic minority background are an important piece in the jigsaw

puzzle of striving for an inclusive educational system that allows each individual child to achieve a level of education that corresponds to its specific talents and interests. Immigrant and ethnic minority teachers have proven to be of very positive influence in the empowerment of these children – as role models and as agents of institutional change in the educational systems.

The EU could and should play a significant and active role in the promotion of such empowerment processes by explicitly recommending to the member states to support or even initiate the foundation of such organisations. The EU would also be the ideal partner for facilitating and supporting cross-country exchange and networking activities among these organisations and initiatives.



Projekt
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