

German migrant teachers in Australia: Insights into the largest cohort of non-English speaking background teachers

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The research reported in this paper investigates the situation of German migrant teachers in Australia. Although German born teachers represent the largest group of non-English speaking background teachers in Australia, there is no study of the circumstances and experiences of these teachers in Australia. This study aims to fill this gap. It consists of two parts, employing quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The first part provides demographic data about the German born teacher population in Australia, compiled from national Australian census data. The second part presents the results of the analyses of interviews with ten German migrant teachers in Western Australia. The results indicate issues related to the acculturation and professional transition of these teachers into Australia, such as diversity in expectations and values of education, a lack of professional support, and feelings of isolation. Finally, wider implications of the findings in terms of the provision of professional support for migrant teachers are discussed.

Introduction

Australia has a long tradition as a country of immigration, with migrants comprising a greater proportion of the total population than in most other Western nations (27.7% in 2013) (ABS, 2011a). In recent years, migrants with professional qualifications and experience in areas such as education have been given priority (Australian Government, Department of Employment, 2013), driven by a demand for overseas trained and educated teachers as an additional source of teaching staff for the Australian teaching labour market (Collins & Reid, 2012; Reid, Collins & Singh, 2014; Santoro, Reid & Kamler, 2001; Sharplin, 2009).

In 2011, there were approximately 319,462 school teachers (primary, middle, secondary and special education teachers) working in Australia (ABS, 2011b). Of those, 56,394 (18%) teachers were born overseas. This migrant teacher cohort comprises teachers from various regions of the world and is characterised by large “cultural, linguistic and religious diversity” (Collins & Reid, 2012, p. 42). The top ten birthplaces of migrant teachers in Australia are England, New Zealand, South Africa, India, United States of America, Scotland, Canada, Germany, China, and Italy (ABS, 2011b). As such, migrant teachers in Australia are drawn predominantly from countries in which English is the first language for the majority of the population, or countries with a substantial adoption of English. Ranking eighth on the list are migrant teachers from Germany (1,346), representing the largest cohort of teachers from non-native English speaking backgrounds in Australia.

Research on migrant teachers in Australia

Over the last two decades, migrant teachers and their experiences in the Australian education system have become a research topic. For example, Santoro, Reid and Kamler

(2001) conducted a study in Victoria on the experiences of teachers who were born and educated overseas, and non-native speakers of English. Their research used a questionnaire to provide demographic data about the teachers' location, qualifications, backgrounds, and the nature of their teaching experiences. A recent national study by Collins and Reid (2012) used Australian census data from 2006, together with a questionnaire and focus group interviews, to offer comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data about the birthplace, ancestry and qualifications, as well as the teaching and living experiences of migrant teachers in Australia.

With increasing interest in teachers' circumstances and experiences (Clandinin, 2007), a number of qualitative studies have been conducted using interviews (Santoro, Reid & Kamler, 2001; Sharplin, 2009; Reid, Collins & Singh, 2014) and narratives (Peeler, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005) in order to understand more about migrant teachers' work and lives in Australia. The few existing studies present insights into the teachers' experiences of professional transition into an unfamiliar environment and the difficulties they face during this process. For example, after interviewing and observing eight Japanese born teachers, who were working as Japanese language educators in Australia, Kato (1998) reported difficulties for these teachers that were caused by differences in terms of teaching professions and education systems, as well as issues with classroom communication caused by language barriers. Similarly, Seah and Bishop's study (2001) with two migrant teachers from Romania and Fiji documented these teachers' negotiation of value conflicts in regards to mathematics education and their adjustment to the Australian school environment. Peeler's (2002) study with two teachers from India and the Philippines highlighted how the process of negotiation between familiar ways of teaching and new practices can be a difficult time for migrant teachers. Based on these findings, Peeler and Jane (2005) investigated in a later study the benefits of mentoring programs for migrant teachers, in order to help them 'bridge' their professional transition. Sharplin (2009) reported in her interview study with six migrant teachers assigned to rural and remote schools in Western Australia that particularly the participants from non-English speaking backgrounds were challenged with the language transition and adjustment to Australian school culture. In response, she advocated effective induction and high levels of collegial and administrative support for all migrant teachers, but particularly for teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The majority of these studies reported difficulties for migrant teachers in Australia in areas related to the bureaucratic system/process (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2014; Sharplin, 2009), the recognition of professional qualifications (Collins & Reid, 2012), employment difficulties (Collins & Reid, 2012; Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Reid et al., 2014), language barriers (Kato, 1998; Sharplin, 2009), differing expectations and values towards teaching (Kato, 1998; Reid, Collins & Singh, 2014; Seah & Bishop, 2001; Sharplin, 2009), discrimination/racism (Collins & Reid, 2012; Reid, Collins & Singh, 2014), marginalisation/isolation (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Santoro, Reid & Kamler, 2001) and a lack of administrative and collegial support (Collins & Reid, 2012; Peeler, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Reid, Collins & Singh, 2014; Sharplin, 2009). While these studies provided significant knowledge about migrant teachers in Australia and their process of professional adjustment to the Australian school culture, the research has drawn

predominantly on participants from Asian backgrounds (Kato, 1998; Peeler, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Seah & Bishop, 2001; Sharplin, 2009). Yet, currently the majority of migrant teachers in Australia come from countries in North-West Europe (21,308 teachers, 36%) as recent census data (ABS, 2011b) showed. Although teachers from this region represent an important component of the Australian education system, their circumstances and experiences in Australia have so far been a neglected area of research. German born teachers form the largest group of non-English speaking background teachers from Europe (ABS, 2011b), and an investigation of their situation in Australia seems therefore imperative.

This study addresses this lack in knowledge and aims to fill the gap. The research was interested in whether the circumstances of teachers from Germany as a Western European country would corroborate earlier findings with other language background groups. To provide a comprehensive elaboration of these teachers' circumstances and experiences in Australia, this study utilised a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Narrative interviews with ten German born and educated teachers in Western Australia were conducted to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences and views of their circumstances. In addition, national Australian census data collected in 2011 were used to contextualise the qualitative data and to deepen the description. The following section presents the demographic data about the German born teacher cohort in Australia compiled in the quantitative study.

Demographic study of German born teachers in Australia

In 2011, 108,002 people of Australia's resident population, or one in 200 people, were born in Germany (ABS, 2011a). Of those, 2,599 were working as educational professionals, including 1,346 school teachers. This number is equivalent to 2.4% of all teachers born overseas and 0.4% of the whole teaching force. Compared to the whole German born population living in Australia (0.5%), German born teachers are well represented within the Australian teaching force. Moreover, records of 1,480 German born school teachers from the previous census in 2006 suggest a stable source of skilled migrants for the Australian education system. In the following section, demographic and professional characteristics of the German born teacher population in Australia compiled from 2011 national census data are presented. It is important to note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics randomly adjusts numbers to avoid the release of confidential data, and therefore little reliance can be placed on very small numbers (ABS, 2011c). The terms used in this section represent the labels applied in the ABS data collection.

Demographic profile

German born teachers are present across all states and territories in Australia, with the largest numbers living in the two highest populated states, New South Wales (NSW, 29%) and Victoria (VIC, 27%). Lower numbers of German born teachers reside in Queensland (QLD, 17%), South Australia (SA, 11%), and Western Australia (WA, 11%), whilst only very small numbers can be found in Tasmania (TAS, 2%), the Northern Territory (NT, 1%), and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT, 2%). These percentages are largely

consistent with the total school teacher population in Australia, which has the largest numbers of teachers registered in NSW and VIC, and fewer in the other states and territories (ABS, 2011b).

Of the 1,346 German born school teachers recorded in the 2011 national census, 74% were female and 26% were male, which is similar to the general Australian teacher cohort. For instance, Reid et al. (2014) reported a predominantly female teacher cohort in Australia and other countries, along with an increasing feminisation of global migration trends among professionals. There are very few German born teachers in the age range between 20 and 39 years (Table 1). One reason might be that initial teacher education in Germany is the longest in Europe (OECD, 2013), requiring at least six years for secondary teachers and five years for primary teachers. Therefore teacher education students in Germany aged 20 to 29 years are often still in the process of completing their teaching qualifications. The majority of German born teachers are 40 years and older, with a very large number of teachers being 60 years and older. It is possible that these older German born teachers represent an earlier period of migration, perhaps even from the 1950s. These numbers are also consistent with previous findings by Santoro et al. (2001), who reported that the majority of overseas born teachers in their study were aged 40 years and older.

Table 1: Age of German born teachers in comparison to the total Australian teacher population

Age range	German born teachers		Australian teacher population	
	n	%	n	%
20 – 29 years	64	5%	57,167	18%
30 – 39 years	175	13%	76,127	24%
40 – 49 years	303	23%	76,695	24%
50 – 59 years	327	24%	83,063	26%
60 – 69 years	475	35%	24,051	8%
Total	1,344	100%	317,102	100%

Professional profile

Teachers from Germany can be found across all levels of the Australian education system (Table 2), with most teachers working in secondary education (48%) and primary education (30%). Smaller numbers work in special education, early childhood education (pre-primary), and middle school education. What is noticeable is the large number of German born teachers working in secondary education, while the majority of teachers in Australia work as primary school teachers. These findings compare with reports by Santoro et al., (2001, p. 71), who found that the overseas born and educated non-native English speaking teachers in their study predominantly taught Year 7, 8, 9 and 10 students, and were “more likely to teach the year levels which require greater class management strategies and which are often regarded as the less prestigious year levels to teach”. Correspondingly, national (Reid et al., 2014) and international research (Caravatti, Lederer, Lupico & van Meter, 2014) reported that most migrant teachers surveyed had

qualifications to teach in secondary education, followed by primary and early childhood education.

Table 2: Occupation sector of German born teachers
in comparison to the total Australian teacher population

Occupation sector	German born teachers		Australian teacher population	
	n	%	n	%
Early childhood teachers	51	4%	18,333	6%
Primary school teachers	407	30%	137,415	43%
Middle school teachers	11	1%	1,588	1%
Secondary school teachers	648	48%	125,028	39%
Special education teachers	79	6%	17,130	5%
School teachers (nfd)	149	11%	19,968	6%
Total	1,345	100%	319,462	100%

In 2011, 690 German born teachers (51%) were working in government schools and 651 (49%) in the private school sector, which is consistent with numbers of the Australian school teacher population as a whole, with 52% and 48% recorded respectively (ABS, 2011b). Only half of the German born teacher population was working full-time (52%) at the time of the 2011 census (Table 3), while 41% were working in part-time positions. These numbers indicate a higher number of German born teachers in part time employment and fewer in full time employment, compared to the total Australian teacher population.

Table 3: Employment status of German born teachers
in comparison to the total Australian teacher population

Employment status	German born teachers		Australian teacher population	
	n	%	n	%
Employed, worked full time	706	52%	199,751	63%
Employed, worked part-time	554	41%	101,513	32%
Employed, away from work	63	5%	14,419	4%
Employed, hours not stated	22	2%	3,782	1%
Total	1,345	100%	319,465	100%

Further data compiled (Table 4) shows that most German born teachers have qualifications equivalent to a bachelor degree (51%), followed by a graduate diploma (19%), a masters degree (14%) and an advanced diploma (13%) (ABS, 2011b). A small number of teachers have a doctorate (2%) or are recorded to have a certificate (1%) (ABS, 2011b). These numbers compare well with the general Australian teaching population and with previous findings on overseas born teachers (Santoro et al., 2001; Collins & Reid, 2012). Yet, the percentage of German born teachers reported to have a graduate diploma, a masters, a doctorate or an equal German qualification is higher compared to the whole Australian teacher population. This is illustrating the “accumulated substantial amount of human capital in the form of teaching qualifications” that Collins and Reid (2012, p. 45)

found migrant teachers bring into the Australian teaching labour market. Given the extensive teacher education in Germany (OECD, 2013), these data substantiate the 'brain gain' Collins and Reid (2012, p. 8) saw in migrant teachers for Australia.

Table 4: Qualifications of German born teachers in comparison to the total Australian teacher population

Qualification	German born teachers		Australian teacher population	
	n	%	n	%
Doctoral degree level	24	2%	1,742	1%
Masters degree level	175	14%	28,133	9%
Graduate diploma level	238	19%	46,596	15%
Bachelor degree level	647	51%	196,348	64%
Advanced diploma level	166	13%	31,779	10%
Certificate level	19	1%	2,775	1%
Total	1,269	100%	307,373	100%

This first section has provided some quantitative insights into the demographic and professional characteristics of German born teachers in Australia. Based on data compiled from the 2011 national Australian census, German born teachers represent an important and stable source of highly qualified teachers for the Australian education system. They are present across all states and territories in Australia, with larger numbers in the more densely populated states. German born teachers are more likely to be female, 40 years and older, and predominantly work as secondary teachers in Australian schools. As such, German born teachers are typical for migrant teachers in Australia and their characteristics reflect the profile of the overall overseas born and educated teacher cohort in Australia (Collins & Reid, 2012; Santoro et al., 2001). Yet, variations seem to exist between German born teachers and the total Australian teacher population in terms of age, occupation sector, employment status, and qualifications. While this section offered some statistical information about the German born teacher cohort in Australia as a whole, the following second part offers data from a narrative study with ten German born teachers in Western Australia to gain a more defined description of German migrant teachers' situation.

Narrative study with German migrant teachers in Western Australia

This study was initiated by the researcher's personal experiences as a German born and educated teacher in Australia. Having to learn the local professional language (Deters, 2006) and to negotiate familiar ways of teaching with new practices (Peeler, 2005) when establishing a professional career as a LOTE (German) teacher in Western Australia, prompted an interest in the issue of migrant teachers in Australia. Given that German migrant teachers' views on the topic are largely unknown, the research followed an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The aim was to learn more about German migrant teachers and their experiences within the Australian education system.

A study was designed using narratives as the method of inquiry (Bense, 2012). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that asks participants to tell their personal accounts of events in order to understand their circumstances and perspectives (Clandinin, 2007). This approach was particularly suitable, given the researcher's own background (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007), language skills (Temple & Young, 2004) and access to a particular community group. For instance, professional affiliation to the *Teacher Association of German, Western Australia* (TAGWA) has significantly facilitated the recruitment of participants for the study, as the majority of participants were contacted during a TAGWA meeting in February 2012. Plus, the researcher's own experiences as a German born and educated teacher in Australia undoubtedly helped to create uniquely trusted relationships with the participants. This, together with letting the German migrant teachers tell their accounts in their native language, enabled the capturing of natural and rich data desired in narrative research.

The interviews were conducted over a period of two years from 2012 to 2014. The conversations were guided by a number of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions was determined prior to the meetings. All interviews were audio recorded. The collected interview data were analysed following an inductive way of identifying, analysing, and reporting themes. Thus, the coding was done without a pre-existing theoretical frame or analytic preconceptions and was data-driven. The research used an approach which aimed to describe the experiences, meanings and reality of the participants of the study. Themes generated across the whole data set include: different expectations/values regarding teaching and learning, a lack of support and feelings of isolation, difficult student behaviour, a lack of teaching resources, a lack of local educational knowledge, and minor language barriers.

However, it is important to recognise the impact of the researcher's own background and experiences on the research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledged this ambiguity in qualitative research methodologies, and argued:

What may appear as an objective tape recording of a structured interview is already an interpretive and contextualized text: it is interpretive because it is shaped by the interpretive processes of researcher and participant and their relationship, and it is contextualized because of the particular circumstances of the interviewer's origin and setting. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 94)

Thus, the study recognises this active role of the researcher not only during data collection but also the analysis of the data. In order to address this issues, efforts were made to reduce biases in the interpretation of the findings. Measures taken included participant checking and fixed participant selection criteria. In addition, the interview data, translations, identified themes, and the research report have undergone a peer-review process at the researcher's affiliated institution. Yet at the same time it is argued that, the researcher's background enabled a level of analysis and interpretation that is not available to monolingual scholars (Temple & Young, 2004) or researchers without experience as migrant teachers (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007).

Census data show that in 2011, 147 German born teachers were living in Western Australia, with the large majority recorded in the Greater Perth region (112 teachers). Only small numbers of German born teachers were recorded for the rural Bunbury area (13), and the remote Outback (12) and Wheat Belt areas (10). (The census data do not provide any further classification regarding places of residence. Terms used in this section represent labels applied in the ABS data collection.) Still, locating and recruiting these teachers as participants for the study proved rather difficult since the *Department of Education & Training* (DET) is obliged to maintain anonymity of their employees. Other formal avenues of participant recruitment, such as information letters to principals of schools indicated by the DET to offer LOTE German as part of the curriculum, were largely unsuccessful. Eventually, all participants were recruited through the researcher's network of German language teachers in Western Australia (TAGWA). As a result, all ten teachers surveyed in this study were teaching in the key learning area of LOTE German in schools in Western Australia at the time of the study. Although this selection was not initially intended, this sample is highly representative for this focus group in Australia. For example, Santoro et al. (2001) reported that the majority of overseas born teachers in their study were working as teachers of LOTE (36.3%) in Australia. Similarly, a recent large-scale international survey found that, with 43%, most migrant teachers were hired to teach in the subject area of foreign languages in their host country (Caravatti et al., 2014).

Characteristics of surveyed German migrant teachers in Western Australia

All participants of this study lived in the greater region of Perth. Further, all interviewees were female and ranged in age from 29 to 66 years, with six of the ten teachers being 40 years and older. Again, this selection was unintentional, but is fairly consistent with the demographic data about German born teachers in Australia and previous study reports on migrant teachers in Australia (Reid et al., 2014; Santoro et al., 2001). Moreover, statistics show that in the specialist area of LOTE, female teachers outnumber male teachers, particularly in the senior secondary years, and teachers are often 41 years and older (Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 1999). All teachers interviewed in this study were born in Germany and attended school there. Finally, all participants were German native speakers.

Similar to the total population of German born teachers in Australia (Table 2), the ten interviewed teachers worked across all levels of schooling. Four teachers were working in secondary education, another three in primary education, one teacher was working across both levels, one in adult education and secondary education, and one participant was working in adult education only. What is noticeable is that, at the time of the interviews, five of the participants were working at independent schools, with four teachers employed at Waldorf or Montessori schools, and only three at government schools. Since all participants worked as teachers of German in Western Australia, employment depends on the number of positions available in schools offering German as part of their curriculum. Consequently, one teacher was working in casual employment and one was teaching German in adult education. Seven teachers were employed as school teachers at the time of the study and another one was employed but temporarily away from work.

All teachers interviewed had acquired significant professional qualifications and teaching experiences before and after arriving in Australia, which is consistent with previous findings on overseas born teachers (Collins & Reid, 2012) and ABS data on German born teachers in Australia (Table 4). Five of the teachers had completed three to five years of initial teacher education in Germany (*Staatsexamen I*) plus two years of preparatory training in German schools (*Staatsexamen II*). Two teachers had a Bachelor of Education from Australia and two teachers had completed a Master of Education, one in England and one in Germany, following recent changes in teacher education in some federal states of Germany. Also, one German migrant teacher had obtained qualifications in early childhood as well as Waldorf education in Germany.

Due to a shortage of permanent positions in the specialist area of LOTE (German), most teachers in this study had experience teaching German across the various levels of education in Australia, including primary, secondary, and adult education plus across the diverse educational sectors, such as public and private education, as well as other. For example, one teacher had worked in Perth as a teacher of German for over 25 years and during that time had worked in primary, secondary, and in adult education, such as TAFE and for the *Goethe Society WA* (n.d.). Similarly, two teachers, who were only in the process of establishing a teaching career in Western Australia, had already worked across all levels and sectors of schooling within the short period of two and four years. These findings vividly illustrate the difficulties of securing a permanent position as a teacher of LOTE (German) in the Perth metropolitan area regardless of qualifications, teaching experiences, and relevant language skills.

All ten German migrant teachers interviewed in this study had gained broad teaching experience in schools in Western Australia, with four participants having between 0-4 years of teaching experience, another four with 5-9 years, one participant with 15 years, and another teacher with more than 25 years of work experience in Australia. In the following section, these experiences are explored in greater detail drawing on the collected narratives. Although it is the overall aim of narrative research to give a voice to participants and their experiences, in this paper the findings of the study are summarised and reported in quantitative form. Presented are the results of the analyses of the data corpus as a whole, whereas specific aspects of the stories, which the teachers shared during the interviews, formed the focus of more detailed and nuanced analyses in other papers (Bense, 2012; Bense, 2014).

Experiences of German migrant teachers in Western Australian schools

Five of the participants described their start in Australian classrooms as a 'difficult' and 'stressful' time. Two teachers revealed during the interviews how they thought about giving up their teaching career because of the obstacles they faced. Four interviewees said they 'didn't feel well prepared' for teaching in Australia. For instance, only one teacher reported that she was offered an orientation program at an independent school, but received no form of introduction at the public school, where she taught first. The most common issue, described by nine of the ten German migrant teachers, was negotiating familiar educational values and expectations with local practices. (Table 5 illustrates the

incidents/patterns of various difficulties as reported by the ten individual teachers.) The interviewees narrated how they initially had *different expectations* regarding student behaviour, learning and teaching styles, their teacher status as well as their professional role, both as teacher and as a member of staff. For example, eight of the participants described differences in learning style between students from the two countries that referred to a more independent work style and sense of responsibility of German students. Five of the teachers discussed the *different value* of foreign languages in the two countries (Bense, 2014). The participants described how they translated their previous expectations regarding language teaching and learning to the Australian context and the challenges they encountered as a result of this, including issues with student behaviour, a lower teacher status, and a lack of teaching resources.

The second most common problem for the interviewed teachers was a *lack of support* and *feelings of isolation*, which were articulated by eight of the interviewed teachers. Five of the participants described how they felt 'lonely' as they had 'no other teachers to talk to' and converse with. Five of the teachers communicated a lack of administrative support at their school and a lack of understanding from colleagues. Only two teachers said that they had some form of a mentor, but not at the first schools they were appointed to.

Table 5: Difficulties experienced by interviewed German migrant teachers in Western Australia

Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Different expectations/values	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X
Lack of support/isolation	X	X	X	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
Student behaviour	X	X	-	-	-	X	-	X	-	X
Inadequate teaching resources	-	X	X	-	-	X	X	-	X	-
Lack of local knowledge	X	-	X	-	-	-	-	X	X	-
Language barriers	-	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	X	-

Other difficulties narrated by the German migrant teachers in this study included *student behaviour*, *inadequate teaching resources*, and a *lack of local knowledge*. For instance, their lack of knowledge regarding 'the standard of discipline', local classroom management practices, and the overall behaviour management plan at their school, led to 'insecurities' and problems with student behaviour for five teachers. Other teachers bemoaned a lack of resources in their teaching area at school, such as language books for students and teaching materials, and narrated how preparation for class was difficult and time consuming as a result of this. Finally, *language barriers* were mentioned by four teachers, however, these were only described as minor issues, such as not being as articulate and 'quick-witted' as they would have liked, and were primarily voiced by teachers who were new to Australia (Number 6, 8, and 9).

What was noticeable is that, the teachers who had lived and/or taught in Australia for a long time (Number 10 and 4) and teachers who had completed teacher qualifications in either Australia or the United Kingdom (Number 1 and 10) described the fewest problems (Table 5). As might be expected, knowledge of local educational practices and

values seem to have better prepared these teachers for Australian classrooms. Also, teachers (Number 2, 4, 5, and 7) working at Montessori or Waldorf schools described fewer difficulties. It is possible that, the alternative educational approach at these schools facilitated an easier professional transition for these four teachers. In contrast, teachers who had completed teacher education in Germany and who were just in the process of establishing a teaching career in Australia (Number 3, 6, 8, and 9), reported the most difficulties. One reason for this might be that, these experiences were only recent and fresh in the teachers' mind. A lack of local knowledge, such as administrative procedures and socio-culturally based expectations and values regarding teaching led to misunderstandings and problems for these teachers. Insufficient institutional and collegial support further aggravated the situation and led to feelings of isolation and marginalisation for the teachers.

Relation to previous research

Overall, the difficulties described by the German migrant teachers in this study are consistent with existing research on overseas born teachers in Australia. Therefore, it can be assumed that a lack of support, differing expectations and values, a lack of local knowledge and difficulties with student behaviour are general problems for migrant teachers settling into Australian school culture. On the other hand, previously reported difficulties for migrant teachers in Australia with a rigid employment process (Reid et al., 2014; Sharplin, 2009) or experiences of racism and discrimination (Reid et al., 2014) were not voiced by the ten teachers in this study. In this point, their experiences clearly differed from those of other overseas born and educated teachers in previous studies (Reid et al., 2014; Sharplin, 2009), and the reasons for those variations in findings have to be explored in further research. Finally, language barriers appear not to be such a big challenge as reported in other research (Kato, 1998; Reid & Collins, 2012; Sharplin, 2009), and were predominantly voiced by teachers who were still dealing with the language transition. Possible reasons for fewer reported communication issues include considerable English language skills, a general appreciation for native speakers in foreign language education, and the use of German as dominant language of instruction in class.

All ten participants in this study were working as teachers of LOTE (German). As such, the described experiences must be seen as specific to the participants and the particular context of this subject area. For instance, 'professional isolation' (Santoro et al., 2001) has been highlighted in previous research as a particular problem for migrant teachers working in LOTE education in Australia. This situation is created by the circumstance that LOTE teachers often work as the only specialist teacher at their school, and is further "amplified by perceptions that their subject area [LOTE] is of little value", Kostogriz and Peeler (2007, p. 113) reported. It is possible that these conditions aggravated the situation for the interviewed German migrant teachers, as eight of ten teachers described feelings of isolation and a sense of marginalisation in their narratives. This was the case despite the participants' membership in a professional association and perhaps one of the reasons for that involvement. Although the members of TAGWA come together for professional development training at an annual conference, the findings suggest that this one-off event

is not able to provide sufficient support for German migrant teachers to transition successfully into language classes in Western Australia. Also, socio-culturally based and value laden concepts (Seah & Bishop, 2001) towards language education (e.g. teacher status, teaching resources, student learning behaviour and time allocation) needed to be negotiated with local strategies by the German migrant teachers (Bense, 2014). It is to be hoped that the latest initiatives, including the development of a national curriculum, bring about a change in language education and attitudes towards foreign languages that also enhances the work conditions for teachers working in this subject area.

Further, all participants were working in the metropolitan Perth area. Hence, the experiences described by the interviewees must be understood within the context of the specific location in Perth. Currently, the local *Department of Education* (DET) offers an *Entry and Orientation Program* designed to support overseas-trained teachers “by familiarising them with current best practice in Western Australian public schools” (Department of Education. Institute of Professional Learning, n.d.). This two-day program is offered to a broader audience, including returning and interstate-trained teachers. It appears, however, that this very brief and generic workshop does not provide sufficient support for migrant teachers settling into Western Australian schools. Although three teachers discussed the orientation program with the DET (n.d.) during the interviews and described the course as helpful, they still felt left alone with their challenges. Many teachers expressed that they would have liked some form of mentoring and more support from the DET during the difficult phase of negotiating and finding their way. This is consistent with findings by Reid, Collins and Singh (2010), who found that an increased professional support for migrant teachers in Australia was the most common request by the 51 survey respondents from WA. While they also found that the experiences of migrant teachers surveyed in their study varied between states because of differing processes in NSW, WA, and SA, including varying induction procedures, a request for more support for migrant teachers was still the third most common answer across the board, after changes to assessment policies and “student related issues” (Reid et al., 2010, p. 161).

Conclusion and implications of the findings

This study provides some valuable information about the circumstances and experiences of German migrant teachers in Australia. Especially, the qualitative part of this research revealed some crucial aspects of the challenges the teachers faced while settling into Australia. The results showed some differences in frequency and significance of difficulties compared to previous research, which predominantly had drawn on participants from Asian backgrounds. Differences in experiences related to fewer reported issues with employment processes, racism/discrimination, and language barriers for German migrant teachers. Here, the findings offer a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the overseas born and educated teacher population in Australia, even though the small size and homogeneity of the sample are limiting the study’s potential for generalisability.

Yet overall, the findings resemble in many aspects the results of previous studies on migrant teachers in Australia. As German born teachers represent the largest non-native English speaking teacher cohort in Australia and their demographics, in many ways, reflect the profile of Australia's overseas born and educated teacher cohort, their experiences can be seen as illustrative of these teachers' situations. Thus, in the context of previous research, there is sufficient empirical evidence in this study to tentatively make inferences about the acculturation and professional adjustment of migrant teachers to Australian teaching contexts. Particularly, the overall lack of support for migrant teachers in Australia has been reported by a number of studies, including work by Peeler (2002), Peeler and Jane (2005), Reid et al. (2014), Santoro et al. (2001), and Sharplin (2009). This study corroborates these earlier findings and reinforces previous calls for an improvement of current support policies and practices for migrant teachers in Australia (Peeler, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Reid et al., 2010; Santoro et al., 2001; Sharplin, 2009).

Suggestions for change

Although acknowledging the limitations of the study, this paper proposes a number of recommendations for change. First of all, it would be beneficial to put strategies into place that facilitate the professional transition of migrant teachers into the Australian school environment, as the assistance currently provided is evidently inadequate. If overseas born and educated teachers are to be retained in Australian classrooms, and to ensure they can make valuable contributions to our education system, it is crucial that these teachers do not have to continue struggling in isolation, but receive adequate preparation and support. Various studies have provided recommendations for the provision of support for migrant teachers. For instance, Peeler and Jane (2005) and Santoro et al. (2001) emphasised that support practices have to acknowledge and value the previous teaching experiences of migrant teachers. International research, including that undertaken by Fee (2011) and Walsh, Brigham and Wang (2011), suggested courses that are tailored to the specific needs of migrant teachers and provide practical opportunities for migrant teachers to familiarise themselves with the new teaching context. Such classes need to address general educational expectations, the local educational system, job expectations, assessment practices, student characteristics, as well as issues relevant to specific subject areas (Hutchison, 2006). Mentoring programs, while found to be able to 'bridge the gap' between previous and new educational practices (Peeler & Jane, 2005) and described as a valuable source of assistance by the participants in this study, were only available to two teachers. Also, peer-support networks of migrant teachers have great potential for providing information, professional support, and counselling to newly arrived teachers (Guo & Singh, 2009).

However, such connections need to be frequent in order to be effective, as the interviews showed. The implementation of coordinated, long-term and specific programs for teachers new to Australia, which offer induction, re-qualification courses, professional development, and ongoing support, is vital. Such programs should be viewed as more than helping migrant teachers to succeed in their new work environment and to retain them in the Australian school system (Collins et al., 2010), under conditions where career plans and work morale can be affected by negative experiences (Bense, 2014; Sharplin,

2009). Such programs are also important as a contribution to the quality of teaching (Bartlett, 2014; Caravatti et al., 2014) and the learning outcomes for Australian students.

This is now all the more the case, as international teacher mobility and migration are increasing dramatically and teachers have become one of the ‘most mobile professions’ (European Commission, n.d.). If Australia wants to compete successfully within a global teaching labour market in the future, there is an urgent need to rethink current approaches. A second important point, therefore, is for educational research to direct its attention to transnational and collaborative research in order to gather evidence on best practices in other countries and their potential for a future replication and systematic integration at regional and/or national level across Australia. Finally, teacher education research has to respond to issues posed by increasing globalisation and teacher mobility. In order for teacher education in Australia to adequately prepare future generations of educational professionals, it is essential to understand what knowledge and skills are needed to meet the challenges arising from international teacher mobility and migration.

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