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Tertium comparationis 21 (2015) 2, S. 161-184

Quellenangabe/ Reference:
Lengyel, Drorit; Rosen, Lisa: Diversity in the staff room - Ethnic minority student teachers' perspectives on the recruitment of minority teachers - In: Tertium comparationis 21 (2015) 2, S. 161-184 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-246407 - DOI: 10.25656/01:24640

https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-246407
https://doi.org/10.25656/01:24640

Tertium Comparationis
Journal für International und Interkulturell
Vergleichende Erziehungswissenschaft
Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 161–184, 2015

Diversity in the staff room – Ethnic minority student teachers' perspectives on the recruitment of minority teachers[1]

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Abstract

Responding to the educational policy that was recently implemented in Germany and that calls for an increase in the recruitment of minority teachers, this study investigates the perspectives of minority student teachers about said policy, about the roles that are ascribed to them, and about multilingualism as a professional resource. The data was gathered in the context of the teaching-research project 'Diversity in the staff room'. For the purpose of this article, portfolio entries and focus groups with minority student teachers where analyzed drawing on grounded theory. The findings reveal the groups' overall ambivalent attitudes towards the policy call mentioned above. On the one hand, the students are willing to contribute to the reduction of educational disadvantage, but on the other hand, they doubt that this policy strategy is sufficient to change the educational environment in a sustainable way. With reference to their multilingual resources, it becomes apparent that the students develop a sense for recognizing situations in which their heritage languages and their experience learning German can be helpful in professional classroom practices. Still, they are not entirely convinced of this and make it contingent upon certain conditions that have to be met in the school system.

1. Introduction

In Germany – as in other European countries – the academic performance of ethnic minority pupils is significantly below the level of their native peers (Prenzel, Sälzer, Klieme & Köller, 2013, p. 10). One strategy intended to reduce this disadvantage, as discussed in educational policy, is to recruit teachers of ethnic minority heritage since the number of minority teachers is still very low in comparison to the

overall number of minority pupils. At 6.1 %, the percentage of minorities in the teaching profession is well below the average of minorities with college degrees engaged in other occupations (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2012, p. 82). When taking nationality into consideration and not the own birthplace or parental birthplace, this percentage even drops to just under 1 % (cf. Stürzer, Täubig, Uchronski, & Bruhns, 2012, p. 52).

The argument put forth within educational policy is that minority teachers are equipped with specific resources due to their bilingual and bicultural upbringing. For example, according to the ministry of the most populous German state, North Rhine-Westphalia:

Teachers of ethnic minority origin can "draw upon their bicultural background not only as mediators between cultures. They are also role models for positive integration and successful educational careers. As they are familiar with many problems that immigrants face, having experienced such problems themselves, they are able to identify and tackle specific problems with greater sensitivity, awareness, and success"[2] (MSW NRW, 2007, p. 3).

Minority teachers are also expected to use these resources as professional competencies to enhance minority pupils' academic achievement. Analyzing educational policy documents, Akbaba, Bräu, and Zimmer (2013, p. 52) outline one negative aspect such policy objectives: They point out that the optimistic expectations that are projected onto minority teachers – to be bridge builders, integration enablers, language and cultural mediators, etc. – are stigmatizing "from a pedagogical and professional perspective," for such culturalization constrains teachers' actions and complicates their self-determined construction of ethnicity (ibid.).

Although international research shows some effects of ethnic minority teacher recruitment on the academic performance of students from the same ethnic group (Karakaşoğlu, 2011, p. 125 ff.), relevant findings emphasize entry barriers, unequal treatment, discrimination, and racism experienced by minority teachers in teacher training and in the labor market (Carrington & Tomlin, 2000; Cunningham & Hargreaves, 2007; Lynn & Lewis, 2009).

All in all, research focusing on recruitment and increasing the participation of ethnic minority teachers has been conducted in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States since the 1980s, whereas in Germany this research has just begun. Several publications have, however, already been published in German, summarizing and systematizing the current state of international and national research (cf. Strasser & Steber, 2010; Mantel & Leutwyler, 2013; Georgi, 2013). These publications concur that additional empirical evidence is necessary to substantiate the effectiveness of certain educational policy strategies. Research on ethnic minority teachers in German-speaking countries is generally considered a desideratum

(cf. Mantel & Leutwyler, 2013, p. 236 ff.) which is even more acute in terms of ethnic minority student teachers. Within the context of educational policy discourse, it is "particularly critical to ask how the student teachers themselves assess their role as sources of hope for the future or ambassadors of integration" (Bandorski & Karakaşoğlu, 2013, p. 133).

Such considerations were the starting point of our research focusing on future ethnic minority teachers. Our aim is to evaluate the educational policy position mentioned previously with its objective of 'integration and social cohesion through specific recruitment' by comparing and contrasting it to the perspectives of ethnic minority student teachers in teacher education (Lengyel & Rosen, 2012).

Thus, in this article we continue with a discussion of the state of research on minority student teachers (2) and explain the ramifications of our project (3). In the fourth section, we present our findings from group discussions (4.1) and portfolio entries (4.2) regarding minority student teachers' perspectives as they pertain to certain relevant educational policy objectives. Furthermore, we examine how these student teachers evaluated their anticipated role as language mediators, and through analyses of their portfolios, we also reconstruct the students' assessments of how they anticipate dealing with their own multilingualism as (future) educators (4.3). In conclusion, based on our findings, we present hypotheses and pose questions relevant for future research involving 'ethnic minority teachers' (5).

2. The state of research on minority student teachers in German-speaking countries

In this section, we present an overview of the few publications currently addressing the topic of minority student teachers. We examine their research questions, methodological approaches, and results. The majority of projects discussed here were still in progress at the time of publication of this article; thus, only their initial findings are presented here.

At the University of Bremen, a study utilizing a mixed methods design to investigate student teachers' levels of progress and satisfaction in terms of their university studies was developed and conducted as "research sensitive to migration issues and aimed at carrying out an empirical needs assessment" (Bandorski & Karakaşoğlu, 2013, p. 133).[3] The quantitative methods involved the collection of data from 560 student teachers via written questionnaires (ibid., p. 136). Using cluster and factor analysis, the researchers determined that the "great majority of students of ethnic minority heritage … do not consider themselves 'a group' with specific features and need for support." Therefore, the researchers recommend not addressing them as such in order to avoid stigmatizing them; only a limited number of stu-

dents have specific needs when it comes to language support (ibid., p. 147). Bandorski and Karakaşoğlu argue that this sample of minority students is slightly more sensitive toward inequality in general than those students of non-minority heritage, but these are to be considered "cautiously corroborative indicators" aligned with educational policy objectives (ibid., p. 152). However, what is more pronounced in their motivation regarding career choice is the desire to be role models for pupils of both minority and non-minority heritage, and this desire "does not specifically refer to the group of children or youth of minority heritage, the benchmark set by policy makers as the 'distinct group' of minority teachers; rather, their motivation does not depend on specific target group categories such as minority vs. non-minority, girl/boy, etc." (ibid., p. 153).

Concerning the perceptions of university teachers accompanying student teachers of minority and non-minority heritage during their practical training, Wojciechowicz (2013)[4] provides a detailed evaluation of one problem-centered interview from the ten she conducted and assessed according to the documentary method and the grounded theory (ibid., pp. 120, 122 ff.). According to her research question about the interpretive patterns and potentially connected ethnic markers of difference among university teachers, Wojciechowicz comes to the following conclusion: Minority teachers' study habits are marked by deficit ascriptions according to features of ethnic classification and difficulties during their studies are explained in a culturally deterministic manner (ibid., p. 120). In a similar manner, Döll and Knappik (2013) investigate constructions of difference within the contexts of university and the initial phases of professionalization; they are especially interested in mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in Austrian teacher education when it comes to creating language hierarchies. While these studies focus on university teachers' perspectives and attitudes about migration-related diversity, the following studies focus on the perspectives of student teachers.

Schlickum (2013) is interested in "student teachers' frames of reference in dealing with cultural diversity" (p. 109) and outlines these in the context of a pilot study at the University of Mainz involving five group discussions comprised of three to five participants each (ibid.). Based on the analysis of one of the group discussions according to the documentary method, she indicates that in terms of approaches to language standardization in school none of the student teachers, whether of minority or non-minority heritage, questioned the general "required obligation to use the national language" (ibid., p. 115). If the issue of discrimination should arise in this context, it is not directed at questioning the requirement itself "but rather its general implementation" (ibid.). No differences were found among students when taking minority or non-minority heritage into consideration (ibid., p. 116). At the University of Cologne, Panagiotopoulou and Rosen (2015) reach similar con-

clusions in their project involving thirty-two student teachers both of minority and non-minority heritage as they interviewed one other, resulting in sixteen guideline-assisted peer-interviews. Their analysis is based on grounded theory and indicates that minority student teachers assess their experiences of (self-)exclusion due to their (own) non-German languages in educational contexts as illegitimate or discriminatory only to a very limited degree, thus barely distancing themselves from such practices within the German school system. On the contrary, they advocate a monolingual approach at school. Also at the University of Cologne, Lengyel and Rosen (2012) conducted four group discussions, each consisting of three to four minority student teachers, involving self-evaluations of their intercultural competencies, and analyzed their data using grounded theory. Using in-vivo coding, "giving us somewhat of an advantage" (ibid., p. 78), the authors indicate that the majority of these students assume they have a higher level of intercultural competence when compared to student teachers of non-minority heritage. At the same time, they also emphasize that students of non-minority heritage can and should acquire such competencies. They refer to attitudes such as openness, tolerance, appreciation, and individualization, which they stress are crucial, and even more importantly, heritage-independent elements of pedagogical professionalism when dealing with migration-related diversity (ibid., p. 81 ff.).

In summary, it is apparent that the minority student respondents do not see themselves as a cohesive group that accepts being identified based solely on their minority heritage, although the university instructor respondents engage precisely in such practices and tend to approach these students with deficit-based attitudes (e.g. in terms of their language practices). Analysis of their professional approaches indicates that minority students, similar to students of non-minority heritage, tend to adopt the strategies of the (monolingual) school system. Additionally, minority students consider themselves to be at an advantage over students of non-minority heritage with regard to intercultural competence.

3. The research project 'Diversity in the staff room'

The teaching-research project 'Diversity in the staff room' provides the context and framework of our study. We conducted this project for the first time at the University of Cologne during the winter term of 2010-11.[5] The objective of this seminar was for students to articulate their own positions in light of educational policy initiatives assigning them roles as language and cultural mediators. In addition to theory-guided discussions about 'multilingualism', 'intercultural competence', and 'discrimination', empowerment methods, in particular, as well as biographical reflection and portfolio work were intended to facilitate a reflective process, moving

from biographical resources toward professional competencies. Given this context, the research instruments are also simultaneously university didactic methods of teacher education. We analyzed students' learning-process portfolios (cf. Gläser-Zikuda, Voigt, & Rohde, 2010, p. 147) in which they made entries during the seminars and between block modules (for an overview, see Gläser-Zikuda, Rohde & Schlomske, 2010; Koch-Priewe, 2013). We recorded, transcribed, and made available for further analysis the discussions which the students in groups of three or four engaged in during peer-learning phases which involved consolidation of theoretical understanding and reflection on personal critical incidents (cf. Flechsig, 1999, p. 217; Hiller, 2010).

The research questions we focus on in this article are closely connected to the previously mentioned educational policy initiatives, giving students themselves the opportunity to express whether or not they wish to be perceived as sources of hope for the future and integration ambassadors at school. Thus, the questions are: How do they foresee their ascribed roles as linguistic and cultural mediators, and which chances and obstacles do they anticipate? Furthermore, how do they expect to deal with their multilingualism as a biographical resource within future educational contexts?

To answer the first question we draw on data from four focus groups in each of which three to four students discussed their views about the linguistic and cultural mediator roles attributed to them (see 4.1). This method of data collection is particularly suitable for eliciting opinions beyond hegemonic discourse. According to Pollock, one epistemological goal of group discussions is to elicit "non-public opinions," which "the individual often only becomes aware of during discussions with others" (quoted in Lamnek, 1995, p. 141 ff.). Here the manner of communication in the group, inspired by everyday practices, becomes "the means to reconstruct individual opinions in an appropriate manner" (Flick, 1995, p. 133). Additionally, we are interested in group opinions, or the consensus among participants, reached during discussions about specific issues (ibid.).

In addition and in order to expand our knowledge base (key term 'triangulation', see Flick, 2011, p. 41), our data is gathered from portfolio entries wherein students were asked to evaluate educational policy initiatives striving for 'diversity in the staff room' and to discuss which roles they themselves wanted to assume in relation to these issues (see 4.2).

To address the question of how students anticipated dealing with their multilingualism in the future, we also drew on portfolio entries written for the purpose of reflecting on their multilingual biographies (see 4.3).

Drawing on grounded theory (cf. Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Hülst, 2010; Charmaz, 2014) the students' portfolios were processed in MAXQDA to enable

computer-assisted analyses, initially through open coding and then through axial coding (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1996, pp. 43 ff., 75 ff.). The objective of this analysis was to develop explorative theoretical concepts about these minority student teachers' perspectives and expectations.

Before discussing our findings, we would like to present our initial discussion questions and the related portfolio assignments in order to describe in detail how the students' (written) statements were generated.

First, some information about the participants themselves: This group consisted of fifteen female students who were, on average, approximately 29 years old. Given that the average age among undergraduate students working toward a B.A. was 22.9 and among students pursuing the German 'Staatsexamen' was 24.0, the average age of the research project participants was relatively high. Nine students were first-generation immigrants, and the remaining six were second-generation immigrants. Immigration status was determined based on the respondents' country of birth and their parents' countries of birth. Nine students born outside of Germany considered a language other than German to be their first language. Of the six students born in Germany, only one considered German to be her sole first language; three students grew up multilingually and two reported a language other than German as their first language. All fifteen students reported that they wanted their future children to grow up bilingually. The majority of students (eight) were studying to become secondary school teachers, six to become primary school teachers and one was pursuing a degree in special education.

4. Student teachers' perspectives on the chances and challenges of minority teachers – the results

First, we turn to the question of how the students evaluate the cultural and language mediator roles attributed to them: What opportunities and obstacles do they perceive in this context? Subsequently, we address how they anticipate using their multilingual resources as teachers in school.

4.1 Results from group discussions about their role as 'special teachers' and their assessment of the educational policy objective calling for diversity in the staff room

The topic of interest was discussed in the context of a focus group concerned with intercultural communication and competence. The students' task was to explore the role of power asymmetries within a critical incident and to derive a model of intercultural competence in which the susceptibility to failure of intercultural communication is primarily attributed to power asymmetries, and cultural differences are of

secondary importance (Auernheimer, 2013). This was followed by the question of how students, bearing Auernheimer's model in mind, would evaluate the call for more diversity in the staff room and how they would assess the argument that ethnic minority teachers should be cultural mediators.

An overarching similarity throughout the discussions is that the students feel particularly responsible for shaping immigrant society and enabling equal opportunities in education; at the same time, they wish to simply be considered members of the staff and not be reduced to the role of integration experts. This result is consistent with other initial findings about minority teachers (cf. Bandorski & Karakaşoğlu, 2013, p. 134). The opportunities they associate with the call for staff, i.e. faculty diversity also represent obstacles. This ambivalence is portrayed differently within the four groups. We continue by tracing how each of these four groups reached their respective conclusions.

The participants of one group emphasized that the responsibility for reducing educational disadvantages of migrant pupils should not only be sustained by a group of 'experts', but also be supported by the involvement of each and every teacher. Their considerations also took into account the academic training of student teachers. Migration issues should be a mandatory element of the curriculum. High-rated aspects included: Knowledge about causes of migration and migrants' motives and familiarity with the environment within which migrants live as well as the diversity of religious expression and religious background. Building on this knowledge, it would be possible to further develop other important skills such as sensitivity, commitment, and openness. Emphasizing these dimensions of knowledge and crucial attitudes went hand in hand with uncertainty about the definition of 'culture' and the transmission and representation of migrant cultures in educational contexts. The discussants wondered whether this was what educational policy makers desired: "especially at school … to actually teach these cultures?" The students agreed that they were uncertain about what exactly was required of them as cultural mediators. They felt they were not up to the task, especially in terms of mediating between "the child" and the "German environment." This would require "a certain willingness … particularly on the German side … either on the part of school or of … society." However, they felt optimistic about the future and assumed that not only the situation in schools, but also the overall situation would improve and that Germany would become a more multicultural society. This forward-looking consensus concluded the discussion, although the students did not address how discrimination, for instance, could be reduced. Indeed, they justified their belief in a better future by pointing to positive developments in recent years. Intercultural education, for example, was now being offered as a subject in teacher

education. They expected this development to continue although they acknowledged that it could still take forty years to reach a satisfactory level.

The students in another group presented arguments along similar lines: They asserted that teachers and student teachers of non-minority heritage should "be thoughtful about this topic and should take great care," by participating in "such seminars," for example, and by taking the "experiences of others" into consideration. They also insisted the entire faculty needed to take responsibility for supporting migrant children and youth in their academic progress. Hence, they argue against a static distribution of tasks. Although they did not feel as optimistic about the future as the first group, this second group emphasized the complexities and the pressures that characterized teachers' daily lives. Thus, teachers lacked the time and capacity to deal with "migrant children." This would be the "fate for the moment" of minority teachers, i.e. the student teachers considered the role ascribed to them as an opportunity and agreed with the statement of one discussant who said, "Okay. We feel like we are up to the challenge." They were willing to adopt this role on a tentative basis, but their goal for the future was not to be viewed as "someone special" – or as "others." They adopted the term 'equality' (Gleichheit) in a unique manner. Their interpretation referred to a lesser extent to equal status in a formerly exclusively 'white' faculty, but rather to equal status in terms of pedagogical qualifications: "Each and every teacher should be equal in competence" and at the same time be able to be "somewhat different." This dilemma about uniformity and difference was resolved by the consensus that intercultural education was to be defined as a cross-sectional task. The participants' discomfort about their special status became particularly apparent when the topic of cooperation with parents arose. They agreed about this potential obstacle, and more precisely about the possibility that minority parents might take advantage of them, especially if these parents considered them "compatriots" according to the motto, "One good deed deserves another." The student teachers felt unprepared for such situations and wondered how to "stay polite" and still deflect such offers.

To some extent, the third group of students was more critical in their discussions of the cultural and language mediator roles they were expected to fulfill. For example:

> S2: … well, this formulation here, ff, yes ff migrant teacher should fulfill this role, this is yet another form of building stereotypes, well yes exactly
> S4: exactly, to peg someone as something

They broached the issue of "being the other" and addressed their discomfort with such circumstances. The discussants concurred with one student's remarks. They highlighted, once again, the importance of the individuality and uniqueness of every human being:

S3: What I like to stress in any case is, the importance of each human being an individual, the individuality of each and every human being
S1: mh (affirmation)
S3: … never mind which country he or she comes from, never mind if he or she is a migrant or not and if you deal with this person respectfully then it does not matter if the teacher is a migrant himself or not
S2: mh (affirmation)

The student teachers came to the conclusion that it was not important whether teachers were migrants or not; what was important was that they dealt with pupils in a respectful manner. It is also worth mentioning that the group discussed this while talking about professionalism and thus opposed the tendency to naturalize traits due to a history of migration. People treat one another respectfully because they choose to do so. This is the central argument the students used to rebuff the attribution of special competences due to minority heritage because, from their perspective, the willingness to treat people respectfully and recognize their humanity "in all their diversity" could and should exist and develop independently of teachers' personal backgrounds. This agreement is due to their immanent recourse to general social competencies and to a humanist conception of humankind as crucial elements of pedagogical professionalism. In doing so, they also draw the necessity of subject-specific competencies into question because they speak up in favor of treating each and every pupil as an individual, or rather, they consider this to be more important than merely focusing on minority heritage. They are likewise skeptical about the assertion that the group of minority teachers are "able to do the job." On the one hand, members of this group may feel they are predestined to fulfill the task of cultural mediator; on the other hand, being a member of a minority is not the only prerequisite required for such a task. Having the strength to accept the challenge of purposefully acting as minority teachers and supporting minority children and youth does not constitute a contradiction. The humanist conception they have developed as a guiding educational principle goes hand in hand with the desire for equal opportunities and their concerted willingness to engage in this.

The participants in the fourth group also deconstruct minority teachers' assumed, quasi-natural ability to better empathize with and understand minority pupils as well as their assumed ability to thus be better able at resolving conflicts among pupils. This qualifies as positive discrimination and the discussants draw parallels to racism. Discrimination and racism are not only background issues allowing discussants to criticize the *othering* of minorities by addressing them as *migrant others* (for term discussion see Mecheril, Castro Varela, Dirim, Kalpaka & Melter, 2010, p. 17); by using these categories, the discussants also question the effectiveness of recruiting minority teachers. Their main argument is that not only do members of the majority practice discrimination, but minorities do so as well:

S2: or perhaps, for example in my opinion, foreigners discriminate against others as well. Why do they think minorities would be more tolerant?
S1: yes exactly
S4: yes
S1: ... this is (incomprehensible)
S2: They discriminate (S1: yes yes) in the same way
S3: mh
S1: yes yes
S2: Perhaps they are not discriminating against their own [people], but other cultures.
S3: yes
S1: Of course, mh
S2: And that's why, who, I don't think, that it is sufficient to say it that way, right? A minority teacher, because a German teacher, who can say, that he would not be more tolerant mh than a minority teacher, right?
S2: These, this...
S3: Mh, yes
S2: ... connection I think somewhat, I don't think that this is something given
S3: Ascription that is not always correct
S2: Exactly, that...
S4: Mh
S2: Every person with minority heritage is being tolerant towards other cultures, that's not true
S1: That's not true at all

The students also associated the role of language and cultural mediator with the issue of discrimination; to be more precise, they associated it with the reduction of discrimination and tolerant attitudes. From their perspective, the call for increased faculty diversity does not reach far enough because the status of "member of a minority" does not prevent one from discriminating against others. Although they highlight collective involvement in discriminatory practices and tend to dismiss differences between people of minority and non-minority heritage, they nevertheless rely on terms like 'own' versus 'strange' as markers of difference. They distinguish between members of their own culture, which they consider to be differentiable, and those "other cultures" of minorities. For this reason, the students come to different conclusions when considering whether they are able to or even wish to fulfill the ascribed role of minority teacher. They, similar to the other groups, think that all staff should be responsible and become more knowledgeable in this field of action. The discussants argue not only normatively but also pragmatically: "a single" fighter cannot change anything within a monocultural school. They are afraid of being rejected by the non-minority members of the staff and of not being accepted by their colleagues. They see not only the necessity to foster cooperation between minority and non-minority teachers, but they also seek to build networks among minority teachers. By working with "many people" on the faculty, one can

"somehow push things forward" and "simply develop more openness and tolerance among the faculty."

In summary, the student teachers exhibit predominantly ambivalent attitudes toward the call for staff diversity. They are conflicted, for they assume that on the one hand, there is a need to reduce educational disadvantage and institutionalized discrimination and they want to facilitate this, but on the other hand, they are afraid of becoming involved in discriminatory practices themselves.

Throughout their respective discussions, the four groups resolved their quandaries by relying on different aspects of these dilemmas. They agreed about the following arguments, which they used to critically examine educational policy:

1. It is every teacher's responsibility! For that reason, minority issues should be an integral element of teacher education.
2. Giving minority teachers a special role is a provisional solution on the path toward education providing equal opportunities for all.
3. Minority heritage is not the only condition that predestines a person to function as a language and cultural mediator.
4. Minority heritage does not automatically ensure anti-discriminatory attitudes and actions.

If we further condense these four lines of argumentation, we can identify a common thread in the overall group consisting of the four focus groups. This theme may be described as "everyone involved assumes responsibilities when it comes to the unfulfilled promise of equal opportunities in education." The student teachers are willing to work toward this. Their commitment may be characterized by distinct contributions, but they doubt that this is sufficient to change the educational environment in a sustainable way. Another common attitude of the overall group is that both pupils and teachers of minority and non-minority heritage are subsumed under the label 'cultural belonging'. By doing this, they – and everyone else involved in the current discourse – run the risk of neglecting other lines of difference such as socio-economic background (cf. Knappik & Dirim, 2012, p. 92 f.). These explorative findings of the group discussions correspond to the analysis of the portfolio entries which is addressed in the next section. The (re)production of binary perspectives according to the pattern 'minority heritage' vs. 'non-minority heritage' also becomes apparent throughout students' individual reflections.

4.2 Results gathered from portfolios about the role of 'special teachers' and about the evaluation of the call for staff diversity

The closing evaluation of minority student teachers' perspectives about educational policy objectives are presented in writing as responses to the following assignment:

> Earlier today you were divided into small groups, and you discussed your personal experiences with discrimination at school. Based on theoretical explanatory models about prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination and (cultural) racism, re-evaluate your experiences and put your ideas in writing: How would you evaluate the targeted recruitment of minority teachers? Please explain your position.

All students reaffirm the educational policy demand for staff, i.e. faculty diversity and scrutinize it critically at the same time. Based on thirteen portfolio entries, it is possible to differentiate the following lines of argumentation:

One student presents the underrepresentation of minority teachers at German school as anachronistic. According to her, it is "long overdue … that more minority teachers work at schools." Instead of referring to "equality", her reasoning is mostly based on considerations of "enrichment" and "gain". She argues that the *enrichment that is achieved by increasing* the amount of minority teachers benefits two different "sides", those in school of minority and non-minority heritage: "I consider it to be a benefit for both sides. It opens up opportunities and possibilities for both sides to broaden horizons and perspectives." She assumes that it is a reciprocal process, which she underlies using educational theory (*broadening horizons through multiple perspectives*). The overarching concept, which is then further differentiated, is the *assumption and construction of various and binary perspectives* which confirm the educational policy agenda. Some students consider themselves to be at an advantage when it comes to social (communicative) competencies when compared with (student) teachers of non-minority heritage. Their *common or at the very least comparable space of experience* at school allows them to better empathize with minority pupils. This particular advantage is that they do not have a deficit-based opinion about minority heritage and can thereby contribute to the de-dramatization of the 'minority' label while at the same time being aware of the 'problems' that minority children and youth may encounter at school and in their everyday lives in society. The student teachers acknowledge the central role of the teacher-pupil relationship. They highlight *the conjunctive space of experience* that minority teachers and pupils *may have in common*, for instance, when it comes to the 'potentialities' of multilingualism; they do not expect this to occur automatically. The following are two examples:

> I would argue in favor of more minority teachers who often are more familiar with the everyday lives of minority children and are better able to cope with their problems. Minority teachers are more empathetic and do not consider minority status to be a problem.

> I do indeed believe that my multilingualism may allow me to create closer connections.

Other student teachers partially deconstruct the *assumption and construction of various and binary perspectives* and completely deconstruct opportunities for establishing relationships by pointing to the heterogeneity of the minority group as a

whole and the unique nature of minority experiences. They use the same argument to reject categorizations and ascriptions and thereby express their unanswered questions about the educational policy agenda as well as their fears of being exploited as minority teachers. "Nevertheless, the entire situation needs to be critically scrutinized! Are we mere stopgaps … in this system?" At the same time these student teachers emphasize their pedagogical stance of "leaving no child behind" and thereby demonstrating their willingness to assume responsibility. They consider their professional opportunities for action to be rather limited because *limitations in understanding cannot be bridged due to the highly personal nature of the conjunctive space of experience*. This is illustrated by the following prime example:

> As a student teacher – and having been a minority pupil – I have lived through … what my pupils go through. Nevertheless, I do not want to be pigeonholed because everyone has a unique background as a minority and consequently, a unique understanding of themselves …, which I cannot comprehend. What I can do is help whenever possible and teach them to trust in themselves.

In addition to these two dimensions, there is another that is based on the argument that a bridge builder role is negotiated interactively and flexibly and is therefore also determined by context and the specifics of any particular situation:

> As a minority teacher, I consider myself to be responsible to be an intermediary or a person of trust when children, youth and parents want to see me in that role.

Here, the assumption that migrants share the same space of experience and perspectives moves partially into the background in favor of active role-making that selected actors within educational institutions as well as the persons themselves actively shape. This seems to include the option not automatically to be seen as "intermediaries" or "persons of trust". The opportunity for establishing connections, which other students describe using the subjunctive mood, becomes more specific on the interactive level in this case due to the *negotiation of connection and trust*. As a result, the educational policy agenda is evaluated based on the perspective of the actors: The primary emphasis is put on the (specific) expectations of children, youth, and parents instead of relying on the (abstract) opportunities of a conjunctive space of experience.

Many students indicate a basic willingness to assume a special role and to also assume this responsibility on a normative level. Nevertheless, even while agreeing with educational policy objectives, some student teachers stress that, as one of the students states, "minority teachers cannot be seen as a 'magic bullet for societal integration'." Particularly when it comes to formal education at school, they emphasize that additional measures of intercultural educational development are necessary and that all teachers need to acquire intercultural competencies as part of their professional training. The same student phrases this in an idealized manner:

> In addition to intentionally recruiting minority teachers, the intercultural competencies of every educator need to improve during basic and advanced training in order to avoid having teachers with international roots be stereotyped and asking them to solve problems that they supposedly know the obvious solutions for.

Another dimension of the *assumption and construction of various and binary perspectives* is to broaden the perspective to include other categories of social inequalities and further differentiate the binary distinction of minority vs. non-minority heritage. At the forefront of this dimension is the role model function of a high-achieving educational career, as the following example illustrates. There is an underlying assumption about the common educational aspirations shared by those pupils with low chances for educational success, and these may include both minority families and families with low socio-economic status:

> I can absolutely imagine that people will treat me with another form of respect and that I might be able to convey that everyone can make it, irrespective of the circumstances. This may not only influence minority pupils; it may also positively affect others (for instance children who come from poor families).

Thus, the minority student teachers reaffirm the call for staff, i.e. faculty diversity in their portfolio entries while, at the same time, scrutinizing it critically. Their perspectives reveal that the *assumption and construction of various and binary perspectives* in different configurations of 'minority vs. non-minority heritage' may have been elicited or facilitated by the debate on educational policy and its rhetoric as well as discriminatory language practices in research publications and in seminars. It can therefore also be understood in the context of emergent "heightened sensitivity to inequality", making it possible to name and recognize educational inequalities which the students wish to address.

4.3 Results gathered from the language biographies about the treatment of multilingualism at school

This analysis is based on portfolio entries that addressed the student teachers' multilingual language biographies. The students were asked to write a 'story' about their multilingual language biography. In conclusion, they were asked to reflect on this while addressing one of the following guiding questions and writing down their reflections: *How important are your languages to you and why? How do the people in your life and specific events and contexts influence the significance of your languages?* In the end, the students were asked to contemplate how their personal multilingualism might benefit them as teachers. They were asked to think of scenarios in which they might be able to use their languages in a meaningful manner.

The following analysis refers to the latter question. It is worth mentioning that only ten language biographies addressed the guiding question that is relevant for

this analysis. Based on these ten documents, it is possible to derive three lines of argumentation: a) benefits of multilingualism, b) potential of the conjunctive space of experience ('konjunktiver Erfahrungsraum', cf. Bohnsack, 2010), and c) ambivalence about the use of personal multilingualism.

a) Benefits of multilingualism

The students consider their multilingualism, both language proficiency and multicultural experience, to be an advantage which they wish to use as teachers in the future. They express this attitude but often do not explicitly state how exactly they want to use this advantage. Statements such as "In my opinion, this gift, multilingualism I mean, which was given to me, is of immeasurable value and I will be able to use this to my advantage later as a teacher" and "I am convinced that there are many advantages to being a teacher who is multilingual" illustrate the abstract benefit they expect from this condition. Another student is more reserved: She 'could' imagine that the multitude of languages she knows 'might' be beneficial. The student teachers often associate this advantage with familiarity with (national) cultures and proficiency in specific languages (e.g. Russian, Turkish); they do not, however, address other advantages of multilingualism which go beyond the connection to the respective languages, such as expanded metalinguistic abilities or translanguaging. One student addresses her specific multilingual opportunities for action: She would not punish pupils who use their heritage languages and would be attuned to pupils' multilingualism using the language-awareness approach (Hawkins, 1984/1987; James & Carrett, 1992); at the same time, she qualifies this intention by pointing to the mistrust against the use of heritage languages that predominates at schools: "If someone were to address me in Polish, (I) would like to reply to the child in Polish. But the German school is a long way away from this ideal."

The student teachers primarily address the interaction with parents but they also mention the interactions with pupils and colleagues when it comes to integration support. They expect to be able to motivate families to participate actively at school, and they consider themselves to operate as intermediaries between different groups, generate cooperation because "cooperation would be more successful if bi-/multilingual communication were possible." Another student provides the following remark, by knowing two minority languages (Turkish and Kurdish), she could be the initial point of contact for pupils and parents and assume the "position of guidance counselor." Nevertheless, she does not want to use her multilingualism in terms of being an interpreter. She would also be able "to recruit parents for various projects, encourage them to be involved how school is conducted. I will be an educator that promotes or facilitates cooperation between certain groups due to my

linguistic advantages." What is interesting at this point is that this student teacher uses the future tense instead of phrasing this statement in the subjunctive mood. By doing so, she highlights her thoughts as a personal and professional goal that she seeks to achieve.

The student teachers not only mention cooperation with parents and maybe other groups as possible advantages, they also address the possibility that they would be able to recognize language difficulties in pupils that are due to second language acquisition or that are heritage language specific. One student teacher writes, "typical language features of Turkish and of Spanish are well known." For that reason, she can understand "the respective language difficulties of children who have this heritage language."

The student teachers' reflections also demonstrate their awareness that certain heritage languages may be more useful than others due to the structure of German migration society and the pupil population. One student, who experienced a "certain hybridity" of Algerian and French while growing up, regrets not knowing Turkish because it would be "relevant for certain in-class situations."

b) Potential of the conjunctive space of experiences

The student teachers reflect at length about the opportunities that the conjunctive space of experience created by a multilingual environment may offer. For instance, they assume that they are able to better understand the process of second language acquisition because of their own experiences. They also assume that they can therefore benefit from this shared experience when it comes to building relationships with their pupils. One student acknowledges that she has used most of her languages passively because she never felt comfortable enough to speak in front of others. Based on her personal language biography and acquired knowledge, she reflects that as a teacher she has the opportunity "to encourage pupils that they shouldn't feel bad about language deficits or about their accents and that they have to communicate actively in this language." But in order to do this, the school would first have to create an "appropriate learning environment." Whether she would be willing to help establish such an atmosphere and how she would do this, remained unspoken.

Based on their personal experiences, the student teachers expect to be more sensitive, more empathetic, and more understanding toward the children who are learning German and may encounter discrimination because of this. Because they themselves have experienced "not understanding something and/or not being understood," they can be more "sensitive toward these children" as teachers. Another student makes a similar observation: Being personally sensitive about (language) discrimination makes it possible to treat pupils "justly". Yet another student also

reflects on being able to establish closer contact with families and pupils because she can understand them better and act as a role model for them in terms of language attainment.

Interestingly, the student teachers also rely on the argument of a common or conjunctive space of experience between minority teachers on the one hand and minority pupils on the other when it comes to supporting colleagues. One student writes that she will be able to support her colleagues by "helping interpret the behaviors of pupils who are of Turkish-Muslim heritage." Although they were merely asked to reflect on their multilingualism as teachers, this draws a connection to national cultural and religious heritage. As the connection between language and culture – even if they are considered dynamic constructs – is omnipresent, this way of thinking reveals an understanding of language that is linked to national culture as well as a close connection between culture and religion, which are transmitted via language. It is also reminiscent of the daily societal discourse about culture wherein cultures are considered clearly differentiable units whose members share inherent characteristics.

c) Ambivalence about the use of personal multilingualism

As the previous sections have already suggested, in most of their portfolio entries, the student teachers exhibit a tendency toward critically ambivalent attitudes about their multilingualism and its use in school. This ambivalence, however, is stated outright only occasionally. One portfolio entry explicitly grapples with the ambivalent feeling and thoughts. By talking about "language as the key to closeness and trust," this student initially highlights the benefits of multilingualism and of her own intercultural experiences in terms of communication and contact with parents and pupils. She considers it to be her job to "convey basic trust in the slow learning achievement" of pupils whose second language is German. Nevertheless, it is generally desirable for pupils to develop "trust in all teachers."

In one paragraph addressing cooperation with parents, she also acknowledges specific challenges that may result when parents speak the same minority language that she does. "I can especially imagine that parents from Russia may be willing to speak with me more openly when they realize that we are connected by our common mother tongue. But here, too, it is important to be aware of the negative aspects because I can imagine that my Russian, which will not be on the same level as the parents, may come across like I didn't spend enough effort on this culture and language."

The student also voices her fear of being stereotyped because of her multilingualism, of having to assume a special role and of being pigeonholed. "Are you in a system where you are potentially forced to assume a certain role because of your

personal background, so are you being stereotyped and have to identify with this? Or are you suddenly a stopgap when your colleagues don't know what to do anymore?"

Here the student demonstrates a high level of willingness to reflect critically. This allows her to clearly express both her questions and fears when it comes to dealing with her own multilingualism and the potential that may be related to it. By referring to her personal multilingualism and minority heritage, she deconstructs the abstract advantages that underlie the empty phrase "to use multilingualism" which we – researchers, lecturers and practitioners – also use.

In summary, we can identify three lines of argumentation based on portfolio entries that dealt with the guiding question of how minority student teachers may use their multilingualism. It becomes apparent that the students develop a sense for recognizing situations in which their multilingualism may be used in a meaningful manner, both by relying on their own heritage languages and by drawing on their experience learning German. But it also becomes apparent that they are not entirely convinced of the usefulness of their multilingualism. Instead they make it contingent upon certain conditions – such as the overall school climate that recognizes multilingual resources – that have to be met in order to be able to deal with their personal multilingualism in a professional manner. This also illustrates that the everyday understanding of language (and culture) and multilingualism, which becomes apparent in the written reflections, needs to be addressed in student teacher education in order to make the potential of the 'personal' (e.g. the individual language competence a person may possess) tangible for the student teachers.

5. Conclusion

The explorative study presented in this article addresses a crucial component in international and German research on 'minority student teachers', namely how minority student teachers themselves evaluate and assess the role of language and cultural mediator assigned to them by educational policy. In order to investigate this question, we used two distinct methods of data collection: focus groups and written documents in the form of portfolio entries. We are convinced that the multidimensionality of this methodological approach is particularly beneficial because it reveals the collective guiding patterns of a (supposed) group as well as individual perspectives. This allows us to better examine the soundness of both articulated perspectives in terms of their validity which a single methodological approach would not allow for. In addition, portfolios, like other pieces of writing, allow for analytical insights into the *reflective processes* of their authors.

The results analyzed according to the grounded theory can be summarized as follows. It has to be considered – as it was said before – that the data was collected in a special learning context where critical reflections based on thematic input and literature reception were supported. This certainly has had an impact on the students' views and ways to argue. The focus groups demonstrate ambivalent perspectives: The students consider themselves, as well as all other teachers, to be obliged to contribute to minority pupils' integration and educational success. They are critical of the special role that is ascribed to them and do not expect to automatically be able to fulfill it better than non-minority teachers due to their biographical resources. In their portfolio entries, the student teachers support this perspective. The analysis comes to a similar conclusion, when they articulate their individual positions about the use of their multilingual resources. Although they mention a few general benefits when it comes to teaching in a multilingual classroom, the analysis also reveals ambivalent attitudes when it comes to how to deal with personal multilingualism and that of pupils. Furthermore it becomes evident that the student teachers do not define their role in isolation from general processes of intercultural school development. Another result of the analysis is that students (re)produce binary perspectives along the lines of difference of minority and non-minority heritage; this is partially due to the explicit involvement with the subject matter on the one hand but also points towards the students' heightened sensitivity to inequality on the other (cf. Bandorski & Karakaşoğlu, 2013, p. 152).

So how can the revealed ambivalences be explained? We will investigate possible responses to this question in light of other research results. The educational policy demand for more minority teachers neglects one aspect in particular: minority teachers who completed or at least partially completed their educational careers in Germany have become acquainted with an educational system that transmits the cultural and linguistic norms of the majority (Gogolin, 2002; Ross, 2003). Initial findings indicate that a interrelation between educational biographical experiences and the (anticipated) contact with migration-related diversity exists or can be expected (cf. Panagiotopoulou & Rosen, 2015). Franz Hamburger, for instance, demonstrates in a survey of qualitative studies that immigrants who were educationally successful studied in a 'steady' manner during their educational careers – they kept their minority heritage in the background in order to be educationally successful (2005, p. 10). The educational policy objective, however, requires them to do exactly the opposite, namely to emphasize that aspect of their biography that they generally have not previously intentionally revealed in educational contexts. Doris Edelmann's (2013) results also point in a similar direction. She demonstrates – also provisionally – that young minority teachers favor a 'silent' recognition of heterogeneity and, in doing so, leave potential differences and commonalities un-

addressed. To these teachers it is "often particularly important not to explicitly talk to pupils about their heritage or even address them as representatives of a certain culture due to their own, negative experiences during primary and secondary education" (p. 200). That is to say, although the ascription of a special role as language and cultural mediators, bridge builders, integration assistants, role models, etc. may be positive, it nevertheless stigmatizes and may not correspond to the personal and professional self-understanding of minority student teachers.

From our perspective, we recommend that future research investigates and further develops such hypotheses in order to help explain the ambivalent perspectives of student teachers.

Notes

1. For reasons of international connectivity we refer to minority teachers, minority student teachers as ethnic minorities although in Germany the term 'migration background' is widespread. When we quote German research literature or our own data we mostly use minority heritage to emphasize the connection to the German term.
2. All citations of German sources have been translated by the authors.
3. The mixed-methods study DIVAL at the University of Teacher Education, St.Gallen, Switzerland (see Edelmann, Bischoff, Beck & Meier in this issue) is based on a comparable university-political interest, namely the illumination and simultaneous consideration of the (growing) diversity among pre-service teachers (see, http://blogs.phsg.ch/dival/).
4. In addition to this research proposal, the wider context of the regional project of Bremen also includes the qualitative study by Kul (2013), which takes the second phase of teacher education into account, for which the universities are not responsible in Germany. Her research question addresses "how student teachers [deal with] racializing ascriptions of positions," which behavioral strategies they use in this context, and how important these experiences of racism are in light of their professional self-understanding (p. 157). In order to investigate these questions Kul conducted 18 episodic interviews with student teachers both of minority and non-minority heritage; the interviews were evaluated according to the documentary method.
5. For more information about the seminar design and the evaluation of the focus-group discussions about 'intercultural competency' between minority student teachers, see Lengyel and Rosen (2012).

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