

# The Relevance of a Migration Background to the Professional Identity of Teachers

Christoph Bressler<sup>1</sup> & Carolin Rotter<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany

Correspondence: Carolin Rotter, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen, Universitätsstr. 2, 45141 Essen, Germany. Tel: 49-201-183-4272

Received: December 28, 2016

Accepted: January 27, 2017

Online Published: February 3, 2017

doi:10.5430/ijhe.v6n1p239

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n1p239>

## Abstract

Immigrant teachers face several specific expectations from policy makers, colleagues, as well as the media. Often new hopes are pinned on them for teaching (ethnically) diverse learners. Their professional identity is inevitably linked to these expectations. In this regard, this paper discusses the findings of a qualitative study exploring the professional identities of immigrant teachers. Furthermore, it draws implications for teacher education. Reflecting on our research findings, we illustrate two types of professional identities: Teachers who accept the “special skills” ascribed to them, and where the migration background constitutes the core of their professional identity, as well as others, who reject the expectations, and appeal to the pedagogical skills they share with their colleagues without a migration background. Given our findings, future teachers need more support when it comes to reflecting their own biography, political and public expectations, and the bearings on their professional identity.

**Keywords:** Professional identity, Teacher, Migration background, Immigrant teacher, Teacher education

## 1. Introduction

In the last twenty-five years of research on teachers and teacher development the concept of professional identity has received growing attention, bringing together research on teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, teachers’ narratives, and biographical research (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 732). In connection thereto, we present a study on professional identities of a specific group of teachers who face particular challenges in the formation of professional identity, namely, immigrant teachers.

The formation of professional identity is taken to be a process of interplay between multiple contexts and the individual. The cultural, social and political context of an individual and the relationship and interaction with others are considered to be crucial external factors in the identity formation. Some theorists have called for teachers to acknowledge these external factors and to actively shape their identity (Britzman, 1993; see also Winograd, 2003; Zembylas, 2002, 2003). This seems to be especially challenging for immigrant teachers since they are confronted with numerous additional expectations from policy makers, colleagues, superiors, and parents. “Persons with a migration background,” as understood by the German Federal Statistical Office, are people “who have immigrated to today’s territory of the Federal Republic of Germany after 1949 as well as all foreigners born in Germany and all persons born as Germans in Germany with at least one parent who has immigrated or who was born as a foreigner in Germany” (Federal Statistical Office of Germany, 2013, p. 50). We define “immigrant teacher” and “immigrant student” accordingly.

In Germany in 2010, about 5% of the teaching staff had a migration background, which is a small percentage compared to the then almost 30% of immigrant students (see Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2010, p. 253 and 259). Since 2010 the disparity has in all likelihood increased, although we lack current statistics to confirm this. Immigrant students are disproportionately disadvantaged in the German school system, as international school achievement studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show. Therefore, education policy makers and the media call for an increasing number of immigrant teachers, hoping that this would foster the learning of immigrant students (for the international trend of specifically recruiting minority teachers see Santoro, 2015, and studies cited therein). Due to their (assumed) biographical and experiential background, these teachers are often depicted to have specific skills, e.g., special intercultural qualities. So they are considered to be more approachable to immigrant students (see Akbaba, Bräü, & Zimmer, 2013). Furthermore, they often are bilingual and

are also seen as mediators and translators when it comes to interacting with parents. Overall, it is assumed that immigrant teachers can facilitate the learning of immigrant students in a variety of ways.

So, when developing their professional identity in this context that deems their migration background to be significant for their professional practice, immigrant teachers are confronted with expectations specific to them and the understanding that migration backgrounds provide resources for their teaching. Consequently, questions arise relating to the role of their migration background in the formation of their professional identity and in particular whether they embrace the aforementioned ascriptions and expectations.

In this study, we investigate the professional identities of German immigrant teachers and what relevance they assign to their migration background in constructing their professional identity. In Sections 1.1 and 1.2 we unfold these research questions in light of the literature on professional identity and minority teachers. Then we present the research method, which provides a new approach to the research on professional identity (Section 2). In Sections 3 and 4, we present our findings, and conclude with some remarks concerning their implications on teacher education.

### *1.1 Professional Identity: Practical Implications and Development*

As Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) note, the concept of professional identity is seldom defined explicitly. As a working concept, we follow Sachs's concept of professional identity, which entails the following:

It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (Sachs, 2005, p. 15)

According to this and most other concepts of professional identity (Rodgers & Scott, 2008), professional identities develop over time (dynamic) and are shaped by the interplay between contextual/external factors and the individual (contextuality). Teachers author their own professional identity based on their own life experiences and emotions in reaction to the cultural, social and political context and the interaction with others. Storytelling and discourse are important aspects of developing and negotiating as well as expressing one's identity. Therefore the concept of professional identity is closely connected to the concept of narrative and metaphors (e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; for the relevance of metaphors see Volkmann & Anderson, 1998).

Professional identity is most often discussed in the context of pre-service teacher education. It is thought to affect the professional development of pre-service teachers (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2000; Britzman, 1993; Freese, 2006; Olsen, 2008; Sachs, 2005). Hence, it is crucial for teacher educators to understand their students' professional identities so they can adequately support them (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). In addition one's identity has an important influence on the professional development beyond initial teacher education (Beijaard et al., 2004, 2000; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). In particular, professional identities influence how teachers deal with institutional or administrative changes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Mitchell, 1997). Furthermore, the professional identity seems to affect teachers' sense of efficacy, for instance, when working in poor working conditions (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Moore & Hofman, 1988; Parkinson, 2008). Furthermore, whether teachers experience institutionalized practices as supportive (e.g., for collaborations), as Cohen (2008) shows, depends on their professional identities. Some studies suggest that professional identities affect teachers' commitment to teaching and retention (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; Hammerness et al., 2005). Summing up, teachers' professional identities "shape their dispositions, where they place their effort, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role." (Hammerness et al., 2005, pp. 383–84). In addition, professional identities influence the classroom practice itself (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Hsieh, 2015). For example, a teacher's explanation, justification or understanding of herself in relation to others is grounded in her professional identity (MacLure, 1993).

As noted, many different contextual and personal factors shape the professional identity of teachers (Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). Sugrue (1997) shows empirical evidence for the influence of significant others such as close and extended family members, the teacher's own school experience, the policy context, teaching traditions and cultural archetypes. Numerous studies confirm the relevance of experiences as a student in school (e.g., Antonek et al., 1997; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Hsieh, 2015; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). Regarding the influence of teaching traditions studies suggest the relevance of the specific subject taught and its teaching culture or status (Barty, 2004; Paechter & Head, 1996; Pennington, 2002; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Further research confirms Sugrue's finding that the policy context is crucial for the development of a teacher's professional identity (Assaf, 2008; Barrett, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin,

1990). In addition to policy context the direct work environment, i.e., the particular school culture, also seems to influence the professional identity formation (Cohen, 2008; Duffee & Aikenhead, 1992). However, the interaction with students as an important contextual factor has not yet been studied extensively, as Wilkins et al. (2012) note. Regarding career changers, Williams (2010) argues that the former work environments may influence the professional identity as well.

### *1.2 Minority Teachers: Their Understanding of the Profession, Experiences and Teaching of Diverse Learners*

The international research efforts on ethnic minority teachers and immigrant teacher focus mainly on three areas of interest: Firstly, career decision motives of minority teachers as well as their understanding of the profession; secondly, experiences with students and their parents as well as colleagues and superiors; and thirdly effectiveness of minority teachers as measured by their students' outcome.

As for teachers overall (e.g., Brookhart & Freeman, 1992), for minority teachers social aspects of teaching such as counseling and caretaking are primary career decision motives (Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, & Woo, 2006; King, 1993; Shipp, 1999). As Su (1996, 1997; see also Robbins, 1995) points out, these teachers are particularly concerned with reducing disadvantages for minority students. Karakaşoğlu (2000) confirms these findings and shows that immigrant student teachers want to be role models for their immigrant students (see also Cunningham & Hargreaves, 2007; Pole, 1999; Solomon, 1997). However, in Carrington's (2002) survey of 289 minority student teachers only 3% of the participants claim that the possibility of being a role model influenced their career choice. Two studies in the UK suggest that those minority student teachers who intend to be role models want to be role models for all students, not just for minority students (Cunningham & Hargreaves, 2007; Maylor, 2009). Similar findings are reported for German teachers with a Turkish migration background (Selimovic, 2008). A Canadian study by Carr and Klassen (1997) shows that having a special responsibility for minority students is central to the interviewed and surveyed minority teachers' understanding of teaching. This special responsibility was often associated with personal negative experiences at school or experiences of discrimination (see also Foster, 1990; similar results for German immigrant teachers in Georgi, Ackermann, & Karakas, 2011). As an interview study by Solomon (1997) shows, some teachers want to be a reference person for minority students. These teachers also want to dispel stereotypes both colleagues and students might have (see also Lee, 2013) and want to be seen as multicultural experts and representatives for minority students. However, some teachers do not necessarily share this understanding of their role, but colleagues, students or parents view them as multicultural experts and reference persons for minority students. In addition to being role models, some minority teachers who understand their role as entailing special responsibilities want to support their students also by pushing for curricular changes to account for biases toward values of the majority society (Ramanathan, 2006; Solomon, 1997; Su, 1996).

Regarding minority teachers' interaction with minority students, Pole (1999) reports that some black students reject black teachers because they represent the values of the majority society. Maylor (2009) confirms these experiences for other black teachers while Carrington (2002) reports analogous experiences of rejection for some British teachers of Asian descent. Relatedly, the Asian-American teachers in Goodwin et al. (2006) describe recurring instances of othering and racism. However, the teachers interviewed by Solomon (1997) claim that minority students feel more understood and confide in them more often (for similar results regarding German immigrant teachers, see Georgi et al., 2011). They also indicated that parents of minority students likewise give them positive feedback, see them as role models for their children and as more sensitive to the children's experiences and needs. However, the Asian-American teachers in Goodwin et al. (2006) often felt that white parents were skeptical of their competency. Adding to this research on the view of minority teachers, Rotter and Timpe (2016) investigate German students with and without a migration background and find that a teacher's migration background does not have much significance for the students (for similar results, see Strasser & Waburg, 2015). The students seem more concerned with how well the teachers assume their teacher role.

With respect to the interaction with colleagues, in some case studies the participants mention experiences of marginalization, exclusion, or discrimination by colleagues (e.g., Milner, 2003; Milner & Hoy, 2003). Regarding the interaction with superiors and administrators, some minority teachers in the aforementioned Canadian study by Carr and Klassen (1997) feel that they face difficulties their colleagues of the majority society do not have to deal with, such as hinderances in promotion or hiring. Similar difficulties with administrators in the US are reported by participants in Castaneda, Kambutu, & Rios (2006). Additionally, the participants in Pole's (1999) study describe that colleagues and superiors see them as "cultural support staff" (Pole, 1999, p. 325) and as natural-born experts for (inter)cultural questions. Similarly, Santoro (2015) reports several cases of Australian minority teachers in which teachers were assigned tasks or classes because of their cultural background. The teachers interviewed also describe

tendencies by colleagues and principals to homogenize the cultural background (see also Goodwin et al., 2006).

As Driessen (2015) concludes in his review, the empirical evidence to date does not unequivocally support the claim that similarity in ethnic background between student and teacher has positive effects on cognitive or noncognitive student outcomes. However, in his reanalysis of the data collected for the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Dee (2005, p. 162) finds that the probability for a student to be perceived as disruptive, as inattentive, or as rarely completing homework increases by approximately a third in case of dissimilarities in the teacher's and student's ethnic background. Other studies confirm the impact of dissimilarities in ethnic background on the teachers' perception of students (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shuan, 1990). However, a longitudinal study of 825 US first-grade students suggests that teachers' reactions to minority students depend more on socioeconomic than ethnic communalities (Alexander, Entwisle, & Thompson, 1987). Relatedly, Beady and Hansell (1981) report in their study of 441 Michigan teachers that although black teachers judge the prospects of their black students in college to be better than white teachers, there seems to be no difference in their assessment of the current academic effort and achievement.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This brief summary of current research on the professional identity of teachers as well as minority teachers shows that we know little about how the expectations of others and the way colleagues, superiors and students view minority teachers influences their professional identity. This is particularly true for immigrant teachers in Germany. They are confronted with high expectations, especially when it comes to properly addressing cultural and multilingual diversity amongst students. In this study, we investigate the following research question:

*What relevance does the migration background have for immigrant teachers in constructing their professional identity?*

Hence, our study can be located at the intersection of research on teachers' professional identities and research on minority teachers.

## 2. Method

In order to explore the professional identities and the relevance the teachers ascribe to their migration background in detail, the study has a qualitative research design which yields a typology of professional identities. The so-called documentary method of data analysis and especially the reconstructive typification of professional identities provide a new approach to the research on professional identity, which is usually based on individual case studies.

### 2.1 Participants and Data Collection

Interviews are very well-suited for our research interest. They allow the participants to retell their experiences and freely express their professional identities in narratives about their work as a teacher. For this study we interviewed two male and thirteen female immigrant teachers. The age of the participants ranged from 27 to 55 years with an average of 35.4 years. All of the interviewees taught in different schools, but in the same city in Germany. The participants were selected through "purposeful sampling strategies" (Patton, 2002, pp. 230–42), meaning that sample size and sampling criteria are determined before collecting and analyzing the data. This ensures information-rich and contrasting cases with maximum variation. However, we also remained open to including additional interviews if further criteria turned out to be relevant. To take into account the variety of migration backgrounds in Germany we conducted interviews with teachers of different origins. The majority of the interviewees have a Turkish migration background (10). Others are of Polish (2), Greek (1), or Croatian (1) descent. Furthermore, some participants are not distinguishable from other teachers by name or appearance and some teach subjects from which one cannot infer their migration background (e.g., teaching Turkish while having a Turkish migration background). To avoid a focus on professional identities specific to a certain type of school, the interviewees also teach in different types of secondary schools in the German school system.

The conducted interviews were semi-structured and "problem-centered" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), i.e., the interview guide provided a "conversational structure that helps to uncover the actual perspectives of individuals on a particular problem [or issue] in a systematic and dialogical way." (Witzel & Reiter, 2012, p. 24) This approach, however, does not entail that the researcher's preliminary conception of the issue is not revised during the interview process or that interviewees are unable to unfold their schemes of relevance. Therefore, the interview method gives access to the participants' perception of reality and their practice with respect to the issue while at the same time acknowledging that interviewers unavoidably approach data collection with a particular research interest and theoretically informed, though revisable, preconceptions of the research topic. This combination of openness and focus on a particular issue is especially suitable for collecting data on the research questions outlined above. The pretest and refinement of the

interview guide yielded a list of nine questions, starting with broad, narrative evoking questions (e.g., “Please tell me about your school.”) and concluding with more specific ones (“What do you feel are your responsibilities in the teaching staff or regarding your students and their parents?”). During the interviews additional follow-up and probing questions were asked.

## 2.2 Methods of Data Analysis

In analyzing the interview data, we deploy the documentary method as developed by Bohnsack (2010, 2013; for the application to interviews, see Nohl, 2010). For the theoretical framework of the documentary method Bohnsack draws on Mannheim’s (1982) sociology of knowledge at the core of which is the distinction between the immanent or explicit meaning on the one hand and the implicit or “documentary meaning” on the other hand (Mannheim, 1952, p. 44). The focus of analysis is on the implicit, documentary meaning since this level of meaning provides access to the so-called conjunctive knowledge that agents can otherwise hardly explicate. This knowledge is deeply rooted in the agent’s practice and experience and is incorporated as well as pre-reflexive. It constitutes the “modus operandi” as “frame of orientation” for the agent (Bohnsack, 2013, pp. 221–22). The frame of orientation determines how an agent perceives certain issues and situations and deals with them. The frame of orientation that concerns a teacher’s professional practice provides a framework for her understanding and perception of her work. We interpret this frame of orientation as her professional identity. According to this conception, then, the professional identity is embedded in the teacher’s experiences and underlies her practice in everyday (work) life, connecting past experiences with present actions.

To reconstruct the frame of orientation, the analytic process focusses on how the subject presents, elaborates, and deals with a particular topic. This pertains to formal questions such as the text genre (argumentative-evaluative or narrative-descriptive) as well as detailed semantic questions regarding the phrasing or use of metaphors (Nohl, 2010, pp. 204–11). The core data for this analytic approach are narrative or descriptive passages about actions and experiences from the interviewee’s professional practice. In describing her experiences and actions a teacher reproduces the modus operandi of her professional practice and expresses her professional identity. Especially with respect to the semantic questions constant comparative analysis of different cases is particularly important for a valid, intersubjectively comprehensible reconstruction of the frame of orientation.

The documentary method includes the analytic step of a “*meaning-genetic*’ typification” (Bohnsack, 2013, p. 229, italics in original) which yields more general findings that go beyond the analyses of individual cases. In this step the frames of orientation of different cases are systematized and brought into relation to each other, thus forming clearly distinguished, while internally coherent types. Hence, the types are abstractions of frames of orientations that transcend the individual cases. This allows us to answer the research question in a more general manner that is not limited to a particular case.

## 3. Results

In this section we present the results of the meaning-genetic typification. The abstraction of general types of frames of orientations yielded three types of professional identities. The types can be compared along the lines of what relevance the participants ascribe to their migration background (for details see Rotter, 2014). The professional identities of two of the types are grounded in the pedagogical competencies developed during teacher education whereas the migration background does not figure in professional identities of these types. For the third type, however, the migration background is at the core of the professional identity. Here we present in more detail this third type (the “Competent Immigrant”) and contrast it with one of the first two types (the “Pedagogical Professional”). Each type is illustrated with an exemplary excerpt of an interview (translation of the German transcript) with a teacher belonging to the respective type.

### 3.1 The “Competent Immigrant” Type

I think for a start it is this ... what you feel, on the other hand, when you’ve got other teachers’ feedback, “In my class student XYZ is so-and-so, I don’t get by” and such things ... that you have sometimes difficult cases. And I believe that in this case we are contact persons for ... especially for these Turkish students. [...] Reference persons, but not with regard to teachers. I think they separate that, that we are teachers in a sense. We are just a reference person. I think that is noticeable. Adults whom they respect then. Maybe they see me as kind of an aunt or older friend who gives them advice and so on. [...] They come [to me] much more openly then. I can deal with them very differently, with problem cases, too. Well, I can also scold these students and then sometimes also scold in Turkish. And, in general, say Turkish things, for example, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” They hear that now and then. In Turkish you hear

that very often, this “Aren’t you ashamed of your behavior? Do you consider that ok?” and so on. If I also say this in Turkish, they handle that totally differently than if they hear ... even if they hear that in German from me, too. They don’t quite latch on to that. But if I say that in Turkish to them, they react totally differently. (LmMHw2, lines 56-82).

In this excerpt the teacher describes her interaction with immigrant students. According to her, especially Turkish immigrant students have a certain trusting relationship to her. She feels that these students see her as a “reference person.” This is elucidated with formulations like “adults whom they respect,” “aunt” and “older friend who gives them advice,” expressions denoting significant others. At the same time she disassociates this role from the teacher role. This encapsulates the subject’s frame of orientation with respect to her professional practice and is paradigmatic for teachers of the Competent Immigrant type.

The teacher maintains that the students address her in a “diffuse” (Parsons, 1951) way and accepts this diffuseness of the relationship. She accepts it by using Turkish of her own accord. She perceives the students as “react[ing] totally differently” and confiding more in her regarding private problems. This encourages her to continue using Turkish with these students. Since Turkish is probably the language the students use in their family, the usage of Turkish also expands the spectrum of her possibilities for interacting with these students. It allows for actions more associated with family life like scolding. Since German as the language of instruction is constitutive to the institutional interaction in class, the interviewee no longer addresses the students within the institutional framework of the school, but in an informal and more private manner. Furthermore, she singles out these students from the other students in class and assigns a special status to them while at the same time excluding the students who do not speak Turkish from the communication.

With respect to the Turkish immigrant students, the subject does not draw boundaries that would provide professional distance and specificity to the interaction with the students. She also does not address that this is a deviation from the institutional role teachers hold within schools. This diffusion of the institutional roles at the same time clashes with what seems to be the function of her “scolding” in Turkish: On the one hand, the teacher addresses the students as an entire person by not communicating in the institutional language of instruction. On the other hand, she addresses the students as students by pointing out the behavior expected of those assuming the student role.

Overall, within the institutional context of the school, the teacher identifies herself as a Turkish woman who is specifically responsible for “these Turkish students.” This allows her to set aside the teacher role. Ethnicity is thus at the core of her professional identity and her identity seems much more dependent on it than on her relationship to the other students or her pedagogical competencies. In these respects hers is a paradigm for this type of professional identity.

### 3.2 The “Pedagogical Professional” Type

When [the colleagues] can’t deal with these Turkish students, “Listen, your fellow countrymen.” By now I’ve lived here longer than in Turkey, that is, I’ve been in Turkey for 23 years or 24 and now I have been in Germany for 32 years, nevertheless I am still the Turk and I assimilated in everything, I eat pork, drink everything, but at every event or so, “Listen, are you allowed to eat that?” I feel they made a sport out of playing me for a fool. However, they approach me in case of problems. At first it was like this for every little thing. And by little thing I mean problems that happen in every lesson, in every class. They studied [to become a teacher], too. Everyone has problems, loud or noisy students or something else ... such things. I should solve it. I said, “I’m very sorry, I have the same qualifications as you do, I am a teacher, I also would just like ... why should I know what trouble you made them? I can’t always go there and then ... take care of your business yourselves.” At first I always ... “But if I realize,” I said, “that the problem was too great and the problems get out of hand and there are going to be disciplinary actions, then you can approach me if the problem is too big.” There I was approached frequently, and again and again I translated for the parents and sometimes I played the role of a mediator between the students and the teachers. [...] If it actually was a normal class problem, then I always refused, but if it was about things like kicking someone out of school or disciplinary measures, then I tried to listen what the problem is and gave some pointers or how to solve the problem. (LmMH6m, lines 171-222)

According to this teacher, colleagues often seek his help with immigrant students. They seem to ascribe to him a special competency for immigrant students in general and a close connection to Turkish immigrant students in particular. They articulate this, according to the subject, with phrases like “fellow countrymen.” The teacher thus describes an external positioning by colleagues along the lines of ethnicity or nationality rather than in terms of institutional roles. Hence, the teacher is treated as the other and his migration background is deemed more important

in identifying him than his institutional role as a teacher.

However, the subject strongly rejects this identification based on his migration background and develops his sense of belonging against the “negative counter horizon” (Bohnsack, 2010) of the “stereotypical Turk.” He points out that he has been in Germany longer than in Turkey and his lifestyle is very different from the cliché. The phrase “they made a sport out of playing me for a fool” indicates that he perceives a wickedness with which his colleagues address him, and that he does not feel to be taken seriously and on a par with his colleagues. He is skeptical of realizing his frame of orientation against his colleagues’ practice of attributing to him a special status.

Because of this process of othering, his fellow teachers view him as a contact person regarding problems with immigrant students. He is supposed to mediate in cases of conflict and provide solutions. The repeatedly used term “problem” becomes a focal point with respect to which the subject explains his area of competence. He distinguishes different stages of escalation: Most of the time, colleagues address him with what he calls “little things.” These are mostly difficulties with classroom management or discipline and, according to the subject, a central part of every teacher’s competencies. For this stage of escalation he does not feel any special responsibility. Rather, he considers his colleagues’ request for help a culturalization of pedagogical problems and a laziness to deal with the difficulties themselves. He points out his professional qualification and that it is the same as that of his colleagues. Hence, he counters the identification based on his migration background with a self-identification as a pedagogical professional, disregarding his ethnicity. His professional identity and the foundation of his professionalism are centered around the pedagogical and content-matter competency. This is the defining feature of the Pedagogical Professional type. However, if the conflicts involve “disciplinary measures,” he says, he tries to lend support to his colleagues. Yet, as he draws a distinction between these cases and those for which he does not feel special responsibility, the distinction is *not* formulated in terms of the migration background of the students involved. Rather, the distinction is one of degree of severity of the pedagogical or administrative measures required. This suggests that the subject does not interpret his support and counseling mainly in the context of immigrant teachers and students, but rather as part of teacher professionalism even if he sometimes assists with specific competencies that immigrants are more likely to have, such as additional language skills.

#### 4. Discussion

We found three types of professional identities two of which we presented here in more detail. The first type is defined by the great importance the teachers attribute to their migration background in their action-guiding understanding of their profession that generates the modus operandi of their professional practice. For teachers of this type the life experience as immigrants is far more important than the pedagogical competencies acquired in teacher education. In this sense, they fully embrace the expectations often placed on immigrant teachers while negating the importance of the pedagogical competencies.

The second type of professional identity is almost diametrically opposed to the first type. Teachers of this type explicitly reject any relevance of their migration background for their teaching. They experience othering by their colleagues, which confirms findings cited in Section 1.2, and are asked for support with immigrant students. However, they strongly oppose any culturalization of difficulties that are independent of the students’ migration background. Rather, they emphasize that they graduated from the same teacher education and have the same pedagogical competencies as their colleagues.

These two types of professional identity represent two extremes on a spectrum. The third type that we found, but did not elaborate on here, can be seen as between these two extremes, leaning more toward the Pedagogical Professional type. Teachers of this type also emphasize the pedagogical competencies they acquired in teacher education. However, they do not negate as strongly the relevance of their migration background, but view it as additional biographical resources they can fruitfully deploy in some situations.

From the perspective of teacher professionalism, teachers of the Competent Immigrant type seem to display a professional identity that jeopardizes professionalism. For, these teachers rely heavily on their own personal experiences as immigrants. These experiences seem to replace the pedagogical competencies developed in the teacher education program as the source of their professionalism. Furthermore, our findings show that these teachers have difficulties to keep a professional specificity in interacting with immigrant students. They assume a role similar to a surrogate parent rather than the institutional role of a teacher. Since, as Rotter and Timpe (2016) find, immigrant students are much more concerned with how well immigrant teachers assume their professional role as teachers independent of their migration background, professional identities of the Competent Immigrant type may clash with expectations students have for their teacher.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings regarding the Competent Immigrant type of professional identity have implications for teacher education programs, especially the university-based teacher education. Immigrant student teachers need more support to reconcile their personal identity with their professional identity in a way that does not negate professional pedagogical competencies and substitute them solely with biographical resources from experiences as immigrants. Since policy makers and the media as well as colleagues address immigrant teachers as having specific skills and responsibilities for immigrant students, this process of identity reconciliation is particularly challenging. Hence, we propose that teacher educators take the life experiences and personal identities of teachers in general and of immigrant teachers in particular more into account and explicitly encourage and support a reflective examination of the expectations raised against them. How this can be accomplished is an open question. Based on our own experience as teacher educators, we suggest the following as a promising approach: Classes on educational science, especially on teacher professionalism, should include time for student teachers to discuss their own school experiences, rememberable teachers they had, or what being a teacher entails for them personally at the beginning of the semester as well as at the end of class. This way student teachers can reflect on how discussing educational-scientific perspectives on teaching changes how they see themselves as teachers. This might be aided by essays the student teachers write at the beginning of class and revisit regularly during the course of the semester. However, this is but one possible approach; others such as discussing expectations raised against teachers in current news articles or educational policies and how these expectations relate to the student teachers' professional identity are also plausible.

Teachers of the Pedagogical Professional type also express difficulties in realizing their professional identities in their practice. They experience othering by their colleagues and culturalization of difficulties with immigrant students. Hence, teacher educators should also pay more attention to the preconceptions of teachers without a migration background about immigrant students and sensitize these teachers for the culturalization of difficulties that are independent of a student's ethnic or cultural background.

In this study, we reconstructed a spectrum of possible professional identity types, ranging from the Competent Immigrant type to the Pedagogical Professional type. This raises questions of how the location of a teacher's professional identity on this spectrum relates to other characteristics of the teacher such as socioeconomic status, gender, age etc. Gaining knowledge of these relations is crucial to better understand the contextuality of teachers' professional identities. Moreover, further research is needed on how the different types of professional identity on this spectrum inform the immigrant teachers' pedagogy and actual teaching. Our research design does not allow inferences with respect to these questions, but additional studies based, e.g., on ethnographical observations could yield insights into this important issue of the practical implications of different professional identities for immigrant teachers.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Sandra Lorscheider, Sarah Schneider and especially Laura Fölker as well as three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on previous drafts.

## References

- Akbaba, Y., Bräu, K., & Zimmer, M. (2013). Erwartungen und Zuschreibungen. Eine Analyse und kritische Reflexion der bildungspolitischen Debatte zu Lehrer/innen mit Migrationshintergrund. In K. Bräu, V. B. Georgi, Y. Karakaşoğlu, & C. Rotter (Eds.), *Lehrerinnen und Lehrer mit Migrationshintergrund. Zur Relevanz eines Merkmals in Theorien, Empirie und Praxis* (pp. 37-57). Münster: Waxmann.
- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Thompson, M. (1987). School performance, status relations; and the structure of sentiment: Bringing the teacher back. *American Sociological Review*, 52, 665-682. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2095602>
- Antonek, J. L., McCormick, D. E., & Donato, R. (1997). The student teacher portfolio as autobiography: Developing a professional identity. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, 15-27. <http://dx.doi.org/j.1540-4781.1997.tb01624.x>
- Assaf, L. C. (2008). Professional identity of a reading teacher: responding to high-stakes testing pressures. *Teachers and Teaching*, 14, 239-252. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540600802006137>
- Authoring Group Educational Reporting. (2010). *Bildung in Deutschland 2010 [Education in Germany 2010]*. [http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2010/bb\\_2010.pdf](http://www.bildungsbericht.de/daten2010/bb_2010.pdf)
- Barrett, B. D. (2009). No Child Left Behind and the assault on teachers' professional practices and identities.



- Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 1018-1025. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.03.021>
- Barty, L. (2004). Embracing ambiguity in the artefacts of the past: Teacher identity and pedagogy. *Canadian Social Studies*, 38(3). Retrieved from [www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css](http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css)
- Beady, C. H., & Hansell, S. (1981). Teacher race and expectations for student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 18, 191-206. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00028312018002191>
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39, 175-189. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 107-128. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>
- Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., & Vermunt, J. D. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16, 749-764. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(00\)00023-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00023-8)
- Bohnsack, R. (2010). Documentary Method and group discussions. In R. Bohnsack, N. Pfaff, & W. Weller (Eds.), *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research* (pp. 99-124). Opladen & Farmington Hills: Budrich.
- Bohnsack, R. (2013). Documentary Method. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 217-233). London: SAGE Publications.
- Britzman, D. (1993). The terrible problem of knowing thyself: toward a poststructuralist account of teacher identity. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 9, 23-46.
- Brookhart, S. M., & Freeman, D. J. (1992). Characteristics of entering teacher candidates. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 37-60. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1170715>
- Carr, P. R., & Klassen, T. R. (1997). Different perceptions of race in education: Racial minority and white teachers. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de L'éducation*, 22, 67-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1585812>
- Carrington, B. (2002). Ethnicity, "role models" and teaching. *Journal of Research in Education*, 12, 40-49.
- Castaneda, C., Kambutu, J., & Rios, F. (2006). Speaking their truths: Teachers of color in diasporic contexts. *The Rural Educator*, 27(3). Retrieved from <http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraleducator/article/view/227/268>
- Cohen, J. L. (2008). "That's not treating you as a professional?": Teachers constructing complex professional identities through talk. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 14, 79-93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540600801965861>
- Coldron, J., & Smith, R. (1999). Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 31, 711-726. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/002202799182954>
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19, 2-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002>
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cunningham, M., & Hargreaves, L. (2007). *Minority ethnic teachers' professional experiences. Evidence from the Teacher Status Project*. <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR853.pdf>
- Day, C., Elliot, B., & Kington, A. (2005). Reform, standards and teacher identity: Challenges of sustaining commitment. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 563-577. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.03.001>
- Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32, 601-616. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920600775316>
- Dee, T. S. (2005). A teacher like me: Does race, ethnicity, or gender matter? *The American Economic Review*, 95, 158-165. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/000282805774670446>
- Downey, D., & Pribesh, S. (2004). When race matters: Teachers' evaluations of students' classroom behavior.

- Sociology of Education*, 77, 267-282. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/003804070407700401>
- Driessen, G. (2015). Teacher ethnicity, student ethnicity, and student outcomes. *Intercultural Education*, 26, 179-191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2015.1048049>
- Duffee, L., & Aikenhead, G. (1992). Curriculum change, student evaluation, and teacher practical knowledge. *Science Education*, 76, 493-506. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/sce.3730760504>
- Farkas, G., Grobe, R. P., Sheehan, D., & Shuan, Y. (1990). Cultural resources and school success: Gender, ethnicity, and poverty groups within an urban school district. *American Sociological*, 55, 127-142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2095708>
- Federal Statistical Office of Germany. (2013). *Extract of Statistical Yearbook, Germany, 2012, English version of the chapter "Population, Families, Living Arrangements."* [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Publications/Specialized/Population/StatYearbook\\_Chapter2\\_5011001129004.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Publications/Specialized/Population/StatYearbook_Chapter2_5011001129004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)
- Foster, M. (1990). The Politics of Race: Through the Eyes of African-American Teachers. *Journal of Education*, 172, 123-141.
- Freese, A. (2006). Reframing one's teaching: Discovering our teacher selves through reflection and inquiry. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 22, 110-119. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.07.003>
- Georgi, V. B., Ackermann, L., & Karakas, N. (2011). *Vielfalt im Lehrerzimmer. Selbstverständnis und schulische Integration von Lehrenden mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Goodwin, A. L., Genishi, C., Asher, N., & Woo, K. A. (2006). Voices from the margins. In C. C. Park, R. Endo, & A. L. Goodwin (Eds.), *Asian and Pacific American education* (pp. 99-117). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Hammerness, K., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). How teachers learn and develop. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 358-389). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hsieh, B. (2015). The importance of orientation: implications of professional identity on classroom practice and for professional learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21, 178-190. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2014.928133>
- Karakasoglu-Aydin, Y. (2000). *Muslimische Religiosität und Erziehungsvorstellungen: eine empirische Untersuchung zu Orientierungen bei türkischen Lehramts- und Pädagogik-Studentinnen in Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main: IKO.
- King, S. H. (1993). Why did we choose teaching careers and what will enable us to stay? Insights from one cohort of the African American teaching pool. *Journal of Negro Education*, 62, 475-492. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2295518>
- Lee, V. J. (2013). Teachers of color creating and recreating identities in suburban schools. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(8), 1-16.
- MacLure, M. (1993). Arguing for your self: Identity as an organising principle in teachers' jobs and lives. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19, 311-322. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141192930190401>
- Mannheim, K. (1952). On the interpretation of "Weltanschauung." In K. Mannheim, *Essays on the sociology of knowledge* (pp. 33-83). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mannheim, K. (1982). *Structures of thinking*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Maylor, U. (2009). "They do not relate to Black people like us": Black teachers as role models for Black pupils. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24, 1-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930802382946>
- Milner, H. R. (2003). A case study of an African American English teacher's cultural comprehensive knowledge and self-reflective planning. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 18, 175-196.
- Milner, H. R., & Hoy, A. W. (2003). A case study of an African American teacher's self-efficacy, stereotype threat, and persistence. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19, 263-276. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x\(02\)00099-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x(02)00099-9)
- Mitchell, A. (1997). Teacher identity: A key to increased collaboration. *Action in Teacher Education*, 19(3), 1-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01626620.1997.10462875>

- Moore, M., & Hofman, J. E. (1988). Professional identity in institutions of higher learning in Israel. *Higher Education, 17*, 69-79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00130900>
- Nohl, A.-M. (2010). Narrative Interview and Documentary Interpretation. In R. Bohnsack, N. Pfaff, & W. Weller (Eds.), *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research* (pp. 195-217). Opladen & Farmington Hills: Budrich.
- Olsen, B. (2008). *Teaching what they learn, learning what they live*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Paechter, C., & Head, J. (1996). Gender, identity, status and the body: Life in a marginal subject. *Gender and Education, 8*, 21-29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713668484>
- Parkinson, P. (2008). Space for performing teacher identity: Through the lens of Kafka and Hegel. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 14*, 51-60. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540600701837640>
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Pennington, M. C. (2002). Bridging gaps: A dialectic perspective on teacher development. In A. Pulverness (Ed.), *IATEFL 2002* (pp. 61-74). Whitstable: IATEFL Publications.
- Pole, C. (1999). Black teachers giving voice: choosing and experiencing teaching. *Teacher Development, 3*, 313-328. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13664539900200089>
- Ramanathan, H. (2006). Asian American teachers: Do they impact the curriculum? Are there support systems for them? *Multicultural Education, 14*, 31-35.
- Robbins, M. M. (1995). Black students in teacher education. *Multicultural Teaching, 14*, 15-22.
- Rodgers, C. R., & Scott, K. H. (2008). The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre, & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education. Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 732-755). New York/London: Routledge.
- Rotter, C. (2014). *Zwischen Illusion und Schulalltag. Berufliche Fremd- und Selbstkonzepte von Lehrkräften mit Migrationshintergrund*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-03817-5>
- Rotter, C., & Timpe, M. (2016). Role models and confidants? Students with and without migration backgrounds and their perception of teachers with migration backgrounds. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 59*, 92-100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.05.016>
- Sachs, J. (2005). Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher. In P. Denicolo & M. Kompf (Eds.), *Connecting policy and practice: Challenges for teaching and learning in schools and universities* (pp. 5-21). Oxford: Routledge.
- Samuel, M., & Stephens, D. (2000). Critical dialogues with self: Developing teacher identities and roles. A case study of South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Research, 33*, 475-491. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0883-0355\(00\)00030-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0883-0355(00)00030-6)
- Santoro, N. (2015). The drive to diversify the teaching profession: narrow assumptions, hidden complexities. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 18*, 858-876. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.759934>
- Selimovic, S. (2008). *Die Motivation zur Wahl des Lehrerberufs – Eine ethnographische Studie mit Studentinnen und Studenten mit türkischem Migrationshintergrund. Examensarbeit, eingereicht bei: Arbeits- und Sozialpolitik Universität Kassel, im Fach Erziehungswissenschaften* (Diploma Thesis). Universität Kassel, Kassel.
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher, 34*(4), 14-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189x034004014>
- Shipp, V. H. (1999). Factors influencing the career choices of African American collegians: Implications for minority teacher recruitment. *Journal of Negro Education, 68*, 343-351. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2668106>
- Solomon, R. P. (1997). Race, role modelling, and representation in teacher education and teaching. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de L'éducation, 22*, 395-410. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1585791>
- Strasser, J., & Waburg, W. (2015). Students' perspectives on minority teachers in Germany. *Tertium Comparationis, 21*, 251-274.

- Su, Z. (1996). Why teach: Profiles and entry perspectives of minority students as becoming teachers. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, (29), 117-133.
- Su, Z. (1997). Teaching as a profession and as a career: Minority candidates' perspectives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13, 325-340. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(96\)00021-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(96)00021-2)
- Sugrue, C. (1997). Student teachers' lay theories and teaching identities: Their implications for professional development. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 20, 213-225. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0261976970200302>
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4, 21-44. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401\\_2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2)
- Volkman, M. J., & Anderson, M. A. (1998). Creating professional identity: Dilemmas and metaphors of a first-year chemistry teacher. *Science Education*, 82, 293-310. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/\(sici\)1098-237x\(199806\)82:3<293::aid-sce1>3.0.co;2-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1098-237x(199806)82:3<293::aid-sce1>3.0.co;2-7)
- Wilkins, C., Busher, H., Kakos, M., Mohamed, C., & Smith, J. (2012). Crossing borders: new teachers co-constructing professional identity in performative times. *Professional Development in Education*, 38, 65-77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2011.587883>
- Williams, J. (2010). Constructing a new professional identity: Career change into teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 639-647. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.016>
- Winograd, K. (2003). The functions of teacher emotion: the good, the bad, and the ugly. *Teachers College Record*, 105, 1641-1673. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-9620.2003.00304.x>
- Witzel, A., & Reiter, H. (2012). *The problem-centered interview*. London: SAGE Publications. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446288030>
- Zembylas, M. (2002). "Structures of feeling" in curriculum and teaching theorizing the the emotional rules. *Educational Theory*, 52, 187-208. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2002.00187.x>
- Zembylas, M. (2003). Emotions and teacher identity: a poststructural perspective. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 9, 214-238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540600309378>