

‘Contextual Elucidation’:
Foregrounding context during cross country
comparison of German and Australian Principals’
attitudes towards teaching out-of-field

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Comment to the Conversation article:

<https://theconversation.com/too-many-teachers-teaching-outside-their-area-of-expertise-39688>



- *We had cases where an unqualified teacher of science **set fire to a lab** and on another occasion 'gassed' a class causing a mass evacuation of the Science building.*
- *A year of helping another teacher to teach Year 10 Geography without the qualifications and watching the disaster that ensued, not to mention the **time and resources I put into assisting him***
- *"I respectfully suggest that where possible, we are allocated subjects we are qualified to teach." The result? The proverbial hit the fan! I was instructed (ordered!) to attend the Deputy Headmaster's office at lunchtime that very day where **I was harangued by my Subject Co Ordinator in front of the Deputy HM for daring to question his decision making ability.** It was the most vicious attack I was ever subjected to in my career...*
- *The experience led to **PTSD** ultimately resulting in my leaving the profession I loved.*

You would be a very brave teacher to try and refuse to teach an out of qualification class. Rebels are not tolerated. In the end you need your job!



Selvakumaran (in prep) about her experiences of being part of a team of Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) teachers, some of whom were out-of-field:

*Although out of field teaching is often viewed as a deficit, this vignette shares personal and team reflections that highlight the positive impact **when teachers view out of field teaching as an opportunity** and a strategy to enhance the instructional capacity of the **whole team**.*

***Working collaboratively**, the HSIE team has evidence that it has strengthened **teacher identities**, better understood general **instructional and subject-specific pedagogies**, and **adapted work practices** to the lessons learnt.*

*Our reflections show how valuing the experience of those working in schools is essential **to flip less than ideal system realities such as out of field teaching into valuable opportunities to develop expertise**.*

Principal attitudes, understandings influencing their responses to OOF

- The attitudes of school leaders to assigning teachers out-of-field, how this relates to their view of quality teaching, and the way they create a culture of support in their school, are of critical importance to how teachers experience teaching out-of-field.
- *'Misconceptions of school-leaders about the lived experience of teachers (both experienced and beginning teachers) in out-of-field positions can lead to crisis-management solutions without the much-needed support. None of this solves the real-life problems that develop as a result of their decisions'* (du Plessis, 2017, p. 132)

Transnational study

- To consider factors that influence incidences, perceptions, and responses in Australia and Germany.
- Currently no research exists that compares out-of-field teaching across countries, apart from those examining incidences according to qualification (Marginson et al., 2013), and correlation between student achievement and teacher qualification (e.g., Porsch & Wendt, 2015, 2016).
- *'...national boundaries are different from ethnic, cultural, and social boundaries. Within all countries, even the very old and fairly homogeneous ones, we may find several sub societies which on some variables may show greater variation than comparisons across national boundaries can demonstrate: that is, within-variation may sometimes be greater than between-variation.'* (Oyen, 1990, p. 7)
- **Purpose:** *'focus on traditional academic concerns that are common to different jurisdictions'* (Kennedy, p. 899)
- **Processes** (from social work tradition: Tripodi & Potocky-Tripodi, 2006):
 - problem formulation – informed by literature from both countries
 - instrument construction;
 - research designs;
 - sampling and generalizability;
 - data collection and analyses;
 - Conclusions and implications - seeks to generalize implications across countries

Literature relating to attitudes towards TOOF

Principals and teachers can view TOOF:

- **As positive, negative, both, neutral**
 - Porsch & Whanell (in press) – student impact
 - Cinkir & Kurum (2015) – high disapproval by teachers and principals
 - Hobbs (2013) – learning opportunity (from teachers)
- **Differently depending on the subject, the year level, the teacher, the context**
 - Du Plessis (2013) – some subjects not difficult (e.g. PE)
 - Hobbs (2013) – just filling in, making the most of it, pursuing an interest
- **In a way that reflects their view on what makes a good teacher, and what is needed to teach effectively**

Pilot Study

Research questions

- What attitudes do Australian and German secondary principals possess towards teaching out-of-field?
- What kind of support structures do schools provide for Australian and German secondary school teachers teaching out-of-field?
- What is the relationship between principals' attitudes towards teaching out-of-field and the schools' support structures?
- What is common and different across Australia and Germany?

Data collection and analysis

German Cases

- Collected specifically for the Systems Project using an agreed interview protocol. (2 states)
- Qualitative Content Analysis (Kuckartz, 2016)
- 5 school leaders, 5 schools
- 4 school leaders in this analysis

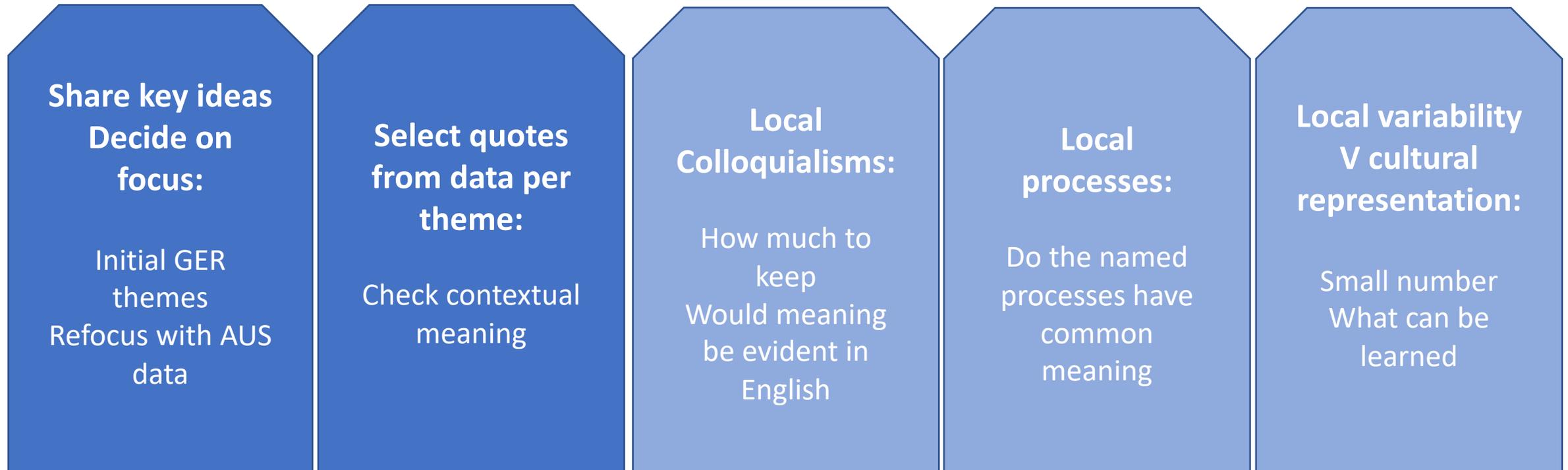
Australian Cases

- Existing interview data involving school leaders from a study *Teaching Across Subject Boundaries* (TASB project) that used similar questions. (3 states)
- Categorical and thematic analysis
- 18 school leaders, 7 schools
- 3 school leaders in this analysis

Multiple case study (Stake)

Cases selected to show the variety of regions (rural/regional), multiple states, and variety in responses in each country.

Selection and Interpretation of data: Elucidation of context



Emerging themes and categories

Theme	Categories
1. School leaders' attitudes towards teaching out-of-field	Category 1.1. Positioning of subject-matter knowledge Category 1.2. How subjects are positioned Category 1.3. Consequences Category 1.4. How the teacher as learner is positioned
2. Principal's views about how to support the learning of out-of-field teachers	Category 2.1 In-school support structures Category 2.2 External support Category 2.3 Teachers' initiative and drive

Local colloquialisms:

Examples from the German interviews:

German text	Translation
<i>Das ist immer eine Sache, wo ganz viel Engagement gefragt ist und ich kann nicht ein Fach so 0-8-15 unterrichten. (Idiom)</i>	<i>It is something where a lot of commitment is needed, and I can not teach a subject with a bog standard.</i>
<i>Sport war zwischendurch eben ein Mangelfach. (compound)</i>	Sport was at a time just a subject where not a sufficient number of teachers were available.

Local processes:

Certificate courses for getting 're-qualified'

German: Case 3: “Nevertheless, it is clear to us, of course, that a colleague, who has studied the subject, naturally has a completely different education than someone having attended a certificate course.”

Australia: Case 7: “If I’m getting teachers to teach out-of-field, I will get them to do a unit through ... some other tertiary institution to upskill them in that area... I gave him 0.2 off to do the Certificate IV in careers education... I got her to do the Graduate Certificate of Maths Education through Melbourne University”

- Germany provides Certificate courses for free for teachers in a variety of subjects.
- Australian universities provide certificate courses sometimes but usually at a cost for the teacher or school, unless supported by a government professional development program or initiative

Local variability V cultural representation: What is not acceptably taught OOF

GERMANY

Case 1

“So I would not let someone teach PE out-of-field. (...) Technology out-of-field.”

Case 2:

“Chemistry one would never do. Never let it teach out-of-field. There’s too much risk if anything happens.”

Case 3:

“make sure that in the main subjects, for example – German, Maths, English – and then also from grade 7 in the fourth major subject (...), no colleague teaches out-of-field.”

“PE is ruled out for non-specialist teaching because of the safety regulations”

AUSTRALIA

Case 5:

“The amount of qualification increases with the level of maths and science that you’re teaching”

“The head teacher would prefer a science teacher to teach Maths rather than an English teacher, and an English teacher would be really upset if we put a Maths teacher in their subject as well.”

Case 6:

“We look for people that we are confident to teach other things that just isn’t Maths/science.”

Case 7:

“I think Maths and English are different to History because they are base subjects where you need core learning right from the word go (...) If you do not have a Maths brain, it is difficult to get a maths brain. Same with English.”

Local variability V cultural representation:
Comparable view of what makes a good teacher in an OOF
context, eg. PASSION

GERMANY

Case 4:

‘And these are the typical subjects [History, Geography, Politics] that, in my opinion, can work well if you are a bit interested in this area. Another classical example is the music, as soon as colleagues has expertise in this area, play an instrument, have some experience in a choir and express that they have fun with that, it is that gladly done

AUSTRALIA

Case 7:

“I look at teachers and say okay, this is what you can teach, but you also have these passions, and if you’ve got a passion for something, that’s also just as well as being qualified.”

What can be learned?

Clues to similarities and differences internationally

Similarities

- Diversity in attitudes towards OOF
- Provision of mentoring being tailored to the subject
- Use of team structures to:
 - support collegiality through working together
 - sharing of resources
 - less evidence of planned units of work or lesson plans that could be provided for an OOF teacher in the German cases.

Differences

- 1) Reference to external networks only featured in the Australian interviews. These were seen as valuable learning opportunities.
- 2) In Germany collegiality appeared to be restricted to subject departments rather than whole school goals (although there was a mention of PD and pedagogical days that could be based on general school issues). In Australia, there appeared to be a number of references to structures that enabled collegiality across disciplinary boundaries:
 - observing teachers who weren't in their subject area (Case 7),
 - using the Quality Teaching Rounds which involve teachers from all subject areas (Case 5),
 - PLTs focusing on pedagogical concerns which may or may not be subject related (Case 6).

What can be learned?

A 'Classification scheme' and 'Hypothesis'

Attitude: Teaching as...	Focus of support for OOF teaching	Support types for OOF teachers
Pedagogy	Generic teaching skills Within or across subject areas	Whole school PD days and professional learning structures Reflection on practice Collegial support generally
Passion	Extending passion into teaching	Collegial support from in-field colleagues Undertaking formal certification or PD Support from external networks Additional time Observing lessons across subject areas
Capability	Enhancing or extending capability	Support from external networks Undertaking formal certification or PD Collegial support generally and from in-field colleagues Observing lessons across subject areas
Specialisation	Building subject-specific teaching skills	Undertaking formal certification or PD Collegial support from in-field colleagues

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