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Immigrant Student Teachers as Co-researchers

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Abstract. This study is based on a project in which immigrant student teachers were involved as co-researchers in a teacher educator's research project. The aim of the study is to highlight the students' experiences of, and their opinions about, participating in a lecturer's research project. The informants are six immigrant students in a teacher education (TE) program. Three of the students previously had been involved in the author's research project before they enrolled in this study. Another three had not been involved, but they had followed the project through their classmates' participation. Through qualitative interviews, the students reflected on the value of participating in a research project. The study indicates that immigrant students may acquire valuable knowledge through participation in teacher education research and that immigrant student teachers' experiential knowledge may contribute to increased knowledge in the field of intercultural education.

Keywords. co-researcher; experiential knowledge; immigrant student teacher; intercultural education; teacher education

Introduction

The Bologna Process (Bologna Declaration, 1999), as well as the curriculum for teacher education (TE) in many countries (Munthe & Rogne, 2015), requires students' involvement in research. A Norwegian white paper also emphasizes the importance of undergraduate students obtaining practical experience in research by participating in their lectures research and development work (R&D) (Meld. St. 18. 2012–2013, 2013). *Guidelines for Teacher Education* especially emphasizes the importance of involving immigrant students in all parts of TE (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012).

Although students at graduate levels, such as MA and PhD candidates, collaborate in research with their supervisors, very few scientific papers acknowledge undergraduate students as contributors to research studies (Päivikki & Nissilä, 2015). If undergraduate students do participate in their lectures R&D, they generally help with data collection and are not acknowledged (Päivikki & Nissilä, 2015). There are exceptions, however. Curtis

and colleagues (Curtis, Goodson, McDonnell, Shields, & Wyness, 2012), as well as student teachers, were engaged in collaborative research within an education studies program. The students were involved in nearly all stages of the research project. They concluded that the cooperation constituted a valuable learning experience for both the student teachers and the researchers. It is possible that undergraduate students are more involved in research, but their participation has not resulted in published articles. In addition, some studies found that pupils in primary and secondary schools may benefit from participating in researchers' R&D (Bahou, 2011; Fielding, 2004; Messiou, 2014; Smit, 2013; Smit, Plomp, & Ponte, 2010). Extensive research revealed that there have been no studies on the involvement of undergraduate immigrant students in their lecturers' R&D. Although the Bologna Process (Bologna Declaration, 1999) and curriculums in higher education (Munthe & Rogne, 2015) have demanded student involvement in research, they have not proposed how the collaboration between students and researchers can be manifested in practice.

The basis of this study is a previous, initial research project, entitled project1,[i] in which three immigrant student teachers were co-researchers. The theme was the low percentage of immigrant students in TE which had special relevance for the immigrant student teachers. Data in project1 were collected in focus groups in upper secondary school, and the students were involved in all phases of the research project. The students could use data collected in project1 in their own bachelors' theses. Before continuing, it must be clarified that the interest of this paper is not project1, but student teachers' opinions, both students that were involved in project1 and students that were not, about the knowledge that may be acquired when students collaborate in lecturers' R&D. The manner in which knowledge can be developed through students' participation in research is further examined, and the following research questions were addressed:

Main research question:

What knowledge may be acquired when immigrant student teachers participate as co-researchers in teacher educators' research?

This question is further developed into the following sub-questions:

- What knowledge may students acquire as co-researchers?
- What knowledge may be provided to the field of intercultural education research based on the immigrant students' experiential knowledge?

The concept of co-researcher, in the context of this study, does not mean that the students were the actual researchers, but rather that they acted as the researcher's assistants. The primary reason for involving immigrant students in project1 was to offer them a rich learning experience and to enable them to acquire knowledge to use for their own bachelors' theses. In addition, the researcher understood the students' perspectives, as immigrants, to be valuable to project1, and assumed that the experiential knowledge of the informants in project1 (the immigrant pupils in secondary school) were identifiable by the

participating immigrant student teachers and vice versa. They shared the experience of being immigrants. The researcher, was a native.

The analytical framework of this study presents four reasons, or motives, for why students should collaborate in research: legal, social, educational, and innovative motives. The informants are six student teachers whose details will be presented in the method section. The method section also presents the data collection and the data analysis information. After the method session the data are analyzed in light of the theoretical framework to determine why students should collaborate in a lecturer's research. Based on this analysis, the research questions are ultimately discussed. The paper argues that students' collaboration in research may expand the horizons of the student teachers. In addition, the argue is that student teachers' experiential knowledge may promote new interpretations in the field of intercultural education.

Motives for Students' Participation in Their Lecturers' Research

This study adopted a sociocultural framework. People learn through communication and reflection in social interactions, and students may reach their zone of proximal development in collaboration with a more competent person (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, immigrant students could reach their zone of proximal development as co-researchers together with a more competent person; as in this case, the researcher. The analytical framework utilizes a research project which presents four reasons that students should be involved in research (Smit, 2013; Smit et al., 2010). Smit and colleagues involved pupils in primary and secondary schools in their research projects. They highlighted four motives for involving pupils as co-researchers as legal, social, pedagogical, and innovative. The terms *pedagogy* and *pedagogical* are not common in TE in all countries, so, for the purposes of this work, *education* and *educational* will be used. To distinguish between school levels, the term *pupil* refers to primary and secondary schools, and the word *student* refers to higher education. However, even if Smit and colleagues' study had been done in primary and secondary schools, the same motives would have been legitimate for involving student teachers in research. The educational and the innovative motives have special relevance for the research questions and will be emphasized.

The Legal Motive

Smit and colleagues (Smit 2013; Smit et al., 2010) claim that the legal motive to involve pupils in research is based upon *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1989), and the participation is a goal in itself. For achieving effective teacher education, the Bologna Process (Bologna Declaration, 1999), as well as the curriculum for TE in Norway and other countries (Munthe & Rogne, 2015), requires students' involvement in research. According to the white paper cited above, students involved in research will develop analytical and critical thinking skills. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (Meld. St. 18. 2012–2013, 2013, p. 66) cites a number of learning outcomes to show why students should participate in research: a) increased knowledge of scientific research

methods, b) increased ability to think critically, c) deeper insight within the field, and d) an ability to search the scientific literature and conduct research at a later stage in their professional lives. Moreover, to involve immigrant student teachers in research contributes to satisfying the government's requirement of facilitating study for immigrant student teachers (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012).

The Social Motive

The social motive for involving pupils in research focuses on the community aspect. According to Smit (2013), pupils in primary and secondary schools will obtain experience in democracy and citizenship through involvement in research. Involving pupils in research also makes education more inclusive (Messiou, 2014). The social motive for involving students in research is to include them in the actual research activity. Previous research shows that immigrant students can be isolated (Naidoo 2015) and segregated (Catarci, 2014) in schools, and that native students' lack of knowledge about immigration may be transferred to their immigrant classmates (Pagani, 2014). In this study, the co-researchers were immigrant students themselves, and previous research indicate that immigrant student teachers experience stigmatization and discrimination and that their cultures are not valued (Wilkins & Lall, 2011). The suggestion is that collaborations between immigrant student teachers and researchers may increase the confidence of the student teachers, and the experiences from collaborating in research may make the student teachers more confident when working with other teachers in school placements in the future (Le Cornu quoted in Rigelman & Ruben, 2012).

The Educational Motive

According to Smith (2013), the educational motive includes the desire of teachers to promote a closer relationship with the pupils, the pupils' greater involvement, and the pupils' increased personal growth. In the sociocultural view of education, students are active participants in their education and construct knowledge within social environments (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Student teachers who work with a researcher will observe how the researcher conducts the research and may discuss pertinent issues with him or her. With the researcher's guidance, the students will acquire new knowledge. The knowledge the students acquire as co-researchers will enable them to develop skills for their own research-based theses. Thus, research-based education may lead to greater student engagement, increased academic performance (Bland & Atweh, 2007) and positive learning outcomes (Kyvik & Vågan, 2014).

A collaboration between a researcher and students is based on both theoretical and experiential knowledge; for the researcher, it is mainly the theoretical, and for the students, it is mainly the experiential. A comparison of the value placed on academic and experiential knowledge in traditional and modern societies shows that modern societies place greater value on academic knowledge, and traditional communities place greater value on experiential knowledge (Eriksen, 2006). When a lecturer asks for the students' opinions based on their cultural experience, the students' cultures are seen to have value, and that action gives

meaning (Spernes, 2014b), but studies show that immigrant students' experiential knowledge is not valued in school (Spernes, 2014a, 2014b). As found by Curtis et al. (2012, p. 5), "Students' confidence grew as they recognized that their ideas were valued and that they were equipped to carry out research."

According to Rigelman and Ruben (2012), there is a hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students. In a research project where students cooperate with a lecturer, there will be a distinct hierarchical relationship. The lecturer and the students will have different roles and different degrees of responsibility. However, the possibility for the students to work closely with the lecturer may break down barriers between them to create a better learning environment. In addition, students can learn social interaction skills by cooperating closely with their lecturer (Päivikki & Nissilä, 2015, p. 28).

The Innovative Motive

The innovative motive "emphasizes that students have insights the school can make use of" (Smit, 2013, p. 553). By utilizing this motive as a reason for students' participation in research, universities place value on students' experiential and theoretical knowledge. During a research project, it would be possible for students, in collaboration with other students and the researcher, to use the learned theoretical knowledge when raising questions and revising developed ideas (Kuusisaari, 2014). In addition, involvement in research may be a way for student teachers to recognize the connection between theory and practice (Munthe & Rogne, 2015). In other words, it would allow students to see the connection between their education and their future careers and enhance the quality and relevance of theoretical learning.

Teachers who see the relevance of research and theory may acquire new scientific knowledge and may conduct practice-based research themselves. This can significantly increase their level of professionalism and, in turn, create opportunities for them to influence their own work and to become active participants who will influence educational change (Vähäsantanen, 2015). Also, teachers' new scientific knowledge may lead to new perspectives, which may change educational policies (Cook-Sather, 2002) and promote innovation in education (Fielding, 2011). Teachers new perspectives will also contribute to intercultural understanding which will prevent stigmatization of immigrant students (Portera, 2008).

Method

This study examined what knowledge may be acquired when immigrant student teachers participate as co-researchers in teacher educators' research. The informants in this study were six student teachers, all immigrated to Norway as children or youth. They had also in common that they were socialized into a culture different from the traditional Norwegian culture. Three of the informants had previously participated in one of this author's earlier project, entitled project1, and three informants had not participated in project1. (As said earlier,

the theme of project1 was the low percentage of immigrant students in TE which had special relevance for the immigrant student teachers. Data in project1 were collected in focus groups in upper secondary school and the members in the focus groups were immigrant pupils.) In project1 the participating students had roles as assistants, and they participated in all the phases of the project. The primary reason for their participation was for them to learn from a researcher how to accomplish the different phases of a research project. The informants that had participated in project1 will be designated as *co-researchers* further in this paper. Three informants had not participated in project1, but they were classmates of the co-researchers. They had been invited, but they chose not to participate. These students followed project1 through their classmates' participation, and it was interesting to also get their perspectives about collaboration between students and lecturers in research projects. The students who did not participate project1 will be designated as *student teachers who did not participate in project1* further in this paper. If no distinction is made, they are just designated student teachers or informants.

I was the lecturer for three of the informants in this study: one of the co-researchers and two of the student teachers who had not participated in project1. The relationship between a researcher and informants in a study may affect the research results (Repstad, 1998). However, nothing indicated that the students of the researcher responded differently than the other three during the interviews, and there is no suspect that their inclusion affected the interviews (cf. Stake, 2006).

The study is based on data from field notes and qualitative interviews. The field notes were written throughout the entirety of project1, and is related to the co-researchers, not the teacher students that did not participate in project1. Some of the co-researchers' comments, questions, and reflections were recorded, often verbatim, through project1. The co-researchers consented to use the field notes in this study. The interviews in this study took place approximately one year after the end of project1 and shortly after the students completed their bachelors' theses. The interview guide was semi-structured, and all the informants were asked general questions about involvement in lecturers' research. The three co-researchers were also asked questions related to their contributions to project1 and personal benefits gained from their participation in the project, and the three students teachers who did not participate project1 had opinions about how they understood their classmates', the co-researchers, participation.

In order to determine how students and the research field could benefit from student collaboration in research, the interviews and the field notes were categorized based on the four motives for student involvement in research. The analysis was iterative within and among the four motives to refine the initial interpretation. The language of instruction in TE is Norwegian, and the informants also spoke Norwegian during the interviews. The interviews were recorded, and quotations from the interviews, which are used to confirm the informants' statements, were translated into English.

The Student Teachers' Opinions of Involvement in Lecturers' Research

This section will present data in light of the four motives for involving students in research: legal, social, educational, and innovative motives. Based on the research questions, the educational and innovative motives are emphasized throughout this section.

Legal Motives

The legal motives for involving students in research are related to official documents which highlight the importance of students' involvement in research (Meld. St. 18. 2012–2013, 2013). Even though the teacher education instructors were especially encouraged to involve immigrant student teachers in their R&D (Ministry of Education and Research 2012), the informants had never, after three years in TE, heard about other research projects than project1 where student teachers had been involved. The political goal is to qualify the student teachers in the use of inquiry methods to learn and to teach (Munthe & Rogne, 2015), and the white paper highlights skills the students need to acquire (Meld. St. 18. 2012–2013, 2013, p. 66). All of these essential skills will be discussed later.

Social Motives

One of the benefits of involving students in research is the social motive (Smit, 2013; Smit et al., 2010), and in this study the social motive is related to the recognition of the immigrant students' minority backgrounds. The co-researchers recognized themselves in the stories the pupils in secondary school told about infringement and lack of recognition in school (Spernes, 2014a, 2014b), and they said that their own experiences had been reflected in the pupils' stories (cf. Catarci, 2014; Naidoo, 2015; Pagani, 2014). Primary, secondary, or college faculty had never sought the informants' experiential knowledge prior to project1 (cf. Wilkins & Lall, 2011). As I understand their statements, they had through "the hidden curriculum" (cf. Jackson, 1990) come to believe that their home cultures were less valuable than the traditional Norwegian culture. Both the co-researchers and the student teachers who did not participate in project1, said that project1 had helped them to see that their own culture had value (cf. Eriksen, 2006). The co-researchers also said that they had obtained new perspectives on the impact of culture on identity through their systematic work with the empirical data. The findings suggest that, by drawing on experiential knowledge, the immigrant co-researchers increased their self-confidence and self-esteem. This was especially true for the co-researchers who had used their experiential knowledge in project1. Also the student teachers who did not participate in project1, said that they perceived their own background valuable because a researcher showed interest in their own culture.

Educational Motives

When analyzing the educational motives, it is appropriate to separate the perspectives of the co-researchers who had experience from participation in a research project from the perspectives of the students who did not participate.

The Perspectives of the Co-researchers

All the co-researchers said that the research process had been far more extensive than they had thought before they participated in project1. One of them said,

> I wasn't aware of it [how to do research] when I joined the project, and I wasn't aware of all the processes involved in a research project. I think that the parts in which we elaborated on the data, when we reached the analytical questions, and prepared the interview guide, were important, especially the interviews, when we were out making the interviews.

This co-researcher emphasized that the preparation of the analytical questions and the interview guide, as well as her involvement in the focus groups, was valuable. She said that she had had an assignment doing focus group interviews during an internship and that she had discovered there was "a great distance" between her and the pupils. She claimed that her participation in focus groups together with a researcher made her understand "the importance of creating a good atmosphere and having a conversation rather than simply questions and answers." She also said that she had learned how to break down the hierarchical relationship between the interviewer and the interview objects (cf. Rigelman & Ruben, 2012).

All the co-researchers said that participation in project1 showed them the importance of reading relevant theories before compiling an interview guide and that the analysis had been far more demanding than they expected. They also highlighted the value of practicing research as a way to get new knowledge. One of the co-researchers said that "to think critically has to be experienced." They said they wondered if instruction from a lecturer in class or assignments in internship would have been enough to understand the scope of a research project. They pointed out that some of their classmates found the methodology courses related to the bachelor's thesis to be frustrating, but it was easier for them because they had the experience from participation in project1. They stated that they might have found it difficult to work systematically on their bachelors' theses without their prior experience. One of the co-researchers said that "to practice together with a researcher is better than to be taught by a lecturer in class." Thus, the cooperative role they had played obviously gave them a greater understanding of how to do research.

The Perspectives of the Student Teachers Who Did Not Participate in Project1

The informants who were classmates of the co-researchers, but had not taken part in project1 themselves, said that observing their classmates made them understand that collaborating with a researcher would be the optimal way to acquire knowledge of research work (cf. Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). One of them said that all student teachers should be given an opportunity to take part in a lecturer's research. She also said that the students should not have had the opportunity to avoid participation, as she did herself. She stated that Arta, her friend and classmate who had participated in project1, obtained major benefits for her bachelor's thesis,

> Arta is way ahead of the rest of us. She has interviewed, she has worked with you who have done this before, and, when I think about it, I should

> have allocated time to take part in it. She has already done research work, but the rest of us are just starting out.

This student also said that she knew that her classmate had used data from project1 in her bachelor's thesis and that she could not "compete with a student who had received professional help." The two other informants who did not take part in project1 were not concerned about the apparent advantage of the co-researchers. They were more concerned about the content of project1 and that the co-researchers had become acquainted with the experiences of immigrant pupils in secondary school.

Innovative Motives

Also, when analyzing the innovative motives, it is appropriate to separate the perspectives of the co-researchers and the perspectives of the student teachers who did not gain experience through research participation.

The Perspectives of the Co-researchers

When preparing the interview guide for project1, the co-researchers emphasized cultural differences between immigrants and natives in school, and they had many suggestions for current themes. They were active and dedicated throughout the workshop, and they said their contributions were related to their own experiences as immigrant pupils. As one of them said,

> I am fully aware of the questions that immigrant students have about choosing higher education. I think our knowledge from culture is valuable when we create questions for use in the interviews.

The co-researchers' comments contributed to topics such as teachers' intercultural knowledge, cultural differences between home and school, and parental involvement. They said that their experiences as minority students were valuable and that they were thankful that their experiential knowledge was given value (cf. Curtis et al., 2012; Eriksen, 2006; Spernes, 2014a, 2014b).

The co-researchers were also active and dedicated in the analysis workshop. Remarkably, all of the co-researchers understood the statements and narratives from the data in project1 in the context of their own experiences. They identified with the pupils' narratives about home cultures and their challenges of being immigrants. Because of their personal connection with the ideas and feelings expressed through the data, they disregarded the research questions. They used their experiential knowledge when raising questions and revising developed ideas (cf. Kuusisaari, 2014). Thus, they interpreted the data in a different context than the researcher did. All of the co-researchers said that their participation in project1 had been an advantage for the project, and they claimed that their participation was valuable for both themselves and project1. One of them stated it as follows:

> I think that by participating in the project and through our experiences, we have contributed things that maybe you might not have thought of. Maybe that makes the findings more reliable.

As her statement indicates, this co-researcher believed that their experiences as immigrants gave the research project another dimension, stressing that their involvement could make the "findings more reliable." The word 'reliable' in Norwegian is exclusively related to research, and the students were presented with this concept in a lecture. As I understand the student, her statement is a way to highlight the importance of experiential knowledge.

Previous research (Lewis, Mumford, Singer & Bonner, 2009; Maylor, 2009) shows that immigrant students identify with immigrant teachers, and in this case, the immigrant pupils identified with the co-researcher. The student's participation in the focus groups contributed to making the pupils feel free to talk. The co-researcher also followed up with questions in a different way than the researcher would have done. One of them said that her identification with the pupils made it possible for her to "ask the right questions." Another co-researcher explained it this way, "As we live with being foreigners in this country, while the Norwegians do not, we understand how minority pupils think." As I understand the co-researcher, she believes it may be difficult for a native Norwegian teacher to fully understand an immigrant pupil.

The co-researchers said that the asymmetrical relationship between themselves and the researcher had not created difficulties in cooperation. They said they felt free to say whatever they wanted, even when their opinions and the researcher's differed. They argued that they had valuable knowledge, which was important to the study, and that the native researcher did not have this knowledge. They said their participation and their perspectives enriched both the research process and the results (cf. Cook-Sather, 2002; Curtis et al., 2012).

The Perspectives of the Student Teachers Who Did Not Participate in Project1

As stated, the informants who had not participated in project1 said that they could see the benefits of the collaboration by observing the co-researchers, their classmates. They also shared opinions about the value of involving students in lecturers' research projects,

> Of course, it is valuable [to involve students in research]. Several heads are better than one. We talk about different aspects, yes, you possess certain knowledge, and they bring forth some facts. In a way, you meet, maybe halfway, and then you produce an altogether different text than you would have done on your own.
>
> I think it is valuable [that some of the immigrant students were co-researchers in project1] because they took part in creating the questions for the interviews. They draw more from their backgrounds as immigrants. They think, "Okay, what do I want to know? What do I think about that? Why do I think they choose one thing but not another?" They also have a different perspective than you [the native researcher] would have.

Although these informants had not been involved in project1, their opinions were that students, especially those from immigrant backgrounds, could provide

valuable knowledge for a project like project1. They believed that the different perspectives, the native researcher's perspectives and the immigrant student teachers' perspective, would contribute to "a different paper" than what would have resulted without the participation of the immigrant student teachers. They found the co-researchers' experiential knowledge valuable (cf. Curtis et al., 2012; Eriksen, 2006; Spernes, 2014a, 2014b). One of them said that those who have an immigrant background could use their experiential knowledge to understand the challenges immigrant students face in school and claimed that "It's hard for Norwegians to reflect on this issue."

Discussion

The discussion in this section is what knowledge may be acquired when immigrant student teachers participate as co-researchers in teacher educators' research, based on the findings presented above. The students' potential knowledge acquisition and possible new knowledge that can be applied in the field of intercultural education are discussed.

Knowledge the Students May Acquire by Participating in a Research Project

The students who participated as co-researchers said that collaboration with a researcher was valuable. They highlighted that they had learned how to plan and conduct research, how to systematize and analyze the data, and how to reflect in light of a theoretical framework. This learning outcomes are also mentioned by The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (Meld. St. 18. 2012–2013, 2013) as a reason why students should participate in research. The co-researchers indicated that it would have been difficult to get the same research skills without participating in project1. This was also mentioned by the informants who had not been involved in project1. They saw the advantages the co-researchers had when working with their bachelor's thesis. During the different phases of the project, the co-researchers also saw the correlation between theory and practice. This knowledge may give them an enhanced ability to reflect on the theoretical bases of educational questions in the future (cf. Westbury, Hansén, Kansanen, & Björkvist, 2005).

Both the co-researchers and the student teachers who had not participated in project1, saw the benefit of working with a researcher. They saw that assistance from a more experienced person led to greater engagement and increased academic performance (cf. Bland & Atweh, 2007; Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Supported by the researcher, the co-researchers had come through their zone of proximal development and they had reached new zones throughout the different phases of the project (cf. Vygotsky, 1978). Students who get knowledge about scientific methods through lectures will also get this knowledge, but a student who collaborate with a researcher will maybe get a more thorough understanding.

As previously stated, the interviews took place shortly after the students completed their bachelors' theses. During the interviews, one of the co-

researchers said that she had postponed the submission date of her thesis because she wanted to spend more time on it. Although she did not say it directly, the interpretation is that because of her knowledge of the requirements of good research, she demanded too much of herself. Curtis and colleagues (2012) claim that students' confidence grew when they were equipped to carry out research, but, in this case, the student perhaps became too critical of her own work because she knew how it would be done by an experienced researcher. It is worrisome if students who participate as co-researchers demand the same standards of themselves as those of an established researcher. This suggests that lecturers must clearly communicate to the undergraduate students that the expectations of their thesis are not to have the same standards as those of researchers.

The informants' experience from prior schooling was that their cultural background had no value, but during project1, their experiential knowledge was required. The co-researchers were more capable of reflecting on their own lives and situations when they analyzed the experiences of others in the same situation, but also those who had not been involved in project1 found their own culture more valuable because of the lecturer's interest. Thus, involving immigrant students in research related to their cultural background, may give them knowledge that strengthens their identities and give them more self-confidence. This knowledge may also be important as teachers in the future (Portera, 2008).

Possible New Knowledge Supplied to the Field

The informants in this study, both the co-researchers and the student teachers who did not participate in project1, said that experiences from cultures different from the traditional native culture, had to be valuable in understanding immigrant pupils' school situations (cf. Curtis et al., 2012; Eriksen, 2006; Spernes, 2014a, 2014b). They further claimed that immigrant students' perspectives enriched both the research process and the results (cf. Cook-Sather, 2002; Curtis et al., 2012). As I understand, the co-researchers produced knowledge that would have been difficult for the researcher to develop without their participation. Due to the co-researchers' experiential knowledge, their viewpoints were different from the researcher's. Unlike the researcher, they had similar experiential knowledge to that of the pupils in project1, and they used their experiential knowledge when raising questions and revising developed ideas (cf. Kuusisaari, 2014). Thus, they interpreted the data in a different context than the researcher did. In fact, when developing the interview guide, some of the students' suggestions supplemented the researcher's. Based on the researcher's academic knowledge, the same questions could have been prepared; however, it is unlikely that the researcher could have followed up the narratives in the same way as the co-researchers did. My opinion is also that the immigrant youths in secondary school might not have opened up to a non-immigrant researcher to the extent that they did to an immigrant student teacher capable of understanding their experiences. The way the co-researchers analyzed the data also indicated that their experiences played a significant role in how they emphasized and interpreted the pupils' narratives and statements.

The immigrant student teachers had insights that the native researcher did not have (cf. Fielding, 2004; Smit, 2013), and these insights contributed knowledge to the intercultural education field. This does not mean that it is impossible for a native researcher to understand immigrant students, but the immigrant co-researchers added project1 an extra dimension, and as I understand, this was valuable for project1.

Conclusion

This paper shows that collaboration between immigrant students and lecturers may produce valuable knowledge for both the students themselves, and for the research field. It is neither desirable nor possible to generalize based on the limited data; however, I argue that the findings may be transferable to other situations in which lecturers involve immigrant students in their R&D. And, as I understand, legal, social, educational, and innovative motives may be substantial reasons for the inclusion of immigrant students as co-researchers.

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[i] The results of project1 are described in two articles: Spernes 2014a and Spernes 2014b.