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CiCe  
Institute for Policy Studies in Education  
London Metropolitan University  
166 – 220 Holloway Road  
London N7 8DB  
UK

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## Competences of teachers and experiences of students in German secondary school

Bernd Wagner  
Free University of Berlin (Germany)

### **Abstract**

*This paper reports on the Portuguese sample of a comparative study of competences concerning the expectations of students and perceptions of teachers, in secondary schools in Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Romania.*

*In Berlin and Lüneburg in Germany we used the translated Italian questionnaires for a sample of 25 secondary teachers and 200 students. Although the German situation in the secondary-school system different from the Italian in many ways the questions about competence and democratic relationships between students and teachers were of interest for our sample. The German discourse about competences in secondary-school is much about individual skills that are based on the so called *Gestaltungsfähigkeit* (ability to create) which has a strong implication on Education for Sustainable Development. In this discourse collective approaches like democratic structures and equal rights in the classroom are not strongly mentioned. Moreover students with a migration background tend to be excluded and forgotten in the German school system with a strong *habitus* on German language. Teachers mention that democratic principles are taught in the curriculum and the extra teaching programs but difficult to live in a hierarchic and administrative school system. Pupils complain about different attention to their learning skills and motivation.*

In Berlin and Lüneburg in Germany we used the translated Italian questionnaires of a sample of 25 secondary teachers and 200 students. Although the German situation in the secondary-school system differs from the Italian in many ways the questions about competence and democratic relationships between students and teachers were of interest in our sample. The German discourse about competences in secondary-school is much about individual skills that are based on the so called *Gestaltungsfähigkeit* (ability to create) which has a strong implication on Education for Sustainable Development. In this discourse collective approaches such as democratic structures and equal rights in the classroom are not strongly mentioned.

Moreover students with a migration background tend to be excluded and forgotten in the German school system with its strong *Habitus* on German language. Teachers mention democratic principles are taught in the curriculum and the extra teaching programs but are difficult to live in a hierarchic and administrative school system. Pupils complain about different attention to their learning skills and motivation. Thus highly motivated students from a family background that is open to intellectual education are much better assisted than others.

**Results (teacher questionnaire):**

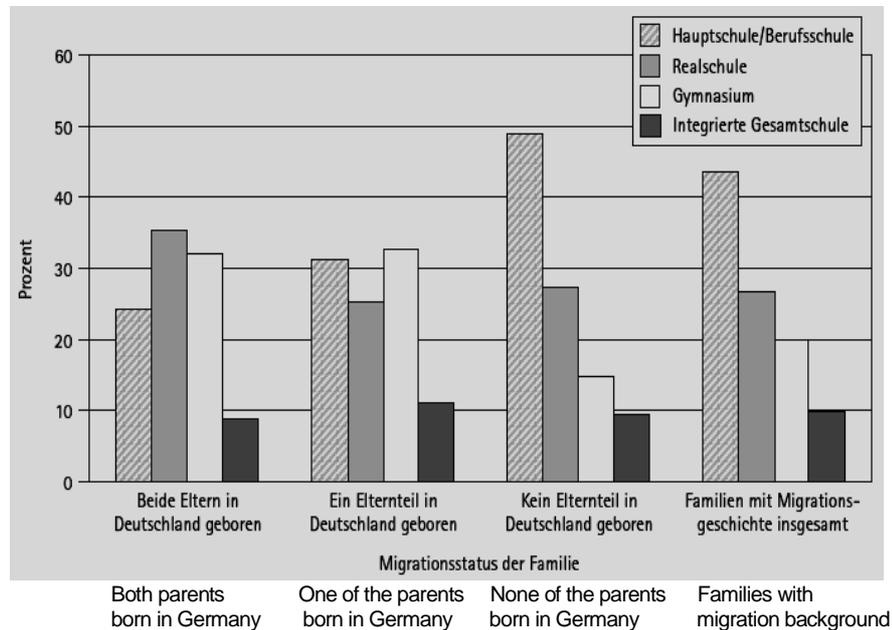
German teachers who took part in our sample are usually motivated and interested in strengthening their teaching competences. They usually respect pupils, try to see student needs and plan their lessons dedicatedly. Nevertheless teachers of our sample complain that they can't fulfil their duties because they are overburdened with administrative responsibilities. Research and new teaching concepts can't be brought forward and so teachers are forced to stick to their preparations already made. The natural scientific basic formation in the transition of the two institutions kindergarten and primary school is not connected as teachers say. They suggest a model of narrative didactic and point out the importance of situations of failure. Teachers consider this experiences suitable for experimental learning conditions. Moreover they highlight the possibility of combining basic and primary formation in natural sciences by evaluating experiments through story telling. The secondary school teachers complain about the high amount of administrative work and the high level of stress in working circumstances. This is the main reason why individual coaching of pupils especially of those who are not showing signs of particular needs can't be done in a satisfying manner. They suggest fewer weekly lesson duties and more exchange with colleagues also from other subjects. Actually these requests are echoed by the teacher unions.

Another point teachers complain about is the low attention capability of their pupils. Teachers remark that they lose a lot of time regaining attention. More sport also in scientific subjects would help dealing with these problems as teachers point out. Also the OECD remarks that teachers lose more than 10% of their classroom time dealing with disruptive pupils. Three out of four teachers feel that they lack incentives to improve the quality of their teaching, while bad behaviour by pupils in the classroom disrupts lessons in three schools out of five. Teachers also complain of no systematic appraisal or feedback on their work. Usually they are even punished by being assigned more duties if they cope with the classroom and school situation. German education authorities can take from this the need to provide rewards and recognition for good teaching performances and best practice examples. The survey results suggest that education planners could support teachers and pupils more effectively by focusing more on learning outcomes rather than detailed curricula.

### **Results (pupils questionnaire):**

Pupils complain about the little IT skills of their teachers. They think often that teaching methods are antiquated, teachers stressed and a high number of lessons either cancelled or taught by teachers of other subjects. Pupils of our sample mention that teachers usually are not motivated. Personal approaches are only possible for a few minutes each lesson. Pupils are very dependent on their parents and family if they want to solve further questions. So if German pupils come to school with a educational background its much easier for them to follow and gain success expressed by an A-level. This is also a result of the OECD PISA researches in Germany that give an extra emphasis on pupils with migration background:

#### **15-year-olds by Migration Background of the Family and Schooling**



Status of Migration of the Families in the Sample

Colours:

White: comprehensive secondary school (with A- level degree)

Dark blue: secondary school (with B- Level degree)

Light blue: comprehensive school

Hatched blue: vocational school

Source: OECD Pisa 2006

***The highest proportion of students with low success at school are children whose parents were both not born in Germany.***

This statistic shows the problems that segregation and exclusion have brought about over the course of 50 years of migration to Germany:

***Significant low success of pupils with migration background in the German school system***

The German school system has little regard for heterogeneity and cultivates monolingual habits. Therefore it is not able to cope appropriately with the education of pupils having migration backgrounds .

***Ethnic segregation in the big cities creates ghettos***

Schools without pupils who speak German as a mother tongue suffer a low level of success in all basic skills like reading, writing and all related areas.

***Withdrawal to the culture of provenance which is mainly artificial and invented by the 3rd and 4th generation***

Islamic fundamentalism of the so-called guest workers began with the economic problems of the 70s. Newcoming immigrants find themselves confronted with unexpected, surprisingly

old-fashioned communities of immigrants with values they have never experienced in their home countries. As we are dealing with parallel societies newcomers often have to cope with integration into two different systems.

German school system has to cope with deficit in technical support. Its not only teachers who regret a lack of IT skills. Although schools were much better equipped with technique pupils complain that it is either not well installed or not accessible to them. German school tends to be very rigid in its time planning schemes, so extra needs and extra motivation are often not perceived by teachers and lost for learning processes. Extra teaching staff is only possibly by the diagnosis of deficits or severe learning difficulties. It should be easier for pupils to demand extra teaching staff to strengthen personal positive skills. There is also the big issue that German schools should be more open to heterogeneity and diversity issues in the context of gender mainstreaming.

### **Conclusions: Creative Teaching and Learning Environments**

The pupils and teachers questionnaires results emphasise that the teacher's role is not only in transmitting knowledge and providing correct solutions. The teacher is also seen as a facilitator of active learning by students who seek out solutions for themselves. The latter *constructivist* view of teaching generally has more support among German teachers surveyed than the former *direct transmission* (TALIS 2009).

In the classroom teachers are using hand-outs and well structured processes more often than they used studentoriented practices. Teachers and pupils complain that they don't find time to care for individual needs in the classroom. Project work and open forms of teaching require more active participation by the student. The factors that prevent teachers from putting their beliefs about teaching into practice require further investigation. Nevertheless this is a source of frustration for teachers. Teachers of mathematics place use more structured patterns than discursive approaches. Teachers in the humanities usually emphasise project work in which practical skills are also taught. Generally teachers complain that they are not using enough student-oriented practices. This shows the importance to enable students to take more responsibility for their learning processes, and suggests that there is a challenge for teachers to broaden their teaching repertoire.

Recent research shows clearly that foundations for successful learning are laid in early learning experiences. More efforts on early childhood education should therefore be developed. In primary school basic patterns of self-reliance and responsibility for learning processes must be transmitted to pupils. Primary school should stimulate our children's curiosity and eagerness to learn. Children with limited aptitude for speech or who do not speak German very well require particular attention. In addition, teacher training must be improved. Teachers as facilitators organise learning in schools in such ways that children can learn from each other. This benefits also advanced pupils and opens the school for community questions.

Moreover school should be a place of recognition. That allows pupils to show their abilities rather than being frustrated by not reaching results. That's why inclusion and participation are the most important strategies also mentioned in our pupil's

questionnaire. Participation means responsibility in decision making and carrying forward learning projects. It also puts an emphasis on relationships between teachers and pupils. Both should be part of a learning process. As Freire pointed out they should be switching roles in emancipating forms of education.

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