



Fairness for All. Integration through education

Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008

1. Conceptual Basis for the CBP 2008

The term integration calls to mind various definitions and desired goals. These range from immigrant assimilation to unquestioningly accepting diversity.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung's understanding of integration is multidimensional and based on achieving active societal participation of, and interaction between community members. People are integrated in a society when they share common social, cultural, economic and political life, as well as when they have access to equal opportunities and public goods. Integration is inevitably a multidimensional phenomenon. Alongside the most important structural dimensions, such as social, economic and political inclusion, there is also a cultural dimension. This last dimension has normative and emotional aspects. Mutual respect and fairness, the recognition of shared basic values, and the feeling of belonging to a common society in the country of cohabitation are the fundamentals for resilient integration.

The pathways to successful societal integration are set in the home/family context as well as in kindergartens and schools. Those who have access to a good education generally have high earning potentials and opportunities to get involved in their communities. The average level of education of Germany's population heavily influences the country's degree of social cohesion and economic prosperity.

Providing people with a good education is a key prerequisite to fostering successful integration. Education must be thought of in a comprehensive way and not just as cognitive learning, as measured by the PISA test.

2. Current Situation:

Equal Learning Opportunities in Germany

Recent comparative international studies (especially the OECD's PISA study) have shown that learning achievement is strongly dependent of family background in Germany (more so than in most other countries evaluated by the OECD's study). Students from economically underprivileged families and those of immigrant origin systematically under-perform in schools, although they have high learning potentials.

Children from economically privileged families have a better chance of going to a Gymnasium (secondary school which tracks students for university education) than those from economically underprivileged families. Children of immigrant origin are mainly tracked to the Hauptschule (a type of secondary school, which issues certifi-

cates that do not allow for college admittance). Students of immigrant origin are underrepresented at universities and overrepresented in the high school dropout population. They also experience more difficulty in getting apprenticeships.

No education system in the world can guarantee absolutely equal learning opportunities. Students' social, economic and cultural backgrounds impact their ability to achieve at school. Yet, comparative international studies have shown that some countries have been quite successful at reducing the effects that these differences have on academic achievement. Research has pointed to various causes for the inability of the German school system to integrate its students. Systematic early childhood education programs, especially language training, are a key to the later success of students of immigrant origin at school. Children from economically underprivileged families and those of immigrant origin have a low rate of enrolment in such programs. A further reason for unequal academic achievement in Germany is the tracking of students (at the age of 10) in various types of schools (with three main tracks: Gymnasium, Realschule, Hauptschule). This practice is quite rare when compared internationally. Additionally, the short duration of class time at school (schools usually only go until lunch time) disadvantages the afore mentioned student populations. These two structural arrangements are the main factors why children from economically underprivileged families and those whose native language is not German are disadvantaged from the beginning of their formal education. These disadvantages are not compensated for during their formal education.

A cultural tradition backs up these structures of the education system in Germany. Children are tracked at an early age in Germany because it is believed that children are blessed with different levels of inherent talent that can best be unleashed in homogeneous learning groups. The current German education system is dominated by West German thinking. It asserts that school class time should not be too long so that the state's impact on child rearing is not too great. This conviction is deeply rooted in German society and has recently come under pressure. This explains why the three-track school system (especially the Gymnasium) in Germany is still supported in many social circles despite its failure to offer equal learning opportunities to large segments of the student population. Especially those parents, whose children seem 'predestined' for the Gymnasium based on their family background, defend the current school system. Also teachers at the Gymnasium tend to be strong supporters of the current school system.

The German school system and education philosophy are based on creating homogeneous learning situations and do not deal well with diversity. In an increasingly globalizing world, in which people of various origins have to cooperate with each other and live together, such an education system is not sustainable.

The German school system with its systematic disadvantages for students of immigrant origin is a cause for concern internationally and nationally. In 2007, the UN published a report by Vernor Muñoz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, on the right to education in Germany. The report highlights the inability of the Germany education system to integrate its students. It also points to problems of the system to provide equal learning opportunities for children from economically underprivileged families, those of immigrant origin and those with disabilities.

From a socio-political point of view, these unequal learning opportunities have the potential to seriously weaken social cohesion in Germany. This is in part due to the scope of the disadvantaged student population. Currently, students of immigrant origin make up 20 percent of the student population.

Finally, the economic consequences of unequal learning opportunities in Germany will be extreme. Germany is a country with few natural resources and one that has an aging and shrinking population. It, therefore, cannot afford to waste the human capital of its future working-age population.

The Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth came to the conclusion during their national campaign *A Just Germany for Children*: "Our education system is selective. We must urgently change its course."

3. The Challenge:

Developing an Integrative Education System

The PISA shock in Germany and the discovery that the German education system is disadvantaging the afore mentioned populations have created room for reform. Many reform measures have already been initiated.

The Standing Conference of Education Ministers (since education is the responsibility of the 16 state governments, and not the Federal Government, the Standing Conference of the Education Ministers brings together all state governments to coordinate education policy) identified reform measures that are of high priority following the publication of the first PISA study. These included measures to improve learning German as a second language for pre-school children, especially those of immigrant origin. They also included additional measures that target students of immigrant origin, who come from underprivileged economic backgrounds. In a very short period of time, schools and kindergartens in Germany were undergoing reform (the focus of the measures varied in the 16 states). The most important measures were the introduction of language competence testing in kindergartens. Additional stan-

standard testing of students' abilities were introduced in schools, as well as external school evaluations. The number of whole-day schools was increased. Some states also made structural changes to their school system by decreasing the number of different types of schools to which students are tracked. It is too early to determine if these changes have made the desired impact.

The initiatives that have been undertaken thus far do not compose a coherent approach to reforming the German schools system. They attempt to repair specific problems within a system that is flawed. This approach will most likely not be able to create more equal learning opportunities in Germany. Systemic reform of the school system remains a taboo in many societal circles.

To date, Germany does not have a comprehensive reform strategy. There is also no consensus in Germany that education reform is necessary. However, such a strategy is needed and it should address the structures of the education system and the tradition and norms on which German education philosophy is based.

4. Difficulty of Creating a Climate of Change:

Guiding Reform

Germany must adjust its education system so that it is successful at teaching diverse student bodies and is able to offer them equal learning opportunities. This change has to be comprehensive and include cultural-normative aspects as well as structural aspects. It must also address the role of teachers and parents.

If the German society and government really want to provide more equal learning opportunities in schools then the school system must become more integrative. This means that it will have to part with cultural norms and traditions in Germany such as the early tracking of children in accordance with their 'inherent talent.' Germany must stop believing in the 'myth of homogeneity' that leads to unequal treatment of 'natives' and 'foreigners' in schools. Germany needs a new societal consensus that diversity is not a problem and that all children deserve equal learning opportunities regardless of their ethnic origin. Reform of the German education system can only be successful if it is embedded in a societal consensus about the need for this reform.

Such a reform process must have strong leadership. This leadership should stem from the persons who are most disadvantaged by the current system. Grass roots 'grand coalitions' for an integrative schools system have been forged in many German cities and regions. However, the need for reform must spread throughout soci-

ety. It must be clear that nobody really stands to profit from unequal learning opportunities because cohesion and long-term economic prosperity are at risk.

Pointing out these risks is important, but this alone will not bring about a climate of change. German society needs to be exposed to positive and convincing examples of integrative education models. Political and civil leaders, who understand the challenges their school system is facing in a global world, must convincingly communicate these ideas to German society as a whole.

5. Goals and Focus of the Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008

The Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008 will address the problem of unequal learning opportunities for students of immigrant origin in Germany, especially the second generation. This is an issue that must be a top priority on the German political agenda.

By choosing this issue, the Bertelsmann Stiftung would like to raise long-term awareness for the acute need for education reform. The Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008 will contribute to creating a change in the German education paradigm by promoting a more integrative education system. Every child matters and deserves to have his or her abilities individually fostered. The German education system has to be guided by a comprehensive philosophy that values the diversity of Germany's student population.

In order to meet the challenges of comprehensive education reform, we need to provide answers at the operative, at the systematic and strategic level. We also need to activate our leadership to carry out education reforms. Therefore, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is seeking out innovative practice and policy in education as well as interesting structural models that have different normative-cultural roots as those in Germany.

The main component of creating equal learning opportunities in Germany will be the ability of the system to integrate students. If schools are able to foster integration in their student bodies then they will also succeed at creating a climate of mutual respect for diversity. Schools would be able to strengthen students' identification with democratic values. A feeling of belonging to a common society would be strengthened.

Models that the Bertelsmann Stiftung is looking for should fulfill the criteria 'ability to create systemic change of the education system' and 'ability to infuse sustainable change into the school system.' Potential prizewinners should withstand the following test questions: Is the initiative a comprehensive strategy? Does it foster the co-

operation of diverse key actors such as teachers, local governments and the national government? Also, does the initiative produce negative side effects? Initiatives or policies that appear to be integrative should not indeed create more inequality.

Other important criteria that prizewinning initiatives or policies should fulfill are 'an innovative approach to education' and 'the ability of the initiative or policy to be implemented in Germany.' The final criterion that is important for prizewinners to have is 'the ability to appeal to the public and be a symbol for political change.'

Prizewinning practice and policy will be sought in countries with significant populations of students of immigrant origin (especially second generation immigrants). The select countries will also be ones in which such students performed better on the PISA study than in Germany. The PISA study has shown that classical countries of immigration such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA are particularly good at providing students of immigrant origin with more equal learning opportunities (integrating these students). Other countries that performed significantly better than Germany in the PISA study were the UK, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Switzerland.¹

¹ According to PISA 2006 students of immigrant origin in Germany earned 95 points fewer than natives in science. Students of immigrant origin did much better in Australia (+1 point), Canada (-11 points), New Zealand (-25 points), the UK (-26 points), the USA (-40 points), France (-47 points), Sweden (-50 points), Norway (-56 points), Switzerland (-72 points) and in the Netherlands (-81 points) [comp. M. Prenzel u.a.: PISA 2006, Summary, P. 20].