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Education Reform and the Global Regulation of Teachers' Education, Development and Work: A Cross-Cultural Analysis

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Globalization and educational reform in German teacher education ☆

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Abstract

For almost 200 years German teacher education has remained relatively stable in its core characteristics. In this paper, the present process of fundamental change is analyzed with regard to consequences for the structure of teacher education, accountability mechanisms, and the concepts of the ideal teacher. The implementation of Bachelor and Master degrees as well as of explicit and implicit accountability mechanisms support the thesis of borrowing global ideas to push local interests. The changes go along with a new concept of the ideal teacher.

1. Introduction

The core characteristics of German teacher education developed in the first decade of the 19th century. Since then, German federal states have demanded that high-school teachers undergo a university-based teacher-education program leading to a state examination. For Germany, this policy marks the starting point of the teaching profession as a special career (see for more details Blömeke, 2002; Jeismann, 1999). The introduction of a state exam was not a detached innovation but part of a fundamental modernization of the public

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administration in general after Napoleon had defeated Prussia in 1806 (Führ, 1985; Tenorth, 1987).

The new-humanism had become influential with Wilhelm von Humboldt as one of the most prominent educational philosophers (Benner, 2002). General education of all children was an important value underlying educational policy (''enlightened absolutism''). Regarding the teaching profession, Humboldt's goal was a state-controlled formation of civil servants with high qualifications.

This idea of teacher education survived the 19th and the 20th centuries in spite of important changes in German society excluding the developments in East Germany which were dissolved as a consequence of reunification. Only gradual modifications were made during the two centuries, for example: the installation of a one-year on-the-job training as a second phase of teacher education in the last decade of the 19th century (Titze, 1991), and the reform of teacher education for elementary schools to a more academic level in the second half of the 20th century (for more details see Blömeke, 1999).

A number of *historical, socio-economical* and *political reasons* for this long-lasting stability exist. *Historically*, Germany has a strong and early philosophical tradition, which influenced the development of its social system and which lead to the development of relatively advanced educational features around 1800. *Socio-economically*, there has traditionally been a close connection between educational degrees and social status in Germany. The German school system and consequently the German teacher-education system have been highly stratified. This stratification follows a ''theory'' according to which different kinds of natural talent exist (manual, technical and intellectual) that must be developed in different kinds of schools (Spranger, 1974). *Politically*, the stratification of the German school system has been subject to highly controversial clashes with ideological connotations as long as conservative and socialist parties have existed (Herrlitz, Hopf, & Titze, 2001). Since both sides had sufficient political power during the two democratic phases in German history—the Republic of Weimar from 1918 to 1933 and the Post-War Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)—the differences have resulted in a kind of stalemate (Müller-Rolli, 1989).

Two other occurrences in the 20th century fostered the stability of German teacher education once again: Nazism and the subsequent Cold War. Between 1933 and 1945 the political influence of the Nazi-state on the educational system was very strong (Bracht, 1998; Dithmar, 2001; Keim, 1995). After an examination of these dynamics, one of the most important agreements after 1945 was to never again allow dictatorial influence on educational questions. For Western Germany, this implied—among other changes—the formation of a FRG in which the rights of each federal state are extensive, especially regarding educational policy, to prevent strong central power. The school system is regulated by independent decisions of Germany's states, while universities are largely autonomous. After 1945, most federal states reinstalled the fundamental characteristics of the regional educational systems dating from the 1920s—including stratification (Führ, 1998). This stratification was enacted as a direct response to the instalment of a comprehensive school model from grade 1–9 in the German Democratic Republic (GDR; for more details see Sandfuchs, 2001). Since the two German countries represented the front countries of the Western block and the Eastern block any decision in Western Germany was highly political and its repercussion upon the Western block's politics was always subject of critical discussion.

Against this historical, political and socio-economical background, the present process of change is almost surprising given the former stability of teacher education. In this article, an overview of the recent educational reforms in Germany is given. Each descriptive section is accompanied by an analytical section in which the rationale behind the development is outlined. Firstly, changes in the *structure* of teacher education are analyzed. Secondly, manifest implications of these changes for *quality control* in teacher education are documented. And thirdly, more latent implications of these changes for *concepts of the ideal teacher* are described.

Most of the data used for this article comes from document analysis of policy documents, existing literature in Germany, and interviews with policy makers, teacher educators and education scholars. During the past decades research on teacher education, the teaching profession and the school system was one of the main fields of inquiry in German history and sociology of education. However, a gap exists in trying to connect German developments to developments elsewhere and to broader theories. To overcome this deficit, the existing data are systematically analyzed to respond to the larger questions raised by Tatto in this issue's introduction regarding the structure of teacher education, accountability mechanisms, and the concepts of the ideal teacher.

2. Changes in the structure of teacher education in Germany

Regardless of school level and school type, teacher education in Germany consists of two phases. The first phase is devoted to acquiring scientific subject knowledge as well as scientific pedagogical knowledge. It takes place at the university and it lasts 3.5 years for primary and 5 years for secondary teachers. Students graduate with the First State Examination which qualifies them to move on to the second phase of teacher education devoted to the acquisition of practical teaching skills. Irrespective of the school level, this is a two-year period of student teaching at school under supervision of a mentor teacher. In parallel, students take classes in general pedagogy and in subject-specific pedagogy. The second phase concludes with the Second State Examination, the formal certificate needed to teach in a state-run school (for more details see Terhart, 2004).

In 1999, the European ministers of education decided at a conference in Bologna/Italy to unify the European university degrees by changing to a consecutive bachelor and master system by 2009. This means to adapt to a system of university organization prevailing in English-speaking countries, including the idea of subdividing the student population into years and classes—in Germany this has only been done at K-12 schools until now. In addition, a new currency for university courses—the European credit transfer system (ECTS)—has been developed to make student exchanges easier. The objective behind these measures was to increase "the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education" (http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/bologna_declaration.pdf).

Even if the German ministry of education had supported the Bologna Declaration most academic disciplines were very resistant to the reform. They wanted to stick to the traditional program structure. Almost all programs at German universities comprise five years. Their degrees (diploma and magister) are highly respected qualifications on the labor market. Academics have always had a lower level of unemployment than other sections of society because of the broad and deep training. Since five years is also the minimum duration that qualifies for the senior civil service, there have been only very few possibilities for university students to graduate earlier with a lower degree; the idea of

consecutive degrees has been completely unknown. It is furthermore important to know that studying in Germany is highly individualized and self-directed by the students (Schelsky, 1962/1971). Every student decides on her/his own how many lectures she/he wants to take in each semester. A common schedule for all students of one year does not exist. Compared to this tradition, Bachelor programs are shorter and they do not qualify for the senior civil service. With their subdivision in years they point more at schooling than at university types of organization.

Since university autonomy is high, it turned out to be more difficult for the German ministers of education to influence the implementation of the Bologna Declaration than anticipated. So subsequently, even though teacher education is more nationally bound by its very nature than courses of study in medicine, engineering or business administration, for example, it appears as if teacher education has become the *driving force* for the reforms in Germany (Bellenberg & Thierack, 2003; Blömeke, 2001). This surprising development is grounded in the state control of teacher education.

Many federal ministers of education used their influence on teacher education to implement measures toward the Bologna Declaration (for more details see "journal für lehrerInnenbildung" 4/2006, special issue "Vi(v)a Bologna?", edited by Blömeke & Keller, 2006). Decrees were released requiring universities to implement Bachelor and Master degrees into the first phase of teacher education; lack of compliance would result in the states reducing the funding proportional to the number of future teachers graduating. Since teacher-education students amount to between 15% and 25% of the whole student body at almost all German universities, this is a strong threat. Furthermore, in contrast to English-speaking countries where teacher-education programmes mostly take place in separate schools or colleges of education, in Germany almost all university departments are involved in teacher-education programs. Diploma, magister and state exam candidates are taught together in the same lectures and seminars. Thus, the threat concerns the whole institution with the university departments having a "choice" between three possibilities:

- To change only the structure of teacher-education programmes and to teach future teachers separately from diploma and magister candidates (i.e. a very expensive choice since all lectures would have to be presented twice).
- To follow up the state decree by changing all degrees into the new Bachelor/Master system (i.e. a much cheaper choice since the university departments could go on teaching all students together).
- To give up teacher education (with the closure of several departments especially in the humanities and in science as a consequence since the majority of students are teacher-education students there).

Hence, regarding the alternatives and having in mind the low funding of German universities, the departments did not really have a choice. Consequently, most universities in most federal states have started to change the traditional German degrees into what is worldwide known as Bachelor and Master degrees. For teacher education this means that it will consist of three phases in the future: a first three-year Bachelor program, a following one- (for future primary teachers) or two-year Master program (for future secondary teachers), and a two-year practical training step at state institutions.

2.1. International influences—institutional reactions

If the German universities had really been convinced that resistance to the Bologna Declaration were the right way to go, they probably could have avoided the changes by just continuing to resist homogenously. But this did not happen. More and more universities deviated from the original path. This is a result of the reforms which solve a number of organizational problems at German universities as the old system is more and more considered unacceptable in a global world with international competition. As a consequence of the students' individual responsibility to organize their programs on their own, they usually take longer to receive a university degree than the formally prescribed five years. In liberal arts as well as in engineering, business administration, teacher education, law or medicine it is not unusual that students use seven or even eight years on average to finish their studies. At the same time, drop out rates are very high: 25% on average and in some subjects up to 50%. Consequently, the subdivision of the student population in years with a prescribed schedule—which is connected to the idea of Bachelor programs—is seen as a possible way to solve this problem (Grützmacher & Reissert, 2006).

But there are more reasons for the general change in attitudes toward the Bachelor program. A number of students do not aim at senior positions in the civil service or in the private industry. Other students may have difficulties with the high standards of a five-year program. For these groups the new degree offers an attractive option of a short but nevertheless academic training (Bensel, Weiler, & Wagner, 2003). This is even more valid since several big companies—after having shown a hesitative attitude in the beginning—have expressed their willingness to hire this kind of staff at a reasonable salary.

Simultaneously, the attractiveness of the new system was realized by the universities themselves. If students for the most part leave university after having taken a bachelor's degree, the overcrowding of courses that lead to a master's degree would be clearly reduced. The gains this policy would bring to the currently low budget of German universities made the idea of introducing bachelor programs more attractive.

To sum up, what seems to be typical of the present globalization process at a first glance, turns out be too one-dimensional and short-sighted interpretation if one looks deeper. Then the general thesis of borrowing global ideas to push local interests (Cowen, 2002; Schriewer, 1992; Steiner-Khamsi, 2002) can be demonstrated in the field of education.

2.2. Standards and evaluation in German teacher education

Up to now Germany has had no explicit control system to assess the educational system's efficacy. Germany's outside image is of a centralized, bureaucratic and highly controlled state. Yet, to get an appropriate impression of the significance control has for German teacher education (and it is widely the same for schools), it is necessary to point out that this control has mostly served to control "inputs" (Blömeke, Herzig, & Tulodziecki, 2006). That means that the federal states enact educational laws and further regulations like the curriculum (consisting mostly of fundamental guidelines), provide the educational institutions with the financing necessary beforehand, and hire the staff. Assessments usually consist of self-prepared assignments by teachers in school and by instructors in teacher education instead of testing performance in a standardized manner. Teachers and teacher educators are regarded as being fully responsible for assessment.

Formal accountability has always been controversial in the field of education and has for the most part been rejected successfully. So, teachers have enjoyed broad autonomy to design their lessons. This rationale goes along with a strong priority of goals over content and methods (Westbury, 1998). The general goal of schooling—'Bildung', composed of self-determination, participation in society, and solidarity—is seen as a process and a product of human development guided by reason. Teachers have to decide by themselves which contents are useful and relevant to reach these goals (Hopmann & Riquarts, 1995). There exists *freedom* combined with the *necessity* of interpretation of the rough curriculum guidelines as well as the possibility to combine the guidelines with the teachers' individual ideas. This rationale has its correspondence in the fact that teachers are employed as senior civil servants. They cannot be made dismissed unless they commit a serious crime sentenced with at least two years in prison. It is this security that offers the possibility to teach freely according to one's own values. A number of schools have tried to develop internally by establishing working groups with inclusion of parents and pupils to ensure quality according to self-developed criteria (Altrichter, Brüsemeister, & Heinrich, 2005). This collaborative approach sees schools as learning organizations and the teaching staff as a learning community.

Teacher education is very similar to these characteristics of the school system. The distribution of financial resources is oriented toward supporting comparable conditions at all universities and not toward rewarding outstanding performance, punishing low quality, nor toward supporting efforts of strengthening in weak areas. Regulations concerning content are not very detailed and the broad autonomy of universities includes freedom of teaching (Anrich, 1962) with the additional result that the teacher-education curriculum differs from university to university. As an internal way of quality control peer evaluation was established during the past two decades. The state institutions which mentor the on-the-job training have to follow state regulations that are more detailed. But also in this case, there is no output control in a standardized manner because even the final exams are carried out locally.

2.3. *Implementation of explicit and implicit accountability mechanisms*

Educational policy and public opinion changed drastically when the results of the PISA-study were published in December 2001. Nearly everyone in Germany was shocked since this international comparison showed that German students only achieved results at the lower end of the scale (OECD, 2001). Of the 31 participating OECD countries, the German students came in 27th in reading, 28th in mathematics, and 25th in science. More than 20% of German pupils failed in achieving the second competence level which is regarded as the absolute minimum requirement to master a crafts or trade apprenticeship. Another worrying result was the uncovering of an unusually close relation between social and ethnic background and academic achievement in Germany—much closer than in countries like England, France or the USA. A final alarming result was the enormous difference between schools in different federal states. A discrepancy of up to two years exists in pupil performance between the states (Baumert et al., 2002).

Since the PISA-results became known, a number of measures have been taken to improve the quality of the education system. The development of nation-wide standards—performance expectations at the end of primary and lower secondary school in the core subjects mathematics, German and English (Klieme et al., 2003) as well as for teachers and

teacher education (KMK, 2004)—accompanied by regular tests of pupil performance were among the first measures. Centralized exams at the end of lower and upper secondary followed. Other measures aimed at the teaching staff. Steps on the career ladder shall no longer be distributed along seniority but along qualifications. Exams for promotion which were seen as formal and superficial obstacles in former times shall develop to real tests of knowledge, skills and competencies in the future (Strukturreformgesetz, 2005).

Whereas the first discussions focused on the school system and the teaching staff, policy moved quickly on to universities and teacher education. New mechanisms of funding according to criteria of efficacy—drop out rates, success in getting research funds, citation index—are common in almost all federal states now. Rankings have become popular even though they were highly controversial in the past. In addition, the central ministry of education released a competition "of excellence": outstanding universities should receive a large sums of money to be able to compete with excellent universities all over the world.

By implementing Bachelor and Master degrees implicit accountability mechanisms were implemented, too. To subdivide the courses of study into years requires arrangements between the university departments to make sure that a specific lecture is offered at a certain time and to a sufficient extent with regard to the number of students enrolled. This is a widely new idea for German universities. Regarding the broad freedom of students to make their own choice of lectures as well as the broad freedom of professors to decide themselves on the themes of their lectures, controlling seemed to be unnecessary. Thus, even if obligations and control existed, it used to be a formality only. Without hesitating one can say that this was a system of "organized irresponsibility."

Another accountability mechanism implicitly introduced with the B.A. program was the requirement to clearly describe the contribution of particular lectures to specific courses of study. This has become an implicit requirement if the newly developed bachelor degrees aspire to qualify for the labor market. In the past, even courses of study which *seemed* to point to a narrow area of professions (like law or medicine) were meant to provide broad preparation. In contrast to bachelors in the US for example, German courses were not at all specialized; breadth was always more important than depth.

2.4. Consequences for the concept of the ideal teacher and the ideal pupil

Outside Germany, the impact of these changes is probably hard to value but with regard to teacher education it means for example a significant loss of status of all those academic areas which do not qualify directly for the job as a teacher. Whereas the philosophy and the history of education had a strong position in teacher education in the old system, the number of courses in educational psychology and teaching methods has increased significantly in the Bologna system at the expense of more philosophical and historical orientated courses. Within a short time this change has also had consequences for the advertisement of professorships. The number of professorships in the philosophy and history of education was significantly lower in the past two to three years than usual (Tippelt, Rauschenbach, & Weishaupt, 2004).

This development mirrors a change in the concept of ideal teachers and pupils. As in other countries the German system has developed in congruency with the image of the ideal citizen, and consequently of the ideal teacher. Starting with Wilhelm von Humboldt's early philosophical idea of general education ("Allgemeinbildung"), *reflection* has always had a high status in school as well as in teacher education, higher than measurable factual

knowledge or its application to narrowly defined tasks in the teaching profession or in the pupils' everyday life. Consequently, Latin, Greek and German literature were core subjects in the 19th century's "Gymnasium", whereas mathematics and science were valued lowly. In teacher education, it was philosophy and history that mattered. The modeling of the linkage of content, teaching methods and pupils' social needs (the didactical triangle) from a normative perspective dominated educational research, whereas empirical approaches were rejected as technical and so as inappropriate in the field of education (Blömeke, 2004).

The ideal teacher was required to know how to define goals like critical citizenship, political responsibility, individual liberation, and emancipation and to outline ideas about how to reach these goals in school. He or she was not, however, encouraged to break them down or to make them measurable.

The present shift is not the first effort to focus educational efforts more on "useful" knowledge and efficacy as well as to strengthen empirical research. Political discussions on education were already forced in the 1960s by international comparisons between the Western and the Eastern world. Picht's (1964) warning of an educational catastrophe if school quality was not improved has been heard widely because of the success of the former Soviet Union. That the USSR—as the leading nation of the Eastern Block—was able to send a satellite into space first raised doubts about the level of technical knowledge in the Western world. In Germany, this led to inquiries on the quality of the school system as well. Robinsohn (1967)—influenced by discussions in the US and Scandinavia—required the school system to train pupils for situations precisely defined and representing professional, social and political challenges ("functional" education instead of general education). Even if many commissions during the 1970s tried to reform the curriculum inspired by this idea (Roth, 1969), they failed due to the complexity of the task and due to the fundamental break with German traditions.

Three to four decades later the situation has changed due to the explicit ideas emerging from the EU efforts to homogenize education and from the OECD's PISA study emphasizing measurement of pupils' capability to apply knowledge to everyday tasks, and to make them ready for the labor market (OECD, 2001).

In this sense, the general thesis of borrowing global ideas to push local interests cited above is still valid. For example, one group is the Association of High School Teachers. Since the philosophy and history of education is valued much lower compared to subject matter and also to subject pedagogy, high school teachers expect to re-gain the former social status this profession had by turning to a subject-matter orientated kind of teacher education. Another group is, for example, the group of empirical researchers that will be in charge of developing Germany's standardized tests. They can expect more power, more funding and more acknowledgment. One can possibly generalize this phenomenon: in a pluralistic society like Germany there will always be a group of people profiting from any development. If this group has enough influence, global tendencies can spread and be implemented by its members—in effect enacting the phenomenon known as "globalization."

Further inquiry requires exploring whether this thesis applies to more countries other than Germany and to more historical periods than the present one.

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