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Inclusion and Empowerment of Children and the Youth

In search for ways to overcome economic based thinking within the German educational system, to give young people the chance to develop themselves by means of education instead of being prepared for their further use as labour forces.

ABSTRACT

Education is the fundamental basis for every human life. Without education a human being cannot understand the world, find any orientation or create a stabile society with others. And finally education gives especially young human beings the chance, the power and the skill to develop their own identity.

This session will show that the German understanding of education is, especially in relation to political decisions, but also within the public view, far from that idealistic definition above. The reaction on the OECD-study *Education at a glance* (September 2004) showed one more time how German officials and decision-makers think about education and its main purposes. The calculation they make is easy: *More investment in education will produce more qualified workers and thus a growing economy.*

This popular calculation is a serious threat to Germany and it is not even possible to foresee the consequences of such an understanding of education by now. Up to some degree Germany is drifting to an understanding of education which comes close to Orwell's *Brave New World*: Raise and educate children as the labour force of tomorrow.

Within the German discussion about a reform of the educational system, which was initiated in this intensive way, it is discussed now, by the publication of the PISA results in 2000, the children's and youth's attitude and their needs concerning education are constantly overseen and thus the ones, who are actually the subjects of the reform discussion, are excluded from it.

What is presently discussed are the circumstances of education, but not the contents. It is taken into concern if an all-day school system would be more efficient(!) than the old three-tier system or how the curricula can be optimised to qualify youth for their jobs in shorter time. And as we are searching for a way to bring viewable changes and improvement as quickly as possible, because we still suffer from the fact that our education system is only middle-class, we are to forget, what really needs to be the object of main concern when we speak about an educational reform: We lose out of site that education is first of all telling young people who they are and laying the foundation to give them the chance to develop as members of a society, who can take responsibility for the community and especially for themselves. But we seem to be far from that, if the Federal Minister of education and research (Edelgard Bulmahn) points out that she will support what brings development and labour (January 2004) and the German Chancellor (Gerhard Schröder) justifies higher investments in the educational sector with the aim to let Germany marsh on the top of the (economic) competition of the world (September 2004, shortly after the publication of *Education at a glance*).

The German attitude to education and especially the opinion what the sense of education is, will be the starting point of the session. I will try to show - from a students point of view - what a) the “officials”, b) the adults, especially the parents and c) the pupils and students themselves think about education and which role it already plays or needs to play for them in the future.

While the first group mainly focuses on the international (economic) competition and financial practicability as well as on the public opinion, does the second one points on the school as the “teacher of the nation” and its task to open their children ways to good jobs. The pupils and students themselves are quite difficult to characterise. They are on an ongoing search to find their own identity, even if they are not always aware of that. But school and education are no help any more, as unlimited access to information in its multiple manifestations from internet over television to print media, a constantly growing variety of luxury articles, which claim to define what is cool, the money to purchase them and myriads of different leisure activities, combined with more spare time and less requirements let them stagger from one situation to another. School and education do not include and empower them as developing characters, thus they do not find the guidance they are in need for to find their view of live.

In a second step I will try to analyze the reasons for these different attitudes, with an intensive view on the group of the pupils and students. It will be necessary to have a closer look on their relation to the world surrounding them and the way they deal with it.

From this we will set of to draw some conclusion and we will finally come to the following main thesis:

The attitude, young Germans have concerning education, and their wishes and demands how school needs to be, do not go along with the parents attitude and do not at all go along with the picture the “officials” have in their mind, when they speak about education. Thus every reform of the educational system of Germany in a way like it is planed and already realized must fail, because the reforms do not at all care for the needs of the ones who are - or better who should be - the subjects of these reforms, the youth themselves. Neither they are included as developing characters in the decisions, nor are they empowered to overtake responsibility for themselves or to discover the advantages of being well educated and thus being able to live a responsible life.

After this first lecture there shall be space for discussion, which will have two aims. On the one hand the audience will have the chance to pose questions, while on the other hand assessments how the situation is like in other countries, especially concerning the attitudes of young people towards education, are warmly welcome.

In the second part of the session I want to discuss possible ways to overcome the economic based thinking within the educational system and possibilities how young people can get the chance to develop themselves by means of education. I will try to show how a better inclusion and empowerment of children and the youth could bring the demands and wishes of the young people and the political targets together.

The main thesis in this part will be that there will be no successful reform of the educational system if there has not been a reform of the opinion, what the main sense of education is, ahead.

After this quiet short introduction we will switch over to an open discussion about the ways other countries went and go to close that gap between the youth’s demand and the economical requirements respectively financial practicability and which ways might be open for Germany.

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Born 29th of December 1983 in Herdecke (North Rhine-Westphalia / Germany). Living in Iserlohn (North Rhine-Westphalia) until the final examination in 2003, then move to Marburg an der Lahn (Hesse). Since 2003 studying protestant theology and since 2004 also geography and economics at the Philipps-University of Marburg. The main focuses are - next to the studies - on the development of the educational system of Germany and - going along with the studies - the importance and influence of theology and religion for the society as well as - in the upcoming time - cultural und economical problems in developing countries. In August 2003, publication of *Probleme und Chancen des deutschen Bildungssystems - eine Bestandsaufnahme aus Schülersicht* (Problems and Chances of the German Educational System - a pupil's perspective).