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13. "IT TAKES A VILLAGE" – (CATHOLIC) EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

BILDUNG IN THE 21ST CENTURY: EDUCATION OR TRAINING?

German School Reforms in the Aftermath of PISA 2000

The first PISA results had a devastating effect on the German educational community. The so called "PISA shock" was immediately followed by a paradigm shift in educational politics, replacing education with qualification, knowledge with expertise, and the attempt to make education quantifiable. According to Schönig (2014) PISA and TIMSS, for the first time in the history of the German school system, brought the two dimensions of school development and testing together. Now the state seemed to be able to measure the students' success as well as the benefits of its education policies. But as the reactions, especially to PISA 2012, show, this procedure is questioned by pedagogues, teachers, parents, and students alike. Schönig (2014) points out that PISA and all the following reforms are rather more interested in results than in education. Starting in 2004 Germany implemented VERA, *Vergleichsarbeiten in der Schule* [= comparison tests in schools], as one further national way to measure and quantify educational success as well as to compare the school systems of the sixteen federal states. Teachers and teachers' unions criticized the rapid increase of testing as a waste of time counting it among the more severe illnesses of the German education system and naming it an "-itis:" *Testeritis*. After ten years of VERA-testing some of the major teachers' unions in Germany, the GEW, GSV, and VBE, claimed that VERA had failed its objective and had left no noticeable impact on school development (Schulniveau, 2014).

In curricula the old learning objectives have been replaced by educational standards, *Bildungsstandards*, adding to the problem: According to Maier (2009), Frühwacht (2012), and Schönig (2014) German teachers still have not been able to fully adopt the concept of *Bildungsstandards* as a means of facilitating and advancing their students' education. Instead they often tend to practice teaching-to-the-test leaving their students with neither qualifications, nor education. The general public got the impression that schools only care for training our children for the economy while making a bad job of it at the same time. However, this problem is not limited to Germany. In their open letter to the OECD Meyer and Zahedi (2014) got to the heart of the matter:

P. Siljander et al. (Eds.), Schools in Transition, 229–239.

> […] – by emphasizing a narrow range of measurable aspects of education, PISA takes attention away from the less measurable or immeasurable educational objectives like physical, moral, civic, and artistic development, thereby dangerously narrowing our collective imagination regarding what education is and ought to be about;
>
> – as an organization of economic development, OECD is naturally biased in favor of the economic role of public schools. But preparing young men and women for gainful employment is not the only, and not even the main goal of public education, which has to prepare students for participation in democratic self-government, moral action, and a life of personal development, growth, and well-being […]

PISA focuses mainly on mathematics and sciences leaving out art, music, history, and social sciences thus presenting the danger "that educational standards undermine an enriched education" (Schönig, 2007, p. 494). Following educational standards and measuring education with standardized testing has nothing to do with education in the traditional sense: it is training at best. It produces people trained to accomplish their given tasks, people who are supposed to be able to function in our economy. What educational standards and standardized testing do not produce are individuals capable of setting their own standards instead of just fulfilling predetermined ones. Schools should enable adolescents to recognize, raise, and use their full potential. But by focusing on performance instead of potential, German schools – especially in Bavaria with its three-tier school system – often deny students any chance of reaching their potential. Thus educational standards and standardized testing have just become one more tool for selection.

In Germany the social background still is the decisive factor concerning how far a child can go in the school system. But instead of enabling children, instead of caring for their individual needs and supporting their strengths, schools keep putting children into batches – according to their age – and keep measuring them according to their ability to do tests. Standardized testing just added another stress factor for grade schoolers; the VERA test, for example, takes place in 3rd grade. Schools should do the exact opposite of what they are doing right now.

And again, this social gap is not only a German problem and standardized testing has been going on in other countries for decades as well. The change from industrial societies to knowledge societies has turned education into a valuable resource. This is mirrored in Angela Merkel repeatedly calling the *Bundesrepublik* [Federal Republic] *Bildungsrepublik* [Educational Republic], as well as in George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. Already in 1996 Hillary Clinton wrote about improved IQ scores in children that had the chance to participate in early childhood education programs:

> Bear this research in mind when you listen to those who argue that our nation cannot afford to implement comprehensive early education programs for disadvantaged children and their families. If we as a village decide not to

> help families develop their children's brains, then at least let us admit that we are acting not on the evidence but according to a different agenda. And let us acknowledge that we are not using all the tools at our disposal to better the lives of our children. (p. 61)

Her book *It takes a village* is interesting for another reason as well: she raises the question of who should educate our children and take care of them. At the same time she depicts the nation, the American society as a whole, as the proverbial village. Despite the fact that rather conservative parents share Rick Santorum's opinion that *It takes a family* (2006), it is true that especially in the 21st century it takes a (global) village to raise a child – at least for two reasons: first, children nowadays spend more and more time at school. Until PISA it had been quite normal in Germany, even for high school students, that school ended around one o'clock in the afternoon. This changed with the school reforms following the "PISA shock" and now full-time schools are becoming more and more common in Germany. Second, families have changed and one is hard pressed to find a typical traditional family today. Often both parents have to go to work, or children are raised by single-moms or single-dads. So schools have to take over caring for the children while their parents are working. Teachers and peers become the villagers – and the school itself becomes the village where the adolescents spend the most part of their day, the most part of their youth.

Although they are the minority there are those in Germany who would follow Rick Santorum's argument that families are the primary arena for lessons in social functioning (Santorum, 2006). Bavaria's conservative political party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), for example, successfully fought for the so called *Betreuungsgeld*, a child care subsidy meant for home-based care by parents, in order to underline the importance of families. Most of the full-time schools in Bavaria are so called *Offene Ganztagsschulen*, which means parents can decide whether or not to send their children there in the afternoon. Unlike at the so called *Gebundene Ganztagsschule*, which means compulsory full-time school, at the *Offene Ganztagsschule* there are no lessons in the afternoon; they just function as a form of daycare (cf. Dollinger, 2012). Nevertheless, there is a growing number of parents who would like to send their children to either one of the types of full-time schools in Germany. In the school year 2012/13 only 32.3 percent of all German students went to full-time schools while 70 percent of the parents would have liked to send their children to one (Klemm, 2014; Bildungspolitik, 2013). According to Klemm (2014) the expansion of full-time schools in Germany is even stalling.

One further challenge for the education system is the rising competition within our new knowledge society. According to Böckerstette and Weber (1995) the middle-classes are completely absorbed in the problems of "social climbing" (p. 318, translation is mine JAF). After PISA and the increased pressure of standardized testing the competition has got worse. This is why middle class parents try to avoid sending their children to comprehensive schools. They think that their children would be held back, and that only disadvantaged children would profit (cf. Nagy, 2015).

Due to PISA, the immense differences between the federal states, and the different approaches to reforms, the German federal school system keeps losing trust while parents are looking for alternatives for their children.

Rise of Private Schools in Germany

PISA and what followed – standardized testing, school reforms, changes in education policy – led parents to worry about the state school system. Especially parents who have an *Abitur* [high school diploma] themselves send their children to private schools. Although numbers have been increasing since 1992 there is a noticeable boost after 2001, the year in which the first PISA results were published. In 2011 already 8 percent of all German students went to private schools. Between 1992/93 and 2011/12 the number of private schools in Germany increased by 69 percent reaching a total number of 5,467 private schools (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2012, pp. 13–15). Although there is no significant difference in the PISA test results between public and private schools, according to Weiß (2011), parents still prefer private schools over state schools, because of their better atmosphere for learning and their integrated approaches.

Private schools also fill gaps within the public school sector: about 10 percent of all students at private schools go to *Förderschulen* [special-needs schools / special schools]. However, the majority of German private school students, 40 percent, go to a private *Gymnasium* [academic high school], 17 percent visit a private *Realschule* [junior high school], and 11 percent go to private *Grundschulen* [elementary schools]. Two thirds of all private school students attend church schools (Weiß, 2011). According to Schönig (2007) there are two reasons why "parents are motivated to choose a Christian school": first, "[p]ublic state schools are accused of favouring rationalised learning, which does not penetrate to the core of young people" and second "because such schools know how to interrelate the various dimensions of what it means to be human […]" (pp. 484–485). Parents are choosing schools that promise to treat their children like human beings with their own individual needs, hopes, and dreams—and not just as standardized human resources. Schools should teach values, not only competencies. Since two thirds of the parents choose Christian schools we will have a look at the pedagogical concept of Catholic schools and the question, whether they can fulfill the parents' hopes.

The Catholic approach: "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me." (Mk 9:37)

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

For a long time the Catholic church had been the only provider of schools, or education as such. The German word *Bildung*, which goes back to the Old High German word *bildunga*, still carries a reminder of the religious roots of education (cf. Dohmen, 1964/65). In the Middle Ages *sich bilden*, to get an education, meant aspiring to

become more and more like God, in whose image, German *Bild*, we were created. This pursuit had already been described at the beginning of the 14th century by the German mystic Meister Eckhart (cf. Flasch, 2006; Witte, 2010). The first schools were either monastic schools, or cathedral schools. Until today "both the Christian message of salvation and the unconditional acceptance that man is created in God's image underlie the personal definition of Catholic schools" (Schönig, 2007, p. 485).

Not only do Catholic schools have a long tradition, they also have a long tradition of doing things differently. Before Pope Boniface VIII in 1298 issued the papal bull *Periculoso* requiring nuns to be cloistered, nuns had run schools – being the first women in the teaching profession (cf. Ennen, 1996; Bertelsmeier-Kierst, 2008). And women could teach again, even with the Pope's blessing, after "the papal bull of 1612 that established the first cloistered Ursuline community in Paris recognized, not the usual three solemn vows of medieval monasticism, but four […] poverty, chastity, obedience, and teaching" (Clark, 2007, p. 25). In the New World the Ursulines broke with another unwritten rule: the sisters in New Orleans following their agenda of universal female education also taught Black students who shared within the convent's walls classrooms and bedrooms with white students. When New Orleans came under Spanish rule in 1767 this practice was scrutinized by the new colonial leaders, but the Spanish "accepted the religious context from which the nuns' independence sprang" (Clark, 2007, p. 4).

Independence is the keyword here. Catholic schools are still able to elude state control to a certain degree; in Germany their independence is guaranteed by the parents' right to freely choose their children's school as well as by religious freedom (cf. Schmitz-Stuhlträger, 2009). Catholic schools, and private schools in general, are seen as valuable additions to state schools providing different perspectives and topics. Their rights are guaranteed in the *Privatschulgesetz* [private school law] of the federal states. Not only in Germany are Catholic schools seen as an enrichment: Bauch (2014) argues that the "presence [of Catholic schools] guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for them" (p. XV). She also emphasizes that they go "beyond the requirements of a public school curriculum by focusing on moral and ethical values" thus serving "the public interest" by fulfilling "a high moral purpose important to all humankind" (p. XVI).

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN GERMANY AFTER 1945

Following the events of the Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation there emerged a denominational school system in Germany in the 17th century, which came under state control and existed throughout Western Germany – especially at the grade school level in the form of *Volksschulen* and *Hauptschulen* – till the middle of the 20th century. Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia are the only federal states in which this form of denominational schools sponsored by the municipality still exists, but as Schönig (2007) shows their numbers are in decline. There are

two other groups of Catholic schools in Germany, health services schools and non-vocational private Catholic schools, of which the latter is not only the biggest group of Catholic schools, but also "particularly interesting," as Schönig argues, because they "are fully recognised as alternative schools in accordance with Article 7, Section 4 of the German Constitution" (p. 482).

These non-vocational private Catholic schools, which used to be run by religious orders, had not only survived secularization but also repressions during the Third Reich. Only since the 1980s there had been changes due to the declining numbers of members in religious orders. Nowadays non-vocational private Catholic schools are mostly sponsored by dioceses, or "Schulstiftungen" and "Schulwerke," which are foundations under public law. These changes also raised the question of how these schools should define themselves after the disappearance of men and women religious who had made them easily recognizable as Catholic (cf. Nothaft, 2012, pp. 32–34). Catholic schools were in need of their own unique profile.

Ironically one of the two events leading to the framing of the "Marchtal Plan" had been a survey of Germany's educational landscape whose ramifications were not unlike those of PISA 2000. But first came the abolition of municipal denominational schools in Baden-Württemberg in 1955 leading to the foundation of the *Katholisches Schulwerk Baden-Württemberg e.V.*, supported by the *Diözesanes Schulamt* of the diocese of Rottenburg [since, 1978: Rottenburg-Stuttgart]. These events coincided with a general educational reform in Baden-Württemberg and made it necessary for the now *Katholische Freie Grund- und Hauptschulen*, private Catholic grade schools, to find their own pedagogical concept.

Then in 1964 Georg Picht coined the term *deutsche Bildungskatastrophe* [German educational disaster] establishing that compared to other (western) countries Germany was spending far too little for its schools and universities, that the three-tier school system was preventing equal opportunities for children from all social classes, and that all of it would lead to a lack of qualified trainees and impede Germany's contestability. He criticized that German schools were unable to face the challenges of the modern industrial society and could not keep pace with scientific progress (Picht, 1964). What followed was a general call for the *Verwissenschaftlichung* [scientification] of schools. Learning and teaching from pre-school to university should be realigned according to scientific standards. All of a sudden children were no longer the focus of education, but scientific discipline was:

> […] die Diskussionen in den Lehrerzimmern drehten sich nicht mehr um Anschauung, Selbsttätigkeit, Lebensnähe und Kindgemäßheit, sondern um Lernzielorientierung mit Richtzielen, Grobzielen und Feinzielen und um Testverfahren [… the discussions in the teachers' lounges were no longer about ideas, self-directed learning, being true to life, and suitability for children, but turned to the orientation according to learning objectives, divided into grade learning objectives, terminal objectives, and enabling objectives, as well as to testing methods, JAF]. (Böckerstette & Weber, 1995, p. 308)

This does not only sound similar to the changes after PISA 2000, it also caused similar reactions back in the 1960/70s as PISA did 2000 since it did not match the Catholic idea of the dignity of humankind, and especially the dignity of children. In the spirit of Mark 9:37, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me," Catholic schools would not give up children as the focus of (Catholic) education.

In order to support and guide the Catholic schools in his diocese Bishop Georg Moser of Rottenburg issued the *Grundordnung für die Katholischen Freien Schulen in der Diözese Rottenburg* [constitution for the Catholic schools in the diocese of Rottenburg] in 1976. And Msgr. Max Müller, head of the diocese's *Schulamt*, forced the foundation of a *Kirchliche Akademie der Lehrerfortbildung* [church academy of teacher training] in the former Premonstratensian abbey in Obermarchtal. In 1979 the first Catholic schools in Baden-Württemberg started testing new educational concepts while new theories were discussed and developed in Obermarchtal. In 1987 Bishop Moser could implement part one auf the "Marchtal Plan" followed in 1989 by part two put into effect by his successor Bishop Walter Kasper. Since the "Marchtal Plan" has its historical origins in grade schools in Baden-Württemberg it used to be limited to this type of school and this federal state (Böckerstette & Weber, 1995). But since then it has not only been implemented in other federal states – mostly in eastern Germany and Bavaria – and even Austria, but it has also been adapted for the other school-types in Germany. Now there are also "Marchtal-" *Realschulen, Gymnasien, Gesamtschulen,* and *Ganztagsschulen*.

CALLED TO BE FREE: THE "MARCHTAL PLAN"

At the core of the "Marchtal Plan" was the continuing struggle to keep children the focus of education. Böckerstette and Weber (1995) underline that Catholic schools were under no circumstances willing to give up the orientation towards children:

> Ausschlaggebend für diese Option für das Kind war die christliche Anthropologie. Demnach galt es ernst zu machen mit seiner leib-seelischen Ganzheitlichkeit, ernst zu machen mit seiner Freiheit, es ernst zu nehmen als einmalige, unwiederholbare, voll gültige Person. Nicht zuletzt galt es, das Kind anzunehmen so wie es ist mit seinen Stärken und Schwächen. [The main reason for this option for the child could be found in Christian anthropology. Accordingly, it was necessary to take their physical and spiritual unity seriously, the same was true for their freedom, and they had to be taken seriously as unique, unrepeatable, full-fledged persons. Finally, it was necessary to accept children as they were with all their strengths and weaknesses, JAF]. (pp. 309–310)

Focusing on two principles of Christian anthropology, that humans are made in the image of God, and that humanity is called to freedom – based on Gal 5:13, "You, my brothers and sisters, were *called to be free* [emphasis is mine JAF]," *Zur Freiheit berufen* became the leitmotif of the "Marchtal Plan" – the educational goals of the

"Marchtal Plan" were drafted and put into educational practice. Here the "Marchtal Plan" draws on the progressive educational movement and makes use of "Montessori education," Petersen's "Jenaplan education," and Gaudig's "*Arbeitsschule*," among others (Schönig, 2014). Its structural elements are: the *Morgenkreis* [morning circle], the *Freie Stillarbeit* (*FSA*) [literally: free seatwork, better: individualized learning], and the *Vernetzter Unterricht* [interconnected education]. Each of these elements focuses on the individual. In the *Morgenkreis*, for example, the children come together before the lessons start on Monday and can share their experiences over the weekend. There is no hidden agenda, no lesson to be learned, and no competence to be mastered. It completely belongs to the children. Böckerstette and Weber (1995) emphasize its "'*zweckfreie*' *Atmosphäre* ['purposeless' atmosphere]" (p. 326). During *FSA* the students fulfill different tasks form subjects of their own choosing at their own pace. The only "limit" or guideline is the schedule for the whole school year that has to be completed within the year. This mirrors on the one hand Maria Montessori's assumption that children at liberty to choose and act freely would act spontaneously for optimal development, and on the other Gaudig's *Arbeitsschule*, or even John Dewey (2001): "It is [the child] and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning" (p. 108).

It becomes obvious that although the focal point is the individual child there also is another level: *Morgenkreis* and *FSA* cannot function without "the others:" the *Morgenkreis* at the beginning of the week is about finding oneself by sharing one's adventures and making contact with one's fellow students. During *FSA* the children are allowed to help each other – some of the tasks are designed so that they cannot be done alone – and at the same time they have to be careful not to disturb the others. The individual learns about the responsible use of freedom by using it, and about community by being an integral, but individual, part of it. This is reflected in the third structural element, the *Vernetzter Unterricht*, or interconnected education, as seen in Figure 1. The individual dealing with the topic is clearly the focus, but neither the person nor the topic are isolated. For example: the individual can rely on the group for help (social dimension), solve the task at their own pace, or even on their own (personal dimension), and make use of their different skills / ideas learned in all possible subjects of study. This holistic approach goes far beyond cross-curricular teaching (Böckerstette & Weber, 1995). Instead of emphasizing the single subjects and looking for common topics to discuss in the different subjects, for example, "the enlightenment" in history, art, and religion – teachers (and learners) following the "Marchtal Plan" would look at the topic at hand, make it the center of the question and discuss it using different approaches thus eliminating the borders between the subjects. Each child is able to bring their personal strengths to bear, no matter whether they are good in English, Music, or Mathematics. They learn that everybody can contribute, that each skill is useful, and that everybody has their own value. To fail is no big deal, because there are others to help you and next time you can help the others. Children in this environment are not in danger of becoming lone

wolves, since they know that together they get can the farthest. Through constant interaction with teachers and peers they grow personally. They feel accepted and valued as they are.

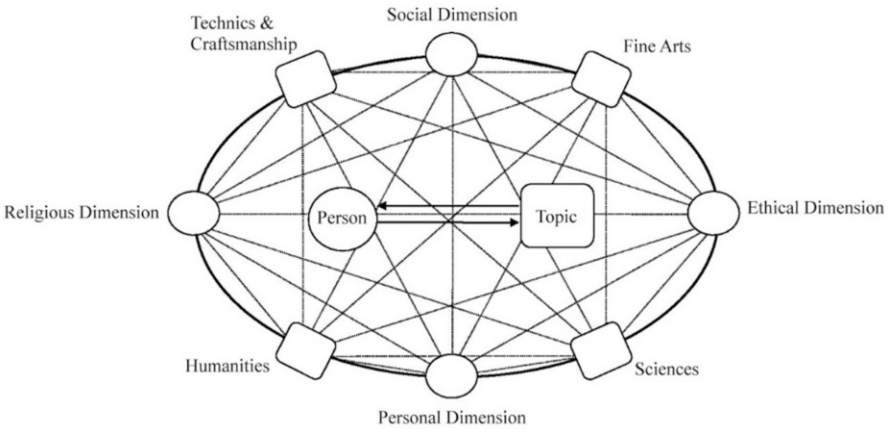

Figure 1. Marchtal Plan: Interconnected education.
(adapted from Bischöfliches Schulamt, 2002)

By following the "Marchtal Plan" and applying interconnected education with its holistic approach Catholic schools provide children with a learning environment in which each of them gets the chance to make the best use of their abilities, hone their skills, and grow as active parts of a supportive community. They also provide them with a living space in which not only their intellectual needs, but also their emotional needs are taken care of and in which they can feel secure. The school becomes the proverbial village.

CONCLUSION: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

In the 1960s keeping the focus on the person was appealing to a generation who rebelled against a society that had high demands: employees and executives alike should have professional competence, should adapt to the economy, should identify themselves with institutions, make sacrifices, and above all place the good of the company above their personal well being. Not persons were important, but competences (Böckerstette & Weber, 1995). It was not the individual who had value, but only what he or she could contribute to further the economy. Not much seems to have changed between 1960 and 2015. I would like to expand Wolfgang Schönig's (2014) picture of the discussion about school development as a pendulum. Schönig points out that the discussion, just like the pendulum, keeps swinging from one side to the other and back again. And the picture fits: in the 1960s it was all about learning

objectives, scientification and curricula, now it is all about educational standards and competencies. But there is another part of the picture: by swinging from side to side the pendulum keeps the clock ticking – there is performance. And so there is in school: no matter whether we talk about curricula or educational standards, what we expect, as a society, is performance and achievement. And this again needs to be measured, like the clock takes time. Your performance becomes who you are. All this leads us to forget that children are no clocks, no machines. Educational achievement is not necessarily something that can (or should) be measured, because it differs for everybody.

In his recent book *Burnout-Kids* Schulte-Markwort (2015) shows how the constant pressure to perform according to certain standards destroys our children. Starting with grade school they learn that they always have to have the best marks in order to be able to make a living. For the reasons discussed above – social background, no traditional family, social climbing – families often cannot provide the necessary support for their children. So it clearly takes more than a family to raise a child. But by focusing on performance, selection, and grading state schools in Germany are, at the moment, not up to the task. And the school reforms triggered by PISA set the wrong goals: standardized testing might not only lead to teaching-to-the-test, leaving the students without usable skills, but also enforces competition. Thus promoting a climate of obstruction, instead of cooperation. As Schulte-Markwort (2015) confirms children living in today's meritocracy suffer burnout, and often feel inferior to their peers, or even worthless. This feeling might be intensified by the fact that PISA highlights the so called MINT subjects seemingly devaluing the arts and humanities.

Since our society is increasingly heterogeneous it becomes even more important to value each child for their own sake, regardless of their marks, or achievements. With the "Marchtal Plan" Catholic schools have the means to help children to become independent, self-reliant, confident, creative and open persons able to set their own standards and using their personal freedom responsibly. Catholic schools can be the village where adolescents learn to live a full life in the global village.

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