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Integrating Immigrant Children in Compulsory Education Systems: A Comparative Analysis of Educational Policy in the U.S. and Germany

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How do differences in the German and American school systems impact immigrants' integration into the two societies?

What can the U.S. and Germany do to improve immigrant education and integration?

The U.S. and German labor forces rely heavily on immigration to close the widening gap created by an aging workforce and declining native population. At the same time, labor markets fueling the global economy are increasingly dependent on a highly-skilled workforce. Therefore, successful integration of immigrant populations has become paramount in maintaining a competitive edge in the global economy. Compulsory educational systems provide a pivotal context to enculturate immigrant youth and effectively prepare them for the twenty-first century workforce.¹

As Schleicher concluded, the "capacity to compete in the global knowledge economy will depend on whether its higher education institutions can meet the fast growing demand for high-level skills. But that, in turn, will hinge on significant improvements in the quality of schooling outcomes and equity in learning opportunities."² Success in higher education is, therefore, contingent on improvements in compulsory education and promoting equitable access to education for all children.

The global economy's mandate for increasingly higher skill-sets has illuminated the deficits in our ability to maximize the potential of immigrant labor forces by means of successful integration in the school systems and equitable access to educational opportunities. In comparison to their native peers, data show that immigrant children lag significantly in performance measures and often have limited access to more advanced secondary and tertiary education in both countries.

Although the cultural conditions surrounding the German and U.S. educational systems differ, a comparison of each nation's federal-level educational policies and practices provides a rich context for collaboration in remedying disparities and improving our efforts to effectively integrate immigrant children.

Immigration: The General Context

The total population as of 2007 in Germany was 82.2 million of which 7.26 million (8.82 percent) were foreigners without German citizenship.³ Immigrants predominately settle in the western states and in city centers where labor demand is higher.⁴ Generally, there has been a steady decline in immigration since 2000 (falling from 841,200 to 661,900), but more Germans are emigrating and the net balance in the general population is being made up by foreigners.⁵

In comparing the immigration contexts of Germany and the United States, one important difference to remember is that all children born in the United States to immigrants are by definition natives. General statistics therefore reflect the number of *non-U.S. born* immigrants and do not account for the large number of children born to immigrant households.

The total population as of 2007 in the United States was estimated at 301.3 million⁶ of which approximately 37.9 million (12.58 percent) were foreign-born populations without U.S. citizenship.⁷ Immigrants now account for one in eight U.S. residents (compared to 1 in 16 in 1980). As of 2000, the states with the highest percentages of foreigners were California (27.6 percent), New York (21.6 percent), New Jersey (21.6 percent), and Florida (19.1 percent). The data shows that immigration in the United States has been on the rise since the

1980s and that the net population increase is directly linked to increased immigration. Immigrant populations account for 34 percent of U.S. population growth in the last seven years, and when the annual net immigration growth of 1.2 million is added to the 950,000 births to immigrants each year, the total impact of immigration accounts for almost three-fourths of U.S. population growth.⁸

General immigration logically affects the necessity to integrate immigrant children into school systems and although the basic structure of the German and U.S. systems differ in particular at the secondary level,⁹ in the compulsory educational setting we share many areas of concern such as the high percentage of school-leavers and disparate access to education.

Germany: School System & Integration

Approximately 9.6 percent of children enrolled in the German school system are immigrants, and this percentage has remained relatively stable since 2000 even though there has been a 6 percent decline in overall enrollment of all school-aged children. There is a marked disparity between the percentages of immigrant children versus German children enrolled in specific types of schools. Data from the 2006/7 school year show that in comparison with their native German counterparts, almost twice as many immigrant children will attend *Hauptschule* (22 percent versus 10.12 percent of German natives) and *Förderschule*, the more stigmatized and less prestigious of the schools (7 percent versus 4 percent), and almost three times as many German natives will attend *Gymnasium* (27.7 percent versus 11.7 percent of immigrant children).¹⁰ These disparities suggest that the German school system continues to battle inequitable access to education.¹¹

Germany: National-Level Educational Policy

In Germany, authority to determine educational policy is ultimately held by the states. Significant policies to address integration of immigrant populations have, however, been established at the national level by means of the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (KMK) or 'Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the Federal Republic of Germany'.¹² For example, in 2001, the KMK documented changes to the Hamburg Accord¹³ designed to ease integration of ethnic Germans and foreign students by allowing language instruction in additional languages and recognizing the languages of origin countries or Russian as part of the foreign language requirements.¹⁴

More recent KMK resolutions have included a 2006 report¹⁵ in which national goals for the integration of children of migrant heritage were outlined and accepted by the states and a 2008 report¹⁶ written in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and providing further updates regarding language learning and instruction in part for immigrants and ethnic Germans.

Germany: Challenges

Key barriers to the successful integration of school children in Germany include: limited language proficiency, disparities in academic knowledge bases, difficulty in adapting to a new learning culture, limited knowledge of the German school system and its educational opportunities, limited contact with native populations and the German language, and the persistence of ethnocentrism and misconceptions about immigrant populations.¹⁷

U.S.: School System and Immigration

In the United States, immigration accounts for virtually all of the national increase in public school enrollment over the last two decades. In 2007, 10.8 million immigrant children accounted for 20.2 percent of the total school-age population. Fewer than one-fourth (2.7 million) of these children are immigrants themselves with the remainder being U.S.-born children with immigrant parents.¹⁸

The U.S. school system differs from Germany's in that for the most part, all school-aged children attend the same types of learning institutions. A study in 2000 found that most immigrant children perform as well or better than their native peers, but that specific subpopulations (Mexican and Central American students in particular) are less likely to continue schooling beyond the eighth grade and those that do are more likely to repeat a grade or fail to graduate.¹⁹

U.S.: Federal Educational Policy

States and localities hold the authority in determining the structure and curricula of compulsory education in the United States. As with Germany, however, federal policy does exist to guide states in the implementation of their education systems. Federal influence in the United States is primarily exerted by means of funding and research. The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965), for example, is a federal statute which funds professional development initiatives, the development of instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and the promotion of parental involvement. Total federal funding for education in 2008 was \$37.9 billion.²⁰ Many of the Titles contained within this Act are relevant to immigrant education (e.g., Title VII Bilingual Education Programs).²¹

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) (2001)²² is federal legislation requiring states to set educational standards for achievement in basic skills at different grade levels and to take steps to improve performance if schools are not meeting the standards as measured by standardized tests. NCLB provides for eventual removal of students and funding from failing schools. It is important to note that NCLB is applied to all school-age children, whether they are citizens or residing legally or illegally in the United States.²³

U.S.: Challenges

A recent Urban Institute study isolated two specific subpopulations of immigrant children at the secondary level that have particular difficulty: immigrant teens, who begin schooling with gaps in their knowledge base (usually neither fully literate in the native or English languages); and students from non-English speaking homes, who have been in the system longer, but have not mastered basic language and literacy skills. Results of the study further illuminated four distinct challenges in immigrant education, including: the shortage of teachers trained in assisting immigrant children; the departmentalization of subjects (much like in colleges) and the division of the day into 50-minute periods (less conducive to individualized instruction); the lack of standards, adequate testing, and accountability of LEP (Limited English Proficiency) and of immigrant students (especially in light of NCLB); and gaps in our knowledge base for simultaneously providing subject-matter and language instruction.²⁴

A comparison of the German and U.S. education systems, their federal or national-level policies, and the challenges to effectively integrating immigrant populations provides the opportunity to make some preliminary recommendations for improvement and areas where transatlantic collaboration might prove beneficial.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Pre-service teacher preparation in both countries must include a nationally-mandated component for integrated theoretical and practical training related to students with special needs (including immigrant populations).

This could be achieved in the United States by means of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).²⁵ NCATE establishes performance-based standards for program areas and the pre-service professional development of teacher candidates, school specialists, and administrators of P-12 systems. Standard #4 requires that teacher candidates acquire skills for facilitating the learning of all students and for interacting with diverse groups. But in its current form, this standard does not require the systematic and intensive training needed to adequately prepare teacher candidates for diagnosing or integrating diverse populations. NCATE should require that teacher candidates complete an endorsement for special needs populations such as English as a Second Language, Special Education, Urban education, or less commonly taught languages and cultures (e.g., Swahili), and require a minimum of ninety-six contact hours directly observing and teaching the target populations. Flexibility should remain with the institutions and the State Boards of Education in determining what special needs endorsements are available to candidates and best serve the P-12 student populations in their regions. Teacher-training programs should also be required to demonstrate how instruction and practical experience related to teaching diverse populations is integrated across the content area and teacher education curricula (rather than treated as

a separate subject in a specific course, for example).

In Germany, teacher training can be influenced at the national level by means of the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (KMK). In 2004, the KMK established national standards for theoretical and practical teacher preparation with one of the focus areas being “Differentiation, integration and advancement/aid” in order to address the growing intercultural dimension of education. These standards were accepted by the states as fundamentals for teacher training to be implemented, applied and evaluated starting in the 2005/2006 academic year. Competence #4, for example, requires candidates “to recognize disadvantages and implement pedagogical assistance and preventative measures.”²⁶

The KMK should continue to advocate state adherence to the 2004 standards with the goal that *all* states have required modules integrated throughout teacher candidate preparation and in-service training for aiding youth of migrant heritage. For pre-service teachers, a practicum during Preparatory Service (*Vorbereitungsdienst*) working directly with immigrant populations should be required, and the First or Second State Examination (*Erste or Zweite Staatsprüfungen*) should require demonstrated proficiency in conducting diagnostic evaluation and working with children of migrant heritage.

Recommendation 2: Both nations should develop national standards designed for those students with limited language proficiency.

In the United States, there is a movement for establishing national standards for many basic subject areas. If the *No Child Left Behind Act* is to assess the achievement of basic skill levels set forth by the states, then LEP students must have clearly defined benchmarks of achievement and valid testing instruments; testing knowledge of mathematics, rather than the child’s ability to comprehend the prompts written in English.

In the same way, the efforts of the KMK and the Institute for Educational Progress (*Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen* or IQB) to establish national standards must include standards for immigrant populations with limited language proficiency.

Recommendation 3: Expand the research mission of the IQB in Germany to inform KMK policy decisions and regional program funding.

The KMK resolutions assert the need for evaluation of the national standards for teaching and learning approved and implemented by the German states and to this end, the IQB was established in 2004. It supports the German states in evaluating the implementation of the Standards set forth by the KMK.²⁷

What is missing in Germany is a centralized, national-level focus on empirical evaluation of the pre-K to 13 context similar to that provided by the U.S. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE).²⁸ The research component of the IQB should be substantially expanded. The reliance on international reports (e.g., PISA) to justify initial funding of programs is understandable, but the program outcomes need to be evaluated to ensure they are successful within the German context.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* or BMBF) website states that “an empirically founded educational research is necessary for the development of the education system. The Federal Government will support the states in their reform of the education system through a stronger commitment into educational research.”²⁹ The BMBF should, therefore, allocate a portion of the 16 percent of the annual budget (€10.2 billion in 2009)³⁰ to the expansion of the IQB’s mission to perform research.

Recommendation 4: Both nations need to support active networking to promote the sharing of best practices in immigrant education.

The United States needs to establish a means for systematic networking between the policymakers of the states much like the KMK in Germany. Such collaboration could be facilitated by means of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Currently, the closest equivalent to the KMK in the United States is the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), which plays a similar role in promoting collaboration between the state secretaries of education. NASBE has an annual conference, but it does not facilitate the close collaboration of states to the extent the KMK in Germany does.³¹

In addition, both nations need to strengthen their networking at the transnational level—forming an institutional roundtable in which leaders in the realm of integration in education and immigrant organizations are actively involved. For example, a closer collaboration between the IQB of Germany and the NCEE of the U.S. could easily and effectively be established in order to share best practices for immigrant education as well as to guide future research at both institutions.

NOTES

- 1 Collaboration is well underway on improving training at the tertiary level (see, for example, a description of the Atlantis Programme of the EU Delegation to the European Commission to the USA at <http://eurunion.org/eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3329&Itemid=178>, however, aside from international comparative studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), there has been little transatlantic collaboration to improve compulsory education—the basis for advanced skill-building at the tertiary level.
- 2 Andreas Schleicher, “The Economics of Knowledge: Why Education is Key for Europe’s Success,” *Lisbon Council Policy Brief* (2006), 16. At the time of publication, Andreas Schleicher was the head of the Indicators and Analysis Division in the Directorate of Education at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris and also the project director of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.
- 3 Statistisches Bundesamt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 2008 Für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008) 28.
- 4 Eurydice European Unit, “Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe: Germany 2003/2004,” Eurydice European Unit (2004) 3.
- 5 Statistisches Bundesamt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 2008 Für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008) 60.
- 6 U.S. Census Bureau, *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008*. Available at <<http://www.census.gov/popest/states/tables/NST-EST2008-01.xls>>.
- 7 U.S. Census Bureau, *2007 Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)*. Available at <<http://www.census.gov/aprd/techdoc/cps/cpsmar07.pdf>>.
- 8 Steven A. Camarota, “Immigrants in the United States, 2007: A Profile of America’s Foreign-Born Population,” *The Backgrounder* (November 2007).
- 9 For a general description of the German school system see the “HowToGermany” website at <<http://www.howtoger-many.com/pages/germanschools.html>>; for a general description of the American school system see the “JustLanded” website at <<http://www.justlanded.com/english/USA/USA-Guide/Education/The-American-school-system>>.
- 10 Statistisches Bundesamt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch 2008 Für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008) 133. The *Hauptschule* or ‘Secondary General School’ (fifth through ninth/tenth grade) provides a lower-secondary, basic comprehensive curriculum. The *Förderschule* or ‘Special Education School’ provides curricula for students with special needs. The *Gymnasium* or ‘Grammar School’ (fifth through twelfth/thirteenth grade) provides college preparatory curricula.
- 11 For results of an empirical study of institutional discrimination see Mechtild Gomolla and Frank-Olaf Radtke, *Institutionelle Diskriminierung. Die Herstellung ethnischer Differenz in der Schule* (Opland: Leske und Budrich, 2002).
- 12 The KMK is a collaborative congress of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs from the individual German states.
- 13 The *Hamburger Abkommen* was first signed in 1964 and established the common basic structure of education in Germany (e.g., regulation of the school year, the beginning and length of compulsory education, the organizational structure of schools). A copy of the Accord is available at <http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/1964/1964_10_28_Hamburger_Abkommen.pdf>.
- 14 Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Weiterentwicklung des Schulwesens in Deutschland seit Abschluss des Abkommens zwischen den Ländern der Bundesrepublik zur*

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Vereinheitlichung auf dem Gebiete des Schulwesens vom 28.10.1964 i.d.F. vom 14.10.1971 (Bonn: Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz, 10 Mai 2001).

15 Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Bericht: Zuwanderung* (Bonn: Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz, 16 November 2006).

16 Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, *Bildung in Deutschland 2008: Ein indikatorengestützter Bericht mit einer Analyse zu Übergängen im Anschluss an den Sekundarbereich I* (Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2008).

17 Ute Heinen, *Zuwanderung und Integration in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Informationen zur politischen Bildung* (Heft 267) (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000).

18 U.S. Census Bureau, *2007 Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)* (March, 2007). Available at <<http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsmar07.pdf>>.

19 Jorge Ruiz-de-Velasco, Michael E. Fix, and Beatriz Chu Clewell, *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2000).

20 U.S. Department of Education, *Education Department Budget History Table 1980-2009PB*, updated 28 February 2008. Available at <<http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/history/index.html>>.

21 More information about the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) is available on the U.S. Department of Education website at <<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>>.

22 More information about the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is available on the U.S. Department of Education website at <<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>>.

23 The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Plyler v. Doe (1982) provided that the equal protection provision of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution requires public schools to admit illegal alien children.

24 Jorge Ruiz-de-Velasco, Michael E. Fix, and Beatriz Chu Clewell, *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2000).

25 NCATE is recognized and authorized by the US Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the professional accrediting body for teacher preparation.

26 Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Standards für die Lehrerbildung: Bildungswissenschaften* (Bonn: Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz, 16 December 2004).

27 The IQB is also tasked with supporting the standardization of educational practices across states, developing national performance scales for evaluating achievement of the standards, further developing the national standards, creating large pools of standards-based tasks for use by the schools, and conducting research to improve standards-based education. More information is available on the IQB website at <<http://www.iqb.hu-berlin.de/institut>>.

28 The NCEE is tasked by the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences with conducting unbiased, large-scale evaluations of education programs and practices supported by federal funds, providing research-based technical assistance to educators and policymakers, and supporting the synthesis and widespread dissemination of the results of research and evaluation throughout the U.S. More information is available on the NCEE homepage at <<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/>>.

29 See the BMBF Website at <<http://www.bmbf.de/en/6880.php>>.

30 As reported on the BMBF Website at <<http://www.bmbf.de/en/96.php>>.

31 For more information on the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), visit their homepage at <<http://nasbe.org/>>.

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