D 1.2 Prejudice and discrimination in an education context

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# Prejudices make us stupid

When people are confronted with disparaging and exclusionary messages that affect them, this has a direct impact on their performance. Horaczek & Wiese (2015) report on an experiment conducted by a psychologist in Vienna during an election campaign in 2006. Young people were shown election posters with slogans such as 'Sozialstaat statt Zuwanderung' ['Welfare state not immigration'], 'Daham statt Islam' ['Home not Islam'] and 'Deutsch statt nix verstehen' ['German, not "don't understand"']. Before and after looking at these posters, the young people were asked to complete brainteasers. Test subjects who had experience of migration did not perform as well after looking at the posters as before. Specifically, their performance worsened by six percent. If they were not confronted with the xenophobic slogans, their performance remained unchanged. On the other hand, no impact from the slogans could be observed on the mental performance of young people without migration experience (Horaczek/Wiese 2015, 159).

# Prejudices shape the expectations of educational staff

The question of what image educational staff have of children and what expectations arise from this is fundamental to children's success at school. This is shown by a study carried out at the University of Oldenburg in 2009 involving children's first names. Certain first names trigger certain expectations regarding a child's behaviour, performance and personality. Those expectations contribute to the child being ascribed positive or negative competencies. The study, entitled "Kevin ist kein Name, sondern eine Diagnose" ["Kevin is not a name, it's a diagnosis"] attracted considerable attention. It also observed that the majority of teachers had no critical detachment from their assumptions, and it concluded that principles of anti-prejudice education should be taught at schools. Katharina Brizić examined very similar effects in Austrian schools, but in this case it was the approach to languages in the family rather than first names that formed the basis for assumptions (cf. Brizić/Hufnagl 2016).

The effects of teacher expectations on children's academic performance as self-fulfilling prophecies have already been demonstrated in various studies, yet little or no consideration is given to this phenomenon in approaches that seek to explain poorer academic performance by children from families with a migration background. Little attention has therefore to date been given to promoting an approach to education that is conscious of prejudice and discrimination.

Currently, the field of pedagogy of migration warns against automatic assumptions, in particular with regard to national/ethnic/cultural affiliations and multilingualism associated with migration, as they not only produce but also legitimise inequality and discrimination (Mecheril et al. 2010). Well-intentioned, 'kindly' and apparently resource-centred attitudes can on closer analysis prove to be of only limited use if not weakness-centred if they are linked to low expectations of children or (unconsciously) make use of depreciative, culturalising stereotypes, such as calling boys "pasha" or the expectation that the parents of girls from Muslim families will not support their academic careers (cf. Friedel-Boesch 2013).

# Institutional discrimination at educational institutions

A study of schools in Bielefeld conducted in early 2000 and still valid today shows that a lack of success at school on the part of the children of migrants is related to institutional discrimination. The authors of the study demonstrate that institutional decision-making mechanisms have multiple negative effects on the academic careers of children who represent linguistic and cultural diversity and come from a migration background, namely in the procedure for admission to primary school (*Schulreifefeststellung* [school readiness assessment]), in the determination of special educational needs and in recommendations for or admission to lower secondary education (*Gymnasium*/*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule* yes or no).

Discrimination against children from families with a migration background takes place because they cannot fulfil the expectations of normality or the "membership conditions" of the educational institution, either in terms of language or with regard to family socialisation. Discrimination against these children also stems from special treatment – treatment that is seen as reasonable and therefore legitimate in the general discourse both within and outside school and nursery.

*Die Diskriminierung von Migrantenkindern besteht (a) darin, dass es weniger wahrscheinlich ist, dass diese Kinder/Schüler die für alle geltenden Mitgliedschaftsbedingungen der Grundschule (und der weiterführenden Schulen) erfüllen können. Sie wird (b) dadurch möglich, weil die meisten in und außerhalb der Organisation Sonderbehandlung von Migranten für plausibel halten und sogar darauf drängen. Diskriminierung resultiert als Effekt also sowohl aus Formen der Gleichbehandlung von Migrantenkindern unter vermeintlich neutralen Leistungs- und Beurteilungskriterien als auch aus Formen der Ungleichbehandlung jeweils im Vergleich mit ihren Mitschülern.  
[Children of migrants (a) experience discrimination in that it is less likely that they will be able to meet the general membership requirements for primary (and secondary) schools. (b) Such discrimination is possible because most people both within and outside the organisation consider special treatment for migrants to be reasonable and even call for it. Discrimination is thus an effect both of forms of equal treatment of migrant children in accordance with supposedly neutral performance and assessment criteria and of forms of unequal treatment as compared to that of their classmates.] (Gomolla/Radtke 2007, 274f)*

The school assumes conditions that are not only not automatically met by children with a migration background: "[...] neben guten Leistungen braucht es auch soziale Integration, Elternmitarbeit, ein anregungsreiches Milieu und vor allem keine zusätzlichen Defizite und Bedürfnisse, die Schwierigkeiten bereiten könnten." "[in addition to good work, children also need social integration, parental involvement, a stimulating environment and, above all, no additional weakness or needs that could cause difficulties."] (ibid) Under these conditions, a child is not guaranteed but is very likely to have a successful school career and complete secondary education.

According to Gomolla/Radtke (2007), mechanisms of institutional discrimination are apparent

* *"wenn regelmäßig von der Organisation Schule vorgenommene (Selektions-) Entscheidungen, die in ihrer eigenen Logik und Pragmatik getroffen werden, ungleiche Wirkungen auf die Schüler haben, und  
  [when regular (selection) decisions made by the school , which are based on its own logic and pragmatism, do not have the same impact or effect on all pupils, and]*
* *wenn diese in der Organisation selbst hergestellten Unterschiede durch Merkmale/Eigenschaften, die der benachteiligten Gruppe zugeschrieben werden, mit Sinn ausgestattet werden, und  
  [when these differences, produced in the organisation itself, are lent meaning through the attribution of certain features/characteristics to the disadvantaged group, and]*
* *wenn es sich dabei um das Kollektivmerkmal der ,nationalen Herkunft´/,Kultur´ handelt."  
  [where said feature/characteristic is the collective characteristic 'national origins'/'culture']  
  (ibid)*

In contrast, recognition and appreciation have a positive impact on pupils' learning.

*Löser (2009) berichtet von kanadischen Schulen, an denen SchülerInnen mit Migrationsgeschichte ähnlich gute Schulleistungen wie solche ohne Migrationsgeschichte aufweisen. Diese Schulen sind charakterisiert durch eine im Vergleich zu anderen Staaten stark hervorstechende sprachlich-kulturelle Vielfalt und eine explizit wertschätzende und fördernde Haltung bei LehrerInnen, die breite Unterstützung in Politik und Gesellschaft findet und mit dem Motto „Celebrate Diversity“ ausgedrückt wird.  
[Löser (2009) reports on Canadian schools where pupils with a migration background perform similarly well to those without a migration background. These schools are characterised by what is a striking linguistic and cultural diversity compared to other countries and an explicitly appreciative and supportive attitude on the part of teachers, which is widely supported in politics and society and reflected in the motto "Celebrate Diversity".] (Melter/İDirim/ Mecheril (2012)*

Accordingly, any education strategy in a migration society, which Austria de facto is, must (critically) explore and reflect upon its own institutional and organisational framework by analysing the institution and its structures. There needs to be a critical assessment of the conscious and subconscious expectations of normality on which the organisation is based. The resulting decision-making mechanisms are to be considered in terms of their effects on those who do not meet expectations.

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