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Education, Politics, Inequalities: Current Dynamics and Perspectives

Editors

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Editorial

The Politics of Inequalities in Education: Exploring Epistemic Orders and Educational Arrangements of Durable Disadvantaging

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Abstract
The durability of educational inequalities marks a key problem for research and politics alike. Why do unwanted patterns of social sorting and disadvantaging in education prove so persistent, despite decades of research, debates, and reforms? This thematic issue of *Social Inclusion* aims to further our understanding of the factors and mechanisms underlying this persistence by putting the manifold entanglements of politics, inequalities, and social research centre stage. The collected articles inquire into various facets of this interplay, from the history and politics of the statistical quantification of educational inequalities to the political embedding of everyday pedagogical practices. The contributions cover a wide range of fields and topics, from non-formal education to school and higher education, from social selectivity in gifted education to subject formation in vocational education. Two strategic anchor points emerge from the collected articles for exploring and analyzing current arrangements of educational inequalities: (1) political and pedagogical epistemic orders and (2) educational arrangements that structure educational processes and situations. Ongoing social and political transformations—including the digitization and datafication of education and changing forms of governance—underline the pressing need for further research along these lines.

Keywords
education; social inequalities; politics of education

Issue
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1. Exploring the Politics of Persistent Inequalities in Education

The Covid-19 crisis has, once again, highlighted the massive social disparities that mark current education systems across the globe. The pandemic seems to have exacerbated these already existing patterns that persist in spite of decades of problematization and debate in educational politics and research, and notwithstanding countless reforms on all levels of educational systems. Actually, rather than helping weaken the strong ties between social inequalities and educational trajectories, current political dynamics have increasingly come under the suspicion of further stabilizing them (Reay, 2017; Thompson, 2019). Our understanding of how exactly social orders and political formations play together in structuring educational inequalities is, however, still rather limited. How are inequalities in education defined and framed as a political issue? What understandings of educational justice inform these problematizations? How

do political discourses become effective in everyday pedagogical practices, e.g., by justifying social sorting and exclusion, and thus patterns of inequalities? How do educational organizations react to political expectations and regulations regarding equity and equality in education, and what are (unintended) consequences of these reactions? How do broader political transformations structure dynamics of social disadvantaging in education?

Hence the objective of this thematic issue of *Social Inclusion*: to inquire into the manifold and intricate entanglements of politics and inequalities in education. The collected articles cover a wide range of fields in which such interplays become manifest: from non-formal education to school and higher education, from everyday pedagogical interactions to changing forms of governing educational inequalities, from media discourses to the "political arithmetic" of measuring educational inequality. This thematic variety mirrors an overriding ambition: Our goal was to bring together scholarship from different research areas and with diverse analytical and methodological outlooks in order to explore perspectives for conceptual and methodological innovation.

2. Facing the Entanglements of Politics and Research

The critical investigation of the politics of educational inequalities faces a dilemma that is perhaps best captured by the role of the OECD PISA surveys. On the one hand, PISA offers an important resource for demonstrating the scale and durability of educational disadvantages across the globe. The impressive amount of regular, comparative data offered by PISA (and other similar international "large scale assessment studies" such as TIMSS, PIRLS, or ICILS) were probably hard to imagine just a few decades ago. These data have played a crucial role in moving the issue of persistent educational inequalities to the fore of public and political debates.

On the other hand, PISA is itself part and parcel of an ongoing reconfiguration of educational inequalities; its power to *represent educational inequalities* (i.e., to define the methods as well as the terminology to monitor them) is linked to its role in *governing them* (Cowen, 2014). To start with, PISA and other assessment surveys focus on one dimension of educational inequality alone: attainment scores on psychometric competence scales. This exclusive focus comes at the price of neglecting various other dimensions and aspects of education. The narrowing of educational inequalities to performance measures in a few subjects also mirrors a specific and contested understanding of justice (Derouet, 1992; Francis et al., 2017). Conceptions of social justice that, for example, take processes of recognition or aspects of distributive justice into account and thus go beyond purely economic understandings of "equity of opportunities" have become marginalized (Lingard et al., 2014). These developments affect professional self-understandings, pedagogical practices, and teaching content (Høvsgaard Maguire, 2019; Ratner et al., 2019). Further, instruments of accountability are being redefined in these terms—not only students, but also schools and teachers are increasingly being assessed based on standardized achievement tests of students' performance (Auld et al., 2019; Niemann & Martens, 2018; Seitzer et al., 2021).

In a nutshell, the core problem is that PISA and other parts of our daily "research infrastructure" do not merely provide a neutral representation of a reality external to them, they are themselves constitutive and expressive of educational orders that are deeply entangled with political and social relations. Critical researchers may be fully aware of these social entanglements—in many situations they nonetheless need to rely on these very infrastructures if they wish to analyze patterns of disadvantaging. Educational research itself has thus become fixed in a powerful epistemic and empirical configuration in which research on inequalities is narrowed to the measurement of educational outcomes, the effects of which are deeply intertwined with conceptions of "fair and good education," pedagogical practices, curricula design, professional self-understandings, evaluation and accountability mechanisms, and educational governance.

3. From *Achievements* to Epistemic *Orders* and Educational *Arrangements*

The demand to reconsider the interplay of politics and inequalities in education implies that we need to move beyond the standard model of problematizing and explaining educational inequalities. One foundational characteristic of this standard model is that inequalities are conceived of as purely external to educational systems, as always already there and then only reproduced in schools and universities. In this model, educational organizations are imagined as passive actors that struggle to respond to overburdening social dynamics and unequal living conditions.

The starting point of Marcus Emmerich's and Ulrike Hormel's article "Unequal Inclusion: The Production of Social Differences in Education Systems" is that we need to overcome this presupposition and rather focus our attention on how inequalities are construed and produced "on the inside" of education systems (Emmerich & Hormel, 2021). Emmerich and Hormel draw on Charles Tilly's relational sociology of social inequalities and Niklas Luhmann's differentiation theory to decipher how particular "observation regimes" arise in educational systems. These observation regimes structure how educational organizations (such as schools) perceive and handle "external" social categories, mapping and matching them with processes and requirements that arise from the structures and logics of educational institutions themselves. Using various examples from their empirical research in schools in Germany and Switzerland, the authors demonstrate how such an analytical perspective helps understand current dynamics of differential inclusion and social closure in education.

There is an important takeaway message in Emmerich and Hormel's argument that resonates with the other articles in this thematic issue. Irrespective of the underlying social theory and the methodological approach, there are two main strategic anchor points for advancing our understanding of the politics of educational inequalities: *epistemic orders* and *organizational forms*.

In this sense, in their article "Education and 'Categorical Inequalities': Manifestation of Segregation in Six Country Contexts in Europe," Başak Akkan and Ayşe Buğra put the emphasis on how access to school education is organized differently in different national contexts (Akkan & Buğra, 2021). Their qualitative comparison of six European education systems addresses a true conundrum: why there is so much similarity across Europe in how vulnerable populations are systematically hindered in developing their full educational capabilities in spite of a wide variation in social structures and education systems. Building on the conceptual framework of "schools as sorting machines" (Domina et al., 2017), Akkan and Buğra speak of *educational arrangements* to grasp these dynamics—in particular different forms of segregation, privatization of public schooling and freedom of school choice that lead to diverse, yet durable "mechanisms of injustice." They argue that these arrangements also help understand why the very instruments designed to deal with social and cultural diversity can end up (re-)producing patterns of exclusion in education. They thus illustrate both the need and the productivity of moving from conceiving of inequalities solely in terms of *achievements* (as measured by standardized tests) to analysing concrete, complex, conditioned, and contextual *arrangements* that promote or hinder equal access to education.

Switching from achievements to arrangements opens a range of novel research perspectives because it directs our attention to issues that tend to be neglected in dominant debates on educational inequalities. For example, Lea Fobel and Nina Kolleck's article "Cultural Education: Panacea or Amplifier of Existing Inequalities in Political Engagement?" invites us to reconsider the potentially equitable role of cultural education. Their article makes a triple shift in comparison to dominant forms of thinking about educational inequalities: First, they do not focus on a high-stakes subject (such as mathematics); second, they investigate non-formal educational settings instead of formal educational institutions; and third, they do not restrict their analysis to achievements as dependent variable, but rather focus on the effects of cultural education on political engagement (Fobel & Kolleck, 2021). Using empirical data from the German National Education Panel Study (NEPS), they show that cultural education indeed does affect levels of political engagement; however, access to and participation in non-formal cultural education is distributed unevenly across social groups. These patterns matter because they lead to fundamental questions regarding the role of education for social cohesion and political belonging. They also illustrate the equitable potential of providing a broad, general, and equal education that includes cultural education for all from an early age onwards.

Using *epistemic orders* and *educational arrangements* as entry points to unravel structures and processes of durable inequalities in education opens a wide spectrum of topics for empirical research. Among the crucial phenomena that deserve attention are changing conceptions of educational justice and forms of reasoning about "good and fair education," strategies and tactics of explaining and justifying educational disadvantages, the emergence and transformation of categories and classifications that are employed in political and pedagogical contexts, the rules and regulations that constrain and enable everyday pedagogical interactions, the fads and foibles of permanent educational reform, or the spatial and temporal organization of education. All these possible research topics define "interfaces" between politics and education: They are deeply marked by political orders and at the same time structure everyday pedagogical situations.

In his article "Mission Accomplished? Critique, Justification, and Efforts to Diversify Gifted Education," Arne Böker demonstrates the added value of focusing on such "interfaces." He discusses the case of the German Academic Scholarship Foundation—a foundation that supports "gifted students" in their university careers (Böker, 2021). On the basis of official documents that span almost a century, Böker investigates how this foundation has responded to criticisms of social selectivity, and how this response has evolved over time—illustrating how this specific educational organization makes strategic use of existing epistemic orders, statistical procedures, and emerging testing infrastructures for justifying its selection practices. This strategic agency ends up reproducing the very patterns of selectivity that it purportedly meant to overcome. One of the key insights of Böker's analysis concerns the role of plurality in understandings of what defines justice and merit in education: social actors seem keen and capable of making strategic use of this plurality.

Epistemic orders and organizational arrangements do not only delineate the strategies of educational actors, they also affect students' biographies and self-understandings. This is the key argument that Stephan Dahmen develops in his article "Constructing the 'Competent' Pupil: Optimizing Human Futures Through Testing?" Dahmen discusses the introduction of so called "analyses of potentials" as key element of the transition system between compulsory education and the labour market in Germany (Dahmen, 2021). He discusses the political and epistemic context of this development: the shift towards neoliberal political rationalities that leads to the construal of "competency" as foundation for forming and assessing students as self-reliant and responsible subjects. Structural barriers and power relations in

getting an apprenticeship become hidden from sight—notwithstanding the essential role of this instrument for forming students' subjectivities by, for example, "cooling aspirations down" into "realistic expectations" regarding their future career.

Dahmen's analysis demonstrates the decisive role of testing for the regulation of educational inequalities: Tests function as devices that shall ensure both differentiation and fairness at the same time. Romuald Normand's contribution to this thematic issue points to a related technology of assessment: the indirect quantification of inequalities in education through measuring intellectual capacities. His article "The New European Political Arithmetic of Inequalities in Education: A History of the Present" reconstructs the historical emergence of testing industries in education, from early intelligence testing to recent psychometric instruments in large scale assessment studies (Normand, 2021). His focus is on the political embedding of these evolving epistemic technologies: He illustrates how their development has been intertwined with changing forms of educational governance and broad social transformations related to the modern welfare state. He argues that our current situation is characterized by political programs that focus on notions of competitiveness and human capital, amounting to a new political arithmetic of inequalities in education.

Educational arrangements always presuppose actors involved in sustaining and transforming them. Thinking in arrangements of educational inequalities therefore allows to reconsider professional responsibilities as well as structural conditions and constraints of equitable educational practices. The final three articles in this collection move in this direction by shifting our attention to the interplay of political logics, professional orientations, and pedagogical practices.

Laura Behrmann's article "'You Can Make a Difference': Teachers' Agency in Addressing Social Differences in the Student Body" asks whether and under what circumstances teachers in Germany consider social responsibility an essential element of their professional self-understanding. Based on her empirical research, Behrmann identifies four types of action orientation that prove highly productive for thinking about the interplay of organizational settings, teacher biographies, and professional self-understandings (Behrmann, 2021). Asserting a generally low inclination of seeing the counterbalancing of social disadvantages as key part of their job, she discusses conditions under which such a consciousness of social responsibility does become more likely. Among others, she underlines the relevance of teachers own biographical experiences as well as the importance of a school culture that is conducive to critical engagement with students' social backgrounds.

In her article "Study Preparation of Refugees in Germany: How Teachers' Evaluative Practices Shape Educational Trajectories," Stefanie Schröder focuses on the (often blocked) transition of refugee students into higher education. Her analysis is inspired by the sociology of valuation and evaluation—a perspective that leads her to focus on the processes of categorization and justification that inform and stabilize patterns of assessing the potentials and performances of refugee students (Schröder, 2021). Based on extensive qualitative interviews with involved teachers, Schröder provides important and timely insights on how teachers' experiences and perceptions as well as institutional norms and rules become effective in whole series of test situations that eventually structure the educational trajectories of a group of students who often are in a socially vulnerable and disadvantaged position.

Nadine Bernhard's article "Students' Differences, Societal Expectations and the Discursive Construction of (De)Legitimate Students in Germany" puts the analytical emphasis on public discourses that become effective in the pedagogical field in the form of expectations concerning the fairness and quality of education (Bernhard, 2021). More specifically, she asks how higher education institutions process social categories and how they get to know (or not to know) about their students in terms of these categories. Based on a content analysis of media outlets and professional journals and building on neo-institutional organizational sociology, she diagnoses a crucial difference between social categorization in higher education in comparison to school education: students' social backgrounds are still effectively de-thematized in higher education, with categorization being organized around notions of competencies and performances.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Unequal Inclusion: The Production of Social Differences in Education Systems

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Abstract
The article raises the question of whether and how education systems produce social differences internally rather than reproducing pre-existing "external" inequalities. Linking Niklas Luhmann's theory of inclusion/exclusion with Charles Tilly's theory of categorical inequalities, and based on empirical data from various qualitative studies, the article identifies an "observation regime" epistemically constituting the social classification of students and legitimising organisational closure mechanisms in the school system. As an alternative to the "reproduction paradigm," a research approach guided by differentiation theory is proposed that takes into account that educational inequality operationally arises on the "inside" of the educational system and is caused by unequal inclusion processes.

Keywords
educational inequality; exclusion; inclusion; observation regime; social closure

Issue
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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the guiding question of sociological research on educational inequality has been: Why do social inequalities persist in Western welfare-state democracies despite educational expansion? Since the late 1960s, the empirical insight that the formally enabled full inclusion into the education system did not provide sufficient opportunities for intergenerational mobility called for a theoretical explanation addressing inequality mechanisms. The "reproduction" concepts of both rational choice theorists (e.g., Boudon, 1974) and cultural Marxists (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) supported the explanans of socioculturally determined (self-)selection of socially disadvantaged students and thus seemed to provide a plausible answer to the above question. The following considerations instead suggest that this initial question had finally focussed on the wrong side of the problem and still does: Due to neglecting the active role of educational organisations as inequality operators, researchers following the "reproduction paradigm" systematically overlook the possibility that educational inequalities result from unequal modes of inclusion into the system of organised education.

The article proposes an alternative approach that assumes that the inherent logic of organisational operations in the education system explains the production of inequalities. In Section 2, following classical approaches in sociology of education that take school organisation and school governance into account (e.g., Bommes & Radtke, 1993; Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963;

Gomolla & Radtke, 2002; Mehan, 1992), the theoretical part of the article tries to complement this tradition with social closure theory that combines Charles Tilly's relational inequality theory (RIT) with Niklas Luhmann's operational theory of social systems and his concept of inclusion/exclusion (Section 3). Identifying an observation regime epistemically constituting and legitimising the social classification of students (Section 4), the empirical part of this article subsequently presents findings and data from various qualitative research projects that give insights into organisational closure mechanisms and the epistemic function of the regime (Section 5). We finally argue that the observation regime not only serves for the durability of educational inequalities, since it guides educational closure inside the school system; the regime also constitutes the "reproduction paradigm" in educational inequality research (Section 6).

2. Beyond Methodological Groupism: How (Not) to Explain Educational Inequalities

Research on educational inequality is persistently dominated by sociological approaches that mainly refer to "classical" allocation theories (Boudon, 1974; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Both Bourdieu's class theory and Boudon's stratification theory are based on a "reproduction paradigm" that explains educational inequality by social inequality and vice versa. The theoretically assumed "habitus" (Bourdieu) and learning abilities, according to "social heritage" (Boudon), construct a socio-ontological explanans for assumed "given" unequal "cognitive" and behavioural dispositions of students and their families (Brubaker, 1985; Emmerich & Hormel, 2013b; Swartz, 1981).

Guided by Boudon's rational choice approach, German educational inequality mainstream research (e.g., Becker, 2011; Blossfeld et al., 2019) in particular follows the notion of an interplay between "primary" and "secondary effects of social stratification" (Boudon, 1974, p. 83) as the main cause for educational inequality. This is also true for current studies on the educational inclusion of students who immigrated during the so-called "refugee crisis" (e.g., Will & Homuth, 2020). Special attention is paid to "secondary effects," which are conceptualised as class-specific educational aspirations and cumulative school choice decisions based on cost-benefit calculations. However, the methodological individualism of the rational choice paradigm proves to be a problem, not because "rational" school choice decisions are thought to be relevant, but because the methodological design of the primary effect is based on the metaphor of "social heritage": If "primary effects" are conceptualised as "inequalities in cognitive abilities generated in a child's formative years by differences in family background" (Blossfeld et al., 2019, p. 26), a strong theoretical assumption bears the burden of explanation, but this assumption itself cannot be empirically verified. Constructed as an independent variable predicting individual learning abilities at the time of school choice, this operationalisation neglects the brute fact that differentiating instructional efforts and learning interactions contaminate "cognitive abilities" with the student's first school contact. In addition to confounding sociocultural competencies with cognitive skills, the "primary effect" includes a school interaction effect that cannot be statistically controlled for.

Compared to Boudon, Bourdieus's differentiation theory at least proclaims a "relative autonomy" of the educational field (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1981), but due to the lack of an operational theory of organisation, the reproduction of class structure through habitus formation remains the only causal explanation for educational inequality (Kieserling, 2008). This is also the case for Bourdieu-oriented research that focuses on problems of the "cultural fit" between students and educational institutions (e.g., Kramer, 2017). Finally, Bourdieu's culturalisation of class theory and Boudon's culturalisation of stratification theory apparently lead to culturalist causalities (e.g., Brubaker, 1985; Jenkins, 1982), methodologically supporting what Brubaker (2004, p. 8) called "groupism," which is "the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as… fundamental units of social analysis" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 8) in the field of cultural sociologies.

International comparative studies, however, cast doubt on the explanatory power of the reproduction paradigm. Their findings lead to ironically phrased questions like: "Are the children of Turkish immigrants in other countries smarter than in Germany?" (Wilmes et al., 2011, p. 101, translation by the authors). The results of the underlying comparative survey TIES (The Integration of the Second Generation) show that the intergenerational mobility of young people whose parents immigrated from Turkey varies considerably across the eleven European countries studied: While a vanishingly small proportion of this "group" gains access to higher education in the two German cities in the sample, in Stockholm and Paris "the second generation experiences a generalised strong upward social mobility in relation to their parents' generation" (Crul et al., 2012, p. 127). Beyond that, regional characteristics of class and migration-related educational disparities in the German school system have been stably demonstrated for decades (El-Mafaalani & Kemper, 2017; Emmerich et al., 2020; Weishaupt & Kemper, 2009). Since this variance cannot be plausibly explained by the assumed educationally relevant origin characteristics of disadvantaged students, as the reproduction paradigm would suggest, this leads to organisational factors that generate patterns of educational inequality.

A long tradition of empirical works based on the theory of social classifications make typifying, labelling, and grouping students the starting point of their analysis (e.g., Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963; Mehan, 1992; Mehan et al., 1986). Criticising the view of schools as "automatic reproduction machines, exacerbating or perpetuating

social inequalities in mechanical ways" (Mehan, 1998, p. 255), these qualitative studies seek to shed light on the "black box" of the internal structures and dynamics of the educational process. Tyack and Tobin (1994), for example, describe how the introduction of grade levels in the US in the early 20th century let a group of students with "developmental delays" emerge. In this case, an organisational change triggers social differentiation inside the school system. Finally, all the above approaches in fact seek to explain phenomena of social differentiation through school differentiation and thus focus implicitly and explicitly on *organised* education.

Within the German context, particularly, the approach of "institutional discrimination" (Bommes & Radtke, 1993; Gomolla & Radtke, 2002) has further developed organisation-oriented inequality research. In conjunction with constructivist/social phenomenological organisational research and Luhmann's operational systems theory, Gomolla and Radtke's (2002) study on the "making of ethnic difference" provided a theoretically grounded analytical framework for empirically observing disadvantaging organisational mechanisms in local school systems. The study shows how discrimination emerges unintentionally as a result of routinised resource distribution and selection strategies following an opportunity structure provided by the organisational differentiation of school types.

Recent contributions referring to Charles Tilly's theory of categorical inequalities analyse social closure mechanisms in school systems as a genuine organisational variable (Domina et al., 2017; Emmerich & Hormel, 2013a). Following on from this conceptualisation of organisations as simultaneously decision-making and sensemaking "machines," we attempt to present a theoretical and empirical approach to inequality research combining Tilly's (1999) analysis of organisation-based social closure mechanisms with Luhmann's concept of inclusion/exclusion to relate the production of inequalities with processes of social differentiation "beyond groupism" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 11).

3. Organised Inequalities and Social Differentiation

Further developing Tilly's approach, RIT particularly focuses on how social categories like gender, ethnicity, race, religion, nationality, education etc. become transformed into structures of "durable inequality" through organised social closure. RIT conceptualises organisations as societal "inequality regimes in their own right" (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 105) internally practising exploitation, social closure, and claims-making by which they affect the inequality structures of their local environment. Tilly's notion of "exterior" social categories being matched with "interior categories" (Tilly, 1999, pp. 74–84) that represent the hierarchy of organisational positions and legitimise exploitation refers to the new institutionalism thesis that organisations copy institutionalised values and norms from the social environment (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Thus, RIT on the one hand overcomes the methodological groupism of inequality research since the concept assumes "generic inequality-producing mechanisms associated with categorical distinctions" that produce a local variance of inequality forms (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 106), but on the other hand, we see two conceptional issues.

First, if organisations were constituted by interacting individuals or "real people" (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 70), we would also methodologically need to assume that individuals were "doing" inequality inside an organisation through exploitation and social closure. In contrast, an operational theory of organising suggests that organisations "work" because they do what they do independently from concrete individuals or concrete interactions. Organisations are more complex sense and decision-makers (Weick et al., 2005) than the image of an aggregate of interacting people suggests.

Second, RIT conceptualises social closure as the core element of the organisational "inequality regimes" (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 70) and assumes that organisations "position a categorical boundary," thus regulating unequal access to resources and power (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 136). According to RIT, organisational closing takes place as a "status distinction" (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 136) between pre-existing social groups in a "situation in which one group excludes, intentionally or not, another categorically distinct group from assessing some organisational resource" (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019, p. 135). Although this interpretation of Max Weber's closure theory is widely established, it reproduces a misconception probably caused by the English translation: Weber did not use the term "group"; instead, he argued that by closure a "part" of competitors would become excluded "from competition" (Emmerich, 2020). Thus, social closure is defined as a specific process that generates a "part" of individuals without access to competition (not to "resources").

Weber had a complex operation in mind that symbolically categorises and materially divides individuals through enabling access/no access to societal areas such as markets, administration, military, and education, etc. The social closure concept indeed leads to a "relational" theory of inequality since it describes a social differentiation in which one part of the people has the chance to succeed or fail in competition because another part has no chance to either succeed or fail. Paradoxically, the English translation adds a methodological "groupism" to social closure theory that obscures the "group-making" done by closing operations.

RIT apparently lacks an *operational* theory of organisation, that is, a theory of what constitutes organisations, what they are "doing" and how they gain internal and external order through what they are doing. Instead, Luhmann (1995a) conceptualises social systems as dynamic, operationally closed ("autopoietic") but

acausal operating communication systems. The system type "organisation" only consists of an operationally closed "stream" of decision-communication drawing a sense-based boundary between its inside and its outside, while membership closes an organisation against any social environment (Luhmann, 2018). Following constructivist and phenomenological organisation theory (Weick, 2001), the autopoietic organisation primarily works as an interpretation machine. Theorising organisations as operators for social inequality not only requires a notion of how organisations "do that." It also calls for an answer to the question of how organisations are linked with society, particularly with societal differentiation. Since "organisation" historically emerges as a modern societal system type, a functional analysis methodologically needs to reconstruct its "outdifferentiation" (Luhmann, 2018, p. 5) guided by the systematic question of what societal problem the observed solution (organisation) deals with. Since generating inequality is not the societal function resp. the basic "sense" of organising, we, therefore, need to focus on the question of what organising has to do with social differentiation. In clear contrast to former functionalist stratification theory (Davis & Moore, 1945), the production of inequalities works as a solution for organisations, but not for society. Thus, the reference problems that drive organisations and pushes their internal dynamics must be found somewhere else.

According to Luhmann, organisation-based inclusion/exclusion operations relate individuals and society by addressing persons as relevant or non-relevant for systems communication (Luhmann, 1995b). Therefore, inclusion/exclusion can be conceptualised as a "polycontextural" organisational closure mechanism generating and relating social differentiation and inequality (Emmerich, 2020). Counter-intuitively, inequalities emerge on the "inclusion side" of the closing operation: Since no individual is categorically excluded from the (labour) market, economic inequalities result from unequal market transactions and since no individual is categorically excluded from access to public schooling, educational inequalities result from grouping and unequal allocating of students inside the school system. While inequality results from "inclusion," "exclusion" produces categorical social differences: The category "man" excludes the category "woman," "white" excludes "black," "disabled" excludes "non-disabled" and so on. By categorising, organisations turn individuals into exclusive group members and decide whether the categorical groups each meet the communication requirements of the observing organisation. Luhmann's theory of inclusion/exclusion thus provides a complex analytical approach allowing, firstly, to generalise the logic of "ethnicization" based on "boundary-making" (Wimmer, 2013) or "group-making" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 13) as a form of social differentiation and, secondly, to systematically observe how social group-making is operationally related to the societal production of inequality.

4. The Observation Regime

Insofar as we accept the notion that organisations do the "group-making" through including/excluding closure, we should further ask how they know how to do so. We propose to use the notion of "regime" to theorise the organisational linking between classificatory observing and organisation based social differentiation concerning its structural effects. Recent regime concepts assume that political power and domination became a globalised and network-based form (Keohane & Nye, 1989). Traditional state-centred political theories fail in describing the complexity of actors, knowledge, and dynamics inside, outside and beyond the modern national welfare state. Therefore, regime theory uses insights of sociology of knowledge and constructivist/phenomenological sociology to make the socio-cognitive dimension of "regime" that guides actors observable. Regimes can be seen as complex, multi-level producers of societal reality generating societal phenomena such as migration (Horvath, 2014), inequality (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019), justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999), classification (Keller, 2008) or education (Amos & Radtke, 2007) through the establishment of categorical boundaries. However, dominated by action and actors' theories, the regime approach lacks a differentiation-theory capable of describing the endemic societal dynamics of societal order formation. Thus, mapping ideologies, interests and strategies of global networks and actors do not explain what actors are, what they do and how they—societally—emerge. From an operational systems theory point of view, we would suggest that "regimes" emerge as a societal form that requires the "outdifferentiation" of organisations. Without the societal capability of decision-making, no regime could generate any material social effect.

We propose to add the term *observation regime* to the existing list of regime types to highlight the socio-cognitive or sensemaking character of any regime working in any decision-making in any organisation. Observation acts "do things with categories" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 13) inside and outside the organisation. Following Luhmann (1995a), societal systems are constituted by the ability to *observe* their social environment based on internally produced distinctions indicating "world" as a reality for themselves. Systems theory conceptualises observation as a performative operation. Particularly organisations materialise what they observe: By making decisions, they turn fiction into function. Following Althusser's (1977) theory of ideology, school systems thus function as ideological state apparatus constituting an "image" of society for the society: Seen as ideology, "exterior" categories would apparently "represent the imaginary relation" (Althusser, 1977, p. 133, translation by the authors) between school and society inside and for the observing school system. According to Luhmann's observation theory, exterior group categories thus "imagine" society from inside the school organ-

isation as "exteriorised" interior categories. Referring to the Durkheimian and Foucauldian tradition, Douglas (1986) argues that institutions "work" as socio-cognitive operators implanting their classification systems within a society that becomes controllable this way. But only organisations can transform classification systems, as we pointed out, into *faits sociaux*; due to their ability to make decisions, organisations not only operate as societal "classificators" (Berger, 1988) but draw categorical boundaries between persons and produce social differentiation. Hence, observation regimes require organisations not only as "decision machines" but also (and foremost) as "observation machines." While Luhmann defines "distinction/indication" as the general *modus observandi* of societal systems, we would propose additionally to conceptualize "classification/ascription" as the specific modus in which organisational systems observe individuals (Emmerich & Hormel, 2013a, pp. 82–89). Organisations materialise an observation regime by producing, copying, and pasting classifications to "match" them with internal demands on the one hand, but the regimes provide distinctions that enable organisations to construct and solve problems by classifying and ascribing "legitim" categories to persons on the other hand. Regimes and organisations are reciprocal parasites.

Making selection decisions is not the function of classroom interaction; nevertheless, instruction produces the only "legitimisable" meritocratic decision premises. In contrast, images of students' socio-cultural characteristics present a social environment that does not legitimise pedagogical differentiation. Hence, as premises, exteriorised categories support allocation decisions, but they do not support any single students learning progress. However, matching legitimate interior with illegitimate "exterior" categories invisibilises the socially constructed decision premises regulating access to high-quality learning environments. Keeping refugee students away from academic school tracks would provoke political and moral critique, even within the organisationally tracked German school systems. However, keeping low-track students away from the academic track schools is part of the system's own foundational normativity and thus a legitimised cause for educational closure.

With explorative purpose, the following chapter will present empirical findings and data collected in several qualitative research studies that make an organisational closure mechanism as well as an observation regime visible.

5. Empirical Explorations: Bypass Schooling and Social Mapping

The school systems in German-speaking countries are well known for their differentiated tracking structure featuring an early and highly selective transition from elementary to lower secondary schools. Early tracking organisationally closes the access to high-quality learning opportunities due to different secondary school curricula. German, as well as Swiss schooling, typically leads to either vocational or academic training. Only the Gymnasium provides direct access to university while the lowest secondary tracks (*Hauptschule* in Germany) offer precarious transition to either vocational training or the labour market. The German, as well as the Swiss "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Tobin, 1994), is characterised by ability-grouping processes on the organisational level (the so-called "external differentiation") particularly forcing primary schools to differentiate students from the first class on to generate decision premises for the early transition process.

Framed by this "grammar," the findings and data presented in the following chapter stem from various comparative case studies conducted in Germany and Switzerland within the last two decades on different organisational levels (local school governance, single schools, and professional interaction) of the school systems. Although the single studies were based on different research questions, designs, and methodological strategies (documentary method, grounded theory methodology), they all were guided by a "functional analysis" (Nassehi & Saake, 2002) of observation operations and closure mechanisms inside the school organisation. Focussing on the desideratum we identified above, we selectively re-interpret the existing data with explorative purpose: The following functional analysis focuses on how schools construct and relate (loosely/tightly couple) problems and solutions in decision-making, and particularly, how schools design decision premises capable of enabling decision-making.

5.1. Bypass Schooling as an Educational Closure Mechanism

"Bypass schooling" (as we name it) is an organisational closing strategy we observed while reconstructing decision-making processes on the level of local school governance in Germany. The first project examines how newly immigrated students have been included and allocated within school structures of local school systems in two German states since 2014 (Emmerich et al., 2017; Emmerich et al., 2021). At the time the data collection started, the local school systems were set under decision-making pressure due to the fast-increasing number of students. Meanwhile, statistical evidence is given on the national level that the German school systematically "bypasses" refugee/newly migrated students to the low regular school tracks (Emmerich et al., 2020; Henschel et al., 2019). Reanalysing qualitative data from a mixed-methods study conducted in the Kanton of Zurich (Switzerland) 2014–2017 (Emmerich, 2016; Maag Merki et al., 2020), we find another version of bypass schooling performed inside schools. Focussing on learning support strategies of primary schools in socially disadvantaged inner-city quarters, the Swiss study analysed the relation between school-internal constructions of socio-spatial environments and differentiation practices.

How does bypass schooling work and what kind of problems does it solve?

5.1.1. How to Protect Academic School Tracks from Newly Immigrated Students

Bypass schooling even seems to be part of the German school governance history. The German school has always responded to new migrants and refugees with compensatory special education measures in the form of a (two-year) preparatory class designed to enable the transition to regular school classes through targeted language support. Neither within the era of the so-called "guest worker" migration based on a "rotation"-strategy in the late 1960s nor during the refugee migration caused by the Yugoslav wars in the mid-1990s, was the full and durable educational integration of these students the politically aim of German school authorities. Preparatory classes were exclusively located in the *Hauptschule* as the lowest track (Radtke, 1996), keeping the "dysfunctional" immigrant students away from higher tracks was the long-term closure effect—intended or not. Bypass schooling occurred, as local school systems used preparatory classes for permanent schooling parallel to the regular school system until the early 1980s (Gomolla & Radtke, 2002). From this time until now, newcomer students must be transferred from preparatory to regular classes after two years by school law. Furthermore, preparatory classes were never meant to provide an effective integration structure, even lacking a curriculum. Reactivated to deal with the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015–2016, the "preparatory system" (separated as well as integrated) apparently performs its legitimised and routinised closure mechanism while internally producing a group of students with "learning risks," who by definition, are not predestined to compete in academic tracks.

With this historical analysis in mind, our intermunicipal comparative study, conducted in North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg, was designed to shed light on the black box of the local "newcomer" allocation systems. To understand how this system works, we reconstructed the sensemaking and decision-making on the level of local school governance. The following explorative re-analyses are based on documents such as laws, decrees, procedural regulations and expert interviews with representatives of the municipal integration management involved in organising the allocation of refugee/immigrant students to secondary schools. Interviews were conducted in seven cities in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2015–2016 (N = 11) and eleven urban and rural districts in Baden-Württemberg in 2018–2019 (N = 21).

Two examples from North Rhine-Westphalia show different bypass schooling solutions, but both work on the same organisational problem: Since the *Hauptschule* appeared to be a dead-end track with a nation-wide reputation of a "residual school" or "immigrant school" hardly offering any successful educational pathways, many local school boards in Germany decided and still decide to abolish this school type—and so did these two. In 2015, only a few places in *Hauptschulen* were available for refugee allocation. City A, therefore, decided to establish a separate preparatory school ("integration centre") exclusively educating the "newcomer" for two years. This school was managed by the local Gymnasia and the official school statistics listed the "newcomers" as Gymnasium students—although the preparatory school only bypassed the newcomers for two years channelling them to low or SEN-school tracks. In 2020, this irregular "preparatory school" was officially transformed into a regular *Hauptschule*, which re-established this formerly abolished school type.

City B, in contrast, decided *not* to reactivate the *Hauptschule* due to political reasons, but installed a complex system of bypass schooling solutions instead: First, setting up new *Hauptschule*-tracks at the secondary modern school types (*Realschulen*) was a decision made to enable the local school system to bypass newcomers as *Hauptschüler* within and parallel the higher school tracks. Second, the local allocation system sends the newcomers to single comprehensive schools (providing a *Hauptschule* certificate) which have the reputation of "immigrant schools." Confirmed by the local school board's decision in 2018 that newly immigrated children should generally be allocated to comprehensive schools to "secure their school career," the local system was enabled to *de facto* treat newcomers as *Hauptschüler* although *de jure* this school type does not exist any longer. However, closing academic tracks against *Hauptschüler* is still a legitim differentiation practice while closing academic tracks against refugees *is not*.

Protecting secondary higher schools from immigrant newcomers in these local systems is done by constructing decoupled passageways beyond or even loosely coupled to the "grammar of schooling." Furthermore, the closing mechanism works due to interior categories such as "side-entrants," "school type changers" or simply *Hauptschüler* ascribed to the refugee or immigrant newcomers, each addressing an operational problem tightly coupled to these students. Bypass schooling epistemically makes sense because it is taken for granted that newcomers are natural *Hauptschüler.* This is what we can find in every local school system we observed.

5.1.2. How to Internally Gentrify Schools

Another version of bypass schooling can be observed within the context of the second project which investigated learning support strategies of segregated primary school in socially disadvantaged quarters in Zurich that were facing an on-going gentrification dynamic pushing mostly immigrant families out of the neighbourhood (for research design and results in detail see Maag Merki et al., 2020). Some of the primary schools had to react to the change in their social environment since the mismatch between the established support measures

that were addressing socially deprived migrant students and the demands and high educational aspirations of the "new" academic Swiss and German parents now inhabiting the school district. Traditionally, only very few of their students successfully realise transition to an academic school career, but gentrification brings middle-class parents to the quarter expecting the schools to serve for the future academic careers of their children.

Switzerland has a six-year primary school leading to either academic or vocational secondary tracks. Compared to the four-year primary school in the majority of German states, the responsibility for successfully preparing students for academic tracks appears to be more pronounced. To meet the needs of the new group of students, some schools redefine the former "supporting" classes, accessible only to the high-achieving immigrant students, as a measure to ensure the school success of social "newcomers" of Swiss or German origin. Apparently, a temporarily practised social decomposition of classes functions as a closure mechanism that "protects'' high-achieving Swiss and German students from the majority of socially disadvantaged migrant students.

While in the first case (Section 5.1.1) the minority immigrant "newcomers" has been bypassed to a scholastic dead end, in this case, the minority of socially privileged Swiss and German "newcomers" has been bypassed on a fast track to higher education. In both cases, bypass schooling not only protects one part of the students from competing with another part, it makes the two parts emerge as different social groups.

5.2. An Observation Regime at Work: Mapping and Matching

The following findings provide insight into what an observation regime consists of and how it works as part of organisational decision-making in schools. Its function is to gain legitimisable decision premises for an observing system by providing a range of group categories that can be ascribed to persons. We use data (interview sequences translated by the authors) from various research projects situated at different system levels (school administration, single schools, profession) to reconstruct an observation regime operating on and *across* different levels.

As already presented above, the constant classification of newly immigrated students as *Hauptschüler* epistemically legitimised bypass schooling at the level of school governance. As shown, the systems memory function still works even if there is no longer a *Hauptschule* available to allocate students. The political decision to abolish the *Hauptschule* in City 2 by example becomes a case of critical self-observation facing the "refugee crisis," as a municipal decision-maker finds:

> We have a problem here that we have no more *Hauptschulen*.

In line with this problematisation, a decision-maker from another city formulates:

> For example, we have the *Hauptschulen*, which are all full at the moment. And in the future, we might have to move away from allocating them directly to a particular type of school, right?

Apparently, the school system historically "learned" to match the exteriorised category "immigrant" student to the interior category *Hauptschüler*—and has not unlearned this ever since. The system even seems to turn the matching into a normative prescription which determines to observe immigrant students that way even if this leads to a decision-making struggle. The boundary the matching constitutes between newcomers and regular students evokes an epistemic plausibility unable to become falsified inside the school system. The notion that newcomers shall not be classified as "dysfunctional students" due to a lack of language skills has never emerged within the data. Instead, we assume that boundary-making is crucial for gaining observation opportunities inside the system since it epistemically legitimises the group-making, that is, the educational closure.

Professional organisations such as schools depend on members educated in classifying persons for the demands of the organisation. In school systems, the work of classifying is done by professionalised teachers observing the classroom interaction at the front line of the education system. Another view on the observation regime can be found in teachers imagining a social world outside, inhabited by students carrying their "socio-ecological origins" inside the classroom. A primary school teacher in Zurich said:

> So, and these children are in tension, right? And then the question is really… how much is it encroachment when you start to interfere with the parents, or…? Because they have their own style, their own—we talk about habitus in sociology—their own habitus. And then you say: This is wrong, and this is wrong. I mean, we don't say it like that; but still, they notice, of course, right?

Paradoxically, the translation of Bourdieu's theory of habitus into an educational social ontology provides an epistemically plausible decision premise—the sociocultural misfit of family and school, which explains why a future academic school career should not be "forced." Furthermore, matching sociological with pedagogical categories apparently makes cognitive differences become "observable," even if there has been no interaction with the concrete students. Asked about what "heterogeneity" primary teachers *expect* from new first-graders they do not know yet, a primary school teacher from Germany answers:

> Yes, well I don't want to talk about social classes now, but there are already [laughs]—I have to say it a bit more diplomatically [laughs]—parents who are maybe a bit simpler in their whole possibilities, in their way of thinking.

The confounding of presupposed socio-cultural competencies and "cognitive abilities" in this case reformulates the idea of a "primary effect" based on "social heritage." Intended or not, the reproduction of Boudon's version of the reproduction paradigm is remarkable. It is interesting to see that and how the two primary school teachers refer to a whole "theory of society" that brings the exterior sociological category "habitus" and "social classes" into the classroom. Making the theories of socio-cultural "misfit" and "primary effect" a pedagogical *faits social* provides "observable" predictors for further school success.

Another example from a *Hauptschule* in the South-West of Germany confirms the intuition that even scientific theories are part of the observation regime. According to a teacher from Germany:

> So, quite clearly: PISA brings to light what we feel every day. We have in the *Hauptschule* exactly the students… well, what PISA says, the underclass children slip through the grate. And these underclass children, we have them here.… But we have certainly 80% migrant children here who are not proficient in the German language....I do not see that we can achieve the goal of qualifying them to such an extent that they can take up these somewhat higher-qualified professions.

Comparable to the "habitus" example, the unconventional reinterpretation of the scientific-sounding PISA findings provides a plausible explanation for why the school is incapable of successfully working with students. In terms of the classificatory logic of observation regime, this example also shows an important aspect that is finally generalisable to every finding we present: By using sociological categories, the teachers create a causal image of the relation between school and society in which the school is *passive* whereas society is the *active* part in the game. Constantly streaming into the school system in the form of students, society disturbs the school's internal educational process. In this case, the slipped-through "dysfunctional" students paradoxically appear to disable high-quality classroom instruction and hinder the school in succeeding educationally.

Schools also develop socio-spatial classifications mapping their local social world, which is primarily guided by organisational variables such as school district boundaries or housing programs. Gentrification processes not only change these variables outside but also inside the classroom. Thus, the relevant social world "outside" needs to be re-mapped:

> I notice that in these six children that I now have from this settlement, so these are worlds. These are children who suddenly have a very good German, who simply—it's not about German now, but I somehow notice that this is a little bit of a higher class. (Primary School Teacher, Zurich)

> Regionally it is in fact, yes, from the catchment area there are a few groups of houses somehow there; one says yes there could be problems. (Primary School Teacher, Germany)

In the first map, language is relevant as a social stratification category, not as a communication category; the operational issues caused by lacking language skills are social issues caused by socio-economic background. As mentioned before, exterior categories represent the "imaginary relation" between the school system and society for the observing school. The six new children are "functional" due to their class membership. They better "fit" the demands of schooling because of their socio-cultural habitus; it is a Bourdieu-map. The second map is a causal map that provides a preventive socio-spatial observing that makes pedagogical problems not only expectable but likely. However, both maps emerge from inside the school system.

6. Unequal Inclusion: Why Is It So Hard to Change?

Our data shed light on a general operational mechanism of social differentiation as an effect of educational closure. The empirical findings made an operating school system visible, which by routine does what it is used to do. We reconstructed a usual and taken-for-granted logic of boundary- and group-making performed by sense- and decision-making processes on the organisational level of the school system. Inventing group categories and coupling them with organisational purposes thus appears to be part of an institutionalised closing routine varying on the different internal system levels as well as in the spatial dimension of school organisation.

Recent international research on tracking phenomena particularly focusses on comprehensive school systems of the Anglo-American type (e.g., Domina et al., 2019), generating informal "hidden" tracking structures. However, our findings can show as well an implicit "hidden'' tracking practice one would not expect to find within the "grammar" of a formalised explicit German (or Swiss) type tracking system. Although the complex organisational differentiation of the German and Swiss school systems appeared to provide an already visible and sufficient opportunity structure for streaming, tracking, and grouping, research on implicit tracking strategies apparently needs to be highlighted as a desideratum. Furthermore, the phenomenon of bypass schooling raises the question of whether discriminatory effects can be qualified as "unintended" and "indirect" (Gomolla & Radtke, 2002), for the local school systems we observed

flexibilise their formally constituted selection structure with a complex interplay between school governance, decision-making on the school level and classificatory observations on the classroom level to perpetuate their discriminatory capability. From an organisational perspective, research on education inequality mechanisms should consider school structures as a dependent variable that changes over time and space.

What we called the "observation regime" makes different classification systems compatible and provides orientation in decision-making due to constituting "cognitive" legitimacy: While the exterior observation-categories in use present a relation between school and society for the school system, these categories generate the image of a "passive" school that can only react on a dynamic and unpredictable society. By mapping and matching the socio-ontological "nature" of the students, the observation regime not only says that what is "real" outside is "real" inside. It causally explains and legitimises an internal closure mechanism that aims at preventing the school from getting operationally "dysfunctionalised" by the "dysfunctional" students streaming in from "outside." From the system's self-observation point of view, practising unequal inclusion appears to be a legitimate self-defence strategy. Furthermore, the observed matching of categories creating new boundaries and groups for the system cannot be explained as a reaction to socio-environmental dynamics such as a "refugee crisis" or increased gentrification processes. Social classifying is rather a general *modus observandi* enabling the school systems to design "social problems" in such a way that the system is capable of processing them on its operational level.

What we can also see from this level of abstraction is mainstream educational inequality research guided by the same observation regime. Boudon and Bourdieu conceptualise the school as a passive actor, be it an arena of cultural class war (Bourdieu) or an independent variable of school-choice opportunities (Boudon). It makes a difference whether the school is viewed as an institution systematically privileging the academic classes (Bourdieu) or as an opportunity structure that fosters socially selective rational educational choices (Boudon). However, in both cases, the theoretical bias toward explanatory factors external to the school obscures the active role school systems play in the societal production of education inequality. Based on the same group categories, the school system processes social differentiation through educational closure (bypass schooling) while the researcher following the reproduction-paradigm explains the production of educational inequality through social differences (self-selection from higher education). In both cases, the active/passive scheme provides explanation and legitimation.

Tyack and Tobin (1994) stated that the grammar of schooling seems so hard to change due to organisational features and professional routines that turned out to be useful for the operating school system. What we find in addition is a "hidden grammar" (bypass schooling) driven by an observation regime which de facto protects the "regular" grammar. Thus, what we can learn from the observed schools is how organisational resilience works in cases of social change. Furthermore, we also need to ask if the "grammar" of educational inequality research might be part of the problem. Maybe it is so hard to change due to the research routines and epistemic beliefs it protects. Therefore, we would suggest educational inequality research based on complex social differentiation theory capable of uncovering the generic mechanisms of a locally, regionally, nationally constituted educational inequality. This research program firstly requires an advanced theory of organised education to partially change the grammar of sociological observation of inequalities.

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Article

Education and "Categorical Inequalities'': Manifestation of Segregation in Six Country Contexts in Europe

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Abstract
This article deals with the educational arrangements and the multiple inequalities that they reproduce from a comparative perspective. Drawing on a qualitative study conducted in six countries (Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey, and the UK) as part of a multinational research project concerning justice in Europe, the article explores the mechanisms through which education sustains and reproduces "categorical inequalities." Although equal access to education is granted by constitutional laws as well as by incorporation of international treaties in the national legal frameworks, it is commonly the educational arrangements that identify the features of access to good quality education in a given context. Dealing with different country cases that have their path dependencies in the arrangements of education, the article provides insights on understanding how different features of segregation in education operate as *mechanisms of exclusion* for students from a disadvantaged background. Hence, the disadvantages manifest themselves concerning socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, and minority background. By focusing on the country-based debates around school segregation, which goes together with the segregated character of urban settings and school choice patterns, the article shows how the institutional context with or without residency-based registration rules and different types of schools with different resources perpetuate multiple inequalities. In a context where educational arrangements operate as a mechanism of sustaining categorical inequalities, identity-based differences, combined with economic disadvantages lead to a situation where students from vulnerable and minority groups face multiple forms of exclusion.

Keywords
educational arrangements; multiple inequalities; residential segregation; school choice; school segregation

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1. Introduction

This article deals with the institutional arrangements of education and the multiple inequalities that they reproduce from a comparative perspective. Drawing on six country cases including Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey, and the UK, the article explores the mechanisms through which education sustains and perpetuates the multiple inequalities. Although education is granted as a fundamental right by law in the countries under study, several mechanisms come into play and hinder equal access to quality education.

The institutional arrangements of education (referred to as *educational arrangements* in the article) often determine the majority and minority relations and draw the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in a given context. Inclusive education that has egalitarian aspirations could not be difference-blind in our pluralistic societies, yet the mechanism of accommodating *difference* in the education system could reinforce

further exclusion and inequality. Hence, inequalities do not just take the form of socio-economic differences, but other identity and gender-based differences could operate as "categorical inequalities" (Tilly, 1999). Feminist research also demonstrated that different social categories intersect and lead to complex forms of inequalities (Collins, 1998). In this respect, the "categorisation of differences" (Knijn & Akkan, 2020) and reproduction of "categorical inequalities" through educational arrangements (Domina et al., 2017) operate as mechanisms that sustain persistent inequalities in society. Respectively, education emerges as an "inequality-creating phenomenon" (Winker & Degele, 2011) and becomes the main determinant of capability deprivation of children from minority and vulnerable groups.

Exclusionary barriers to education have overlapping socioeconomic and spatial determinants. The literature draws attention to the persistent forms of segregation in education that are reinforced by the segregated nature of the underprivileged neighbourhoods with disadvantaged schools. The factors that generate such discrepancies in the quality of education also lead to inequalities in the representation of minority groups in matters of education. The kind of voice and impact that parents have to influence the access processes might vary in a way to reflect socio-economic divides and spatial segregation. Drawing on the literature that addresses the educational inequalities, several questions are raised in the article: How do the educational arrangements in different country contexts pave the way for the segregated schools? How does this operate for vulnerable groups? How is it intertwined with the segregated character of urban settings in different country cases? How does school choice define the exclusionary process?

Although the study does not empirically look into the capability deprivation of children as an outcome of the exclusionary processes, the capability approach of Amartya Sen provides a normative framework as the exclusionary process of education is a matter of deprivation for children with a disadvantaged background. Capability deprivation as a result of the exclusionary mechanisms of education reinforces the persistent inequalities transferred over generations. In this framework, first, the article provides a descriptive analysis of the various institutional frameworks of the educational arrangements in the countries under study; second, it presents how educational arrangements operate as different mechanisms of exclusion, yet yield similar results concerning the role of education in the maintenance of "categorical inequalities."

2. Theoretical Framework

There is consensus in the literature that inequalities in access to education are predominantly determined by poverty and the disadvantaged background of children (Keddie, 2012; Unterhalter, 2003). Education, with its egalitarian objectives, has a vital role in eradicating persistent inequalities in society, yet literature demonstrates that education arrangements fortify and reproduce the multiple inequalities of class, gender, race, and others (Domina et al., 2017; Power, 2012; Tikly & Barrett, 2011; Unterhalter, 2003). One framework suggested by Domina et al. (2017) that looks into the inequality-reproducing aspects of education by applying theories of categorical inequality provides significant insights to our analysis. The theory of categorical inequality suggests a framework for understanding how educational arrangements interact with broader social categories including gender, class, and race (Domina et al., 2017). In several circumstances, these broader categories intersect and lead to more complex inequalities as intersectionality literature also draws our attention (Collins, 1998; Unterhalter, 2003). The categorical inequality approach points to the organisational processes of education through which individuals are "sorted" (Domina et al., 2017, p. 2); in other terms, categorised according to their difference (Knijn & Akkan, 2020). The social categories establish the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and define the distribution of resources as the categorical inequality theory suggests (Tilly, 1999). Hence, the schools create these categories by sorting students through the interplay of different mechanisms (Domina et al., 2017). The minority and vulnerable groups' access to education is a manifestation of how the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn by such educational arrangements.

School segregation is a major factor in reproducing educational inequalities, which have been studied extensively, and its effects on most disadvantaged students have been empirically presented (Benito et al., 2014; Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Dupriez et al., 2008). School segregation perpetuates the stratification mechanism in society, which manifests not just the socio-economic differences, but also other vulnerabilities and minority positions in society. School segregation could further emerge as a form of racial discrimination like the segregation of Roma in the context of Central Europe (Arabadjieva, 2016). Several factors identify school segregation. These include language barriers of groups from minority and vulnerable backgrounds, residential segregation, parental choice (opting for high performing schools, choosing not to enrol their children in minority populated schools), and school separation for the sake of meeting the special needs of children (Council of Europe, 2017). There is strong evidence that the segregated nature of the school relates to students' disadvantaged backgrounds, which are also being reflected in PISA results (Alegre & Ferrer, 2010). OECD PISA survey results reveal how the disadvantaged position of the family overlaps with the disadvantaged position of the school. Forty eight percent of the disadvantaged students attend disadvantaged schools, as demonstrated by the PISA cycles since 2006 (OECD, 2018). The OECD (2018) points to the "double disadvantage" that the children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds experience, as they attend

the disadvantaged schools positioned in poor areas and neighbourhoods. Such interdependence defines educational performances. Students who come from more advantaged backgrounds, and whose classmates are also more advantaged, achieve better scores in the PISA assessment (OECD, 2018). For instance, the studies reveal that Roma-only schools provide less demanding and substandard education (Council of Europe, 2017). Strikingly, the countries with schools having high social and cultural heterogeneity in class (higher index of social inclusion) perform best in mathematics tests in PISA (OECD, 2013).

Residential segregation is an important aspect of school segregation which is always intertwined with other social categories like class, race, and ethnicity (Andersson et al., 2010; Arabadjieva, 2016; Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Cashman, 2017; Domina et al., 2017). The low quality of schools in the so-called "pockets of poverty" is a major concern for school achievement as it reproduces categorical inequalities that pertain not just to class but also race and ethnicity (Alexiadou, 2019; Cashman, 2017; Shores et al., 2020). Residential segregation intermingles with other factors like school choice, which creates "circuits of schooling" (Bonal & Bellei, 2018, p. 8; Butler & Hamnett, 2007). In the last decades, respect for freedom of school choice has become a central norm in all contexts (Council of Europe, 2017; OECD, 2018). Yet, school choice could have adverse effects on students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lynch & Baker, 2005, p. 136). Parental preferences are mostly associated with the socio-economic but also migration background of families, and in many contexts the practices of school choice emerge as a "white flag" for middle-class families (Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). In the United States, race has always been a significant factor concerning school choice (Levin, 1998). Schools, depending on their residency, are segregated by race as white families make use of "magnet school choice programs" (Saporito, 2003). The school differentiation systems also define the school choice of parents, which identifies the ethnic composition of the school (Denessen et al., 2005). School segregation is a complex phenomenon where several factors interplay. Consequently, education becomes a contested terrain with its mechanisms of categorisation and segregation for disadvantaged groups, like Roma, who no longer believe that education overcomes their marginalisation in society (Sime et al., 2018). The literature reveals that in the last decades, marketisation has also reinforced the inequalities in accessing quality education as the widening gap between schools with and without resources affects the inequalities in the education outcomes among students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2013, 2018; Power & Frandji, 2010).

In a larger framework, understanding mechanisms of education that sustain the persistent inequalities with their multiple and complex forms pertains to the normative ideal of education for a *just* society. Sen identifies education as "a relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well-being" (Sen, 1992, p. 44, as cited in Walker, 2006, p. 163). The normative ideal of education is a precondition to the development of capabilities. According to Sen, the concept of capability entails the substantive freedom to achieve actual *functionings* (Sen, 1999, p. 75). While education is an "unqualified good for human development freedom" (Walker, 2006, p. 168), educational arrangements also reproduce inequalities and become an arena of "unfreedom" and capability deprivation (Tikly & Barrett, 2011; Unterhalter, 2003; Walker, 2006). According to Sen, capability deprivation has a relational aspect and, in this respect, the social exclusion paradigm makes a useful contribution (Sen, 2000). There are diverse ways that social exclusion could cause deprivation. Hence, Sen (2000) points to the fact that social exclusion concerning the education arrangements pertains to a particular experience of poverty and deprivation for children with a disadvantaged background. Introducing here the relational understanding of justice and conception of capability help one to understand that access to good quality education that defines the persistent inequalities is a result of exclusionary processes that the education system creates. Despite its importance as a capability-building entity, education in our era as an inequality-creating institution defines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in every society.

Furthermore, education policies tackling inequalities prioritise the financial allocation of resources, government spending on education and access to free compulsory education for all (Power, 2012). As the country cases in our study also demonstrate, access to free compulsory education has become a priority in all contexts in tackling socio-economic inequalities. Yet, the disadvantaged background of a child does not just drive from the socio-economic status, as the literature demonstrates (Domina et al., 2017; Unterhalter, 2012). An inclusive education policy aims at redistributive politics without losing sight of the categorisation of differences as boundaries of exclusion and inclusion in a given context. The low socio-economic class of minority groups, immigration, racial segregation, language, and distribution of resources across the schools should be considered for the egalitarian objectives of education institutions (Allen & Reich, 2013; Steiner-Khamsi, 2003). It is in this framework that we address education as a matter of justice and inequality with a particular focus on educational arrangements as mechanisms of inequality in six country contexts.

3. Methodology

The article is based on a qualitative study with elements of discourse analysis. Although the methodological framework is not full-fledged discourse analysis per se, the qualitative study is concerned with reflecting the contextualised debates around the mechanisms that

impede equality in education. Hence, this research recognises that the institutional processes are entrenched in a discursive frame that manifests the perceptions of educational arrangements (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). In this respect, the research has had two phases: The first phase was the collection of various types of data on the educational arrangements in different country contexts, which provided a comparative illustration of institutional framework; the second stage was the document analysis and the qualitative interviews with the relevant parties in the area of education, which provided a comparative analysis of the debates around the educational arrangements that operated as mechanisms of inequalities.

The research that is carried out as part of a larger research project on justice in Europe looked into the minorities and vulnerable groups' access to education in six countries: Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey, and the UK. Respectively, the country case selection is bound with the research partners' country of residence. The comparative value of the research pertains to its demonstration of the consequences of divergent and common educational arrangements in the reinforcement of persistent inequalities rather than systematic comparisons of minority positions. Depending on the country contexts, different minorities and vulnerable groups' disadvantaged position in the education system (Muslim minority in the UK, ethnic minority in Austria and Netherlands, Roma in Hungary, Portugal, and Turkey, Afro-descendants in Portugal, Alevi in Turkey) are determined. It should be noted that the definition of minority and minority statutes vary across countries.

The qualitative analysis of the debates around the exclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups in different settings of education analytically dealt with mechanisms with common or different features in each setting. The research strikingly demonstrates that such diverse mechanisms yield similar consequences of educational inequalities that affect the most vulnerable. Also, the selection of a variety of minorities in countries provided the researchers to understand how the categorisation of differences that is historically constructed in different country contexts operates as a mechanism towards the reproduction of categorical inequalities through the education systems.

In each country context, firstly a descriptive analysis was applied looking into commonalities and differences in legal frameworks of education rights, the compulsory school years, the school differentiation systems, the administration of education and the residency-based registration. Based on this comparative outlook of the institutional framework in the studied countries, the research explored the debates around exclusionary mechanisms of the education processes through the qualitative analysis of relevant documents and qualitative interviews with the significant social actors in the area of education. The documents that were analysed vary across the countries, yet they included policy documents, strategy papers by the Ministries, NGO reports, other governmental reports, recommendation papers, and other relevant documents are analysed. Although the document selection varied and depended on the researcher, the documents were selected according to the guidelines of the research that prioritised the minorities' access to education; therefore, themes of exclusion emerged from the fieldwork rather than a dictated framework with established indicators that partner researchers work with. In representing the debates critically, 4–6 in-depth interviews were conducted in each country context, which includes representatives of NGOs (minorities, vulnerable groups, rights and anti-racism), government officials, civil servants, teachers unions, rights protection lawyers, education researchers, and parent associations.

This article draws on the secondary analysis of each country case analysis with a particular focus on the different and common features of the inequality-reproducing mechanisms of the education arrangements in six country contexts with different histories of institutional framework and majority-minority relations.

4. Institutional Characteristics of the Education Arrangements

The six countries under study represent diverse institutional frameworks of education including length of compulsory education, legal framework, registration (residence-based) systems, different actors in the education and school differentiation systems. The years of compulsory education range from 9 to 13 years in the countries studied (see Table 1).

The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) concedes education as a fundamental right. Article 13(1) of the ICESCR emphasises the role of education in the development of human personality, a sense of dignity and effective participation in a free society (ICESCR, 1999). More importantly, ICESCR grants education as an "empowerment right," where "education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalised adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities" (ICESCR, 1999). Such a framework addresses the role of education in the capability-building of disadvantaged groups. According to the ICESCR, the states are compelled to provide free education (compulsory) to all children, unhindered by their family background (Salat, 2019).

The international human rights instruments, along with the EU equality law, have a significant influence on national constitutional contexts (Salat, 2019). Equal access to education is protected by national laws and, in many countries, it is granted as a constitutional right. In Austria, the objectives of the education system are laid by the Federal Constitutional Law and School Organization Act (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). The Fundamental Law of Hungary (Article 11) secures equal access to education and holds the state

Table 1. Years of compulsory education.

Country	Years	Ages
Austria	9	6–15
Hungary	13	3–16
Netherlands	13	5–18
Portugal	12	6–18
Turkey	12	6–18
UK	11	5–16

responsible for public education. The right not to be discriminated against in the Fundamental Law also concerns education (Kende, 2018). In the Netherlands, education freedom has a central place in the national law as it is granted as a fundamental right whereas access to education as a right to education is framed by international law. Freedom to education refers to parental choice in selecting the education institution according to their cultural beliefs and values (Hiah, 2018). In Portugal, access to education is arranged by a series of independent articles in the Constitution. Articles 43 and 74 refer to the "freedom to learn and to teach" and "right to education" respectively (Roldao et al., 2018). Free and non-discriminatory education is a constitutional right in Turkey. Article 42 of the Constitution guarantees the right "not to be deprived of education" and free compulsory education for all citizens (Akkan & Ruben, 2018). The state is held responsible for supporting access to education for individuals who are economically deprived (Akkan & Ruben, 2018). The UK regulates education by laws enacted by the Parliament Education Acts of 1996 and 2002 and the School Standards Act (1998, as cited in Dupont, 2018). Without an explicit constitutional guarantee, the European Convention of Human Rights' right to education is incorporated into domestic law (Dupont, 2018).

Although the international and national legal frameworks grant education as a fundamental right and urge the states to take necessary measures to secure equal access to education, the diverse education arrangements in different country contexts define the terms of access to education. Such arrangements include centralised and decentralised systems, public and private ownership, school differentiation systems and residency-based registration mechanisms. Hence, all arrangements operate in a rather complex education system that diverges in each context. They are also prone to change depending on the changing political contexts of the countries. Therefore, the complex organisational outlook of education is important to explore as it paves the way for multiple exclusionary mechanisms.

The increasing private ownership of schools emerges as a mechanism that seems to define the boundaries of access to quality education, yet, in many contexts, the presence of private schools is not dominant. In the Netherlands, private schools are not numerous and do not have a high standing (Hiah, 2018). In Austria, the majority of the students are also enrolled in federal state-run public schools (90%). Private schools, which constitute 8% of the schools, are mostly denominational (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). The public and private separation in schooling is a complex one as in many countries the private schools are funded by the state. In Portugal, although the majority of the schools are publicly run, the private and independent schools have a place in the system. There are also schools run under the public-private partnership model, in which the state makes payments to the private schools. In this model, these schools, although private, cannot request tuition fees from the students (Roldao et al., 2018). In Austria, the majority of private schools are also funded by the state, yet they charge tuition fees (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). In Hungary, private schools also receive public funds and they charge fees like in Austria (Kende, 2018).

The separation of public and private schools in a complex set of organisational relations could also operate to the extent that the education system is centralised or decentralised. The UK is a strong example of a highly decentralised school system. The state-funded and all-through schools which are community and foundation schools are run by a local authority, under the shared governance of local authorities and other parties which are mostly religious organisations (Dupont, 2018). There are also "academies" and "free schools" governed by private foundations (under a funding agreement with the state) and "independent schools" that rely on tuitions without receiving any state funds (Dupont, 2018). In Hungary, there is a trend towards centralisation under the current government, which is a drastic shift from the decentralised education system of the 90s. This has manifested itself in the transformation of the schools run under the Municipalities, which are now being governed by the central state, unless the Municipality area has a population above 3000 (Kende, 2018). Turkey is a salient case of a highly centralised education system. The public schools operate under the Ministry of Education. There are also private schools run under the mandate of the Ministry, however, these schools charge high tuition fees (Akkan & Ruben, 2018).

The school systems also vary concerning the centrality or diversity of curriculum followed at schools. In the UK, the schools governed by local authorities follow the national curriculum whereas academies, free schools

and independent schools are not required to follow the national curriculum. The only requirement for them is to include linguistic, mathematics, physical, and aesthetic skill development in their curriculum (Dupont, 2018). In the Netherlands, all schools follow the national curriculum, yet the denominational schools have the freedom to provide religious education and they are also autonomous in their procedures of teacher recruitment and student admission. Whereas public schools that have a secular and "neutral" character, they do not have the liberty to provide a particular religious education or to select teachers regarding their belief system, and they are open to all students regardless of their beliefs (Hiah, 2018).

In both the centralised and decentralised education systems, the arrangements are towards maintaining equal access and accommodating diversity. In the Netherlands, the "institutionalised" dual school system constitutes "neutral" public schools and denominational schools (Hiah, 2018). "Neutral" education rests on the principle of religious diversity, equality, and non-discrimination. The denominational schools are commonly Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish schools but recently Muslim and Hindustani schools have also been incorporated (Hiah, 2018). They are all funded by the State. The denominational schools (Roman-Catholic, Protestant Christian) identified as high-quality education institutions are also favoured by parents that belong to other belief systems or are secular. In Hungary, under an agreement with the state, schools can be opened by churches and religious denominations. The church schools that are taking over the secular schools are a recent phenomenon (Kende, 2018).

In certain countries, residency-based registration defines the access process. In Austria, registration in public schools is residency-based according to a system of administrative districts, although this has been made flexible. In Hungary, public school registration is also residency-based, yet families are free to choose a school outside of their district. In Turkey, registration to public primary schools has been done by a computerised system that places the students in schools nearest to their residence addresses.

As it is maintained, in all countries under study, although equal access to education is granted by the national laws under the international human rights framework, it is often the arrangements around the diverse school types that identify the terms of access to education in each context. In the following section, we explore how educational arrangements operate as mechanisms that hinder the role of education as an equality-creating entity.

5. A Comparative Perspective on the Perceived Mechanisms that Impede Access to Education

School segregation is one of the mechanisms that operate as a source of injustice and inequality for students with minority backgrounds. In all countries under study, school segregation is deliberated as a mechanism that generates exclusionary practices in education. Yet, the features of school segregation may change depending on the education system, including differentiation of schools as well as residency requirements for enrolment. However, as the study focuses on mechanisms around minorities' access to education, the different minority positions in different contexts also define the features of these mechanisms. In certain contexts, like Hungary, the debate is around the drastically segregated character of the system which has paved the way to a duality between schools, referred to as "homogeneity within the schools and heterogeneity between schools," which is associated both with the socio-economic background of parents as well as residential segregation, which is mostly a Roma condition (Kende, 2018, p. 20). The differences in quality of schools that overlap with the socio-economic status of the families act as a stratification mechanism that particularly affects minorities' exclusionary position in the education system.

Hence, the economic and cultural aspects of the exclusionary dynamics do not manifest themselves in the same way for all minority groups. The country cases in our study strongly demonstrate the persistently disadvantaged position of Roma children in education. Particularly in Hungary, Turkey, and Portugal, the discourses on Roma's access to education illustrate how segregation operates as a mechanism of not just exclusion but how it reproduces persistent inequalities within the education system by creating disadvantaged schools for already disadvantaged groups. In Hungary, the debates illustrate that Roma have access to *disadvantaged* primary schools without resources; the education itself is a stratifying mechanism as it does not provide the necessary skills for Roma. Low-quality vocational schools are what are available for Roma, where the drop-out rates are also high (Kende, 2018). In Turkey, the inability of the school system to provide Roma with the inclusionary space to develop capabilities that influence their life chances has been a major debate as school withdrawal is high among the Roma students who start working to contribute to family income (Akkan & Ruben, 2018). In many contexts, school segregation intertwines with track systems and operates as a mechanism of reproducing categorical inequalities as the debates in Portugal also reveal that Roma, as well as Afro-descendants, are pushed into vocational schools that do not provide a path towards higher education (Roldao et al., 2018). In a parallel vein, in the Netherlands, it has also been exposed that socio-economic status, tangled with minority and migration background, has a high correlation with the quality of the school that is being accessed (Hiah, 2018).

These cases demonstrate that school segregation is a strongly entrenched mechanism that reproduces multiple inequalities of socio-economic status and minority background when the school quality is associated with the categorically disadvantaged position of the

enrolled students. The debates in the Netherlands also reveal another story; that there are high achieving schools with low socio-economic and minority background students (Hiah, 2018). Such a contrasting story draws attention to the role of education policies for more egalitarian education arrangements. The inclusionary space that the school creates for the capability development is associated with the inclusionary education arrangements including the allocation of resources. In the Austrian case, discourses contemplate the scarcity of resources in providing inclusionary school arrangements with high-quality teaching to meet the needs and enhance the capability of students with different backgrounds (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). Marketisation trends also exacerbate this situation. In the UK, as it has been revealed, the transfer of school governance from local authorities to private foundations that was initiated by the Labour party and bolted by the Coalition government in 2010 was a significant move towards marketisation (Dupont, 2018).

School segregation mostly coincides with spatial, namely residential segregation. In Austria, the discourses reveal salient school segregation associated with the quality of the school. The schools referred to as "left-over schools" (*Restschulen*) or "hot spot schools" (*Brennpunktschulen*) reflect the spatial character of school segregation as the socio-economic development of the neighbourhood where the school is situated determines the main difference between the "hot spots" and "left-overs" (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). The neighbourhoods with residents from minority background with low socio-economic status host the public and vocational schools, stigmatised as the "left-over schools" (*Restschulen*), where children with a disadvantaged background go (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). Such segregation is being reinforced by a residency-based registration scheme in Austria where the quality of the school, the disadvantaged position of the individuals and spatial underdevelopment come together and create the phenomenon of "left-over schools." The debates in Austria also draw attention to the aspect of language proficiency: The migration background of the students emerge as a major disadvantage in the school system, as the left-over schools, mostly attended by students with a minority background, are marked by problems of low proficiency of German language (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). The debates reveal that a large number of children who do not speak German as a first language often pose large challenges and contribute to schools' attributed status as *Restschulen*, particularly in Vienna (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018). As the case of Austria strongly demonstrates, segregation in education is always in tandem with the categorical inequalities concerning ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background, as well as "cultural" and language differences. The differences in the minority position in different contexts demonstrate that the persistent inequalities that the minorities experience reveal the highly segregated environment that is being reflected in contextualised debates in different country settings.

Although school choice is not a matter of discrimination in itself, it might also become a determinant of school segregation with implications for exclusionary processes concerning the economic or cultural background of children. The schools' differentiation systems influence this process. Among the countries studied, the denominational schools in the Netherlands and the church schools in Hungary, which have the public support of middle-class families, are being debated within the framework of school choice and segregation. These schools with high-quality education influence the process of segregation through mechanisms like school choice. The debates reveal that the school choice of middle-class families in Hungary reinforces the relationship between the quality of the school and the socio-economic background of students. As the debates lay bare, this situation particularly pertains to the propensity of non-Roma families to choose schools which Roma students do not attend (Kende, 2018). The phenomenon of the "white flag" is salient in the debates on school choice in Hungary, which is a strong determinant of school segregation as the literature also points out. The debates in Hungary also manifest how categorical inequalities are being internalised by vulnerable groups. The school choice of Roma in Hungary supports the homogenisation within the school and the disadvantaged schools based in Roma neighbourhoods are preferred by Roma parents as in mixed schools the discrimination is more salient. Besides, the high expectation of high-quality schools is creating new forms of vulnerabilities for Roma parents (Kende, 2018). In a larger normative framework, although the parents have the freedom to choose the school, the process operates as a form of capability deprivation (unfreedom) for children with disadvantaged backgrounds, which reinforces the persistent inequalities.

The residency-based measures operate as mechanisms to provide equal access to education. Yet, they are perceived as a major constraint for school choice. The residency-based measures are hard to enforce on middle-class families than on the more disadvantaged groups, like Roma. In Portugal, residency-based registration is defended to deter ethnic and racial segregation. Yet, middle-class families find ways to attain school choice by forging their address or sending their children to private schools, which again provides a sort of homogeneity concerning ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Roldao et al., 2018). Also, the claims of middle-class families for quality education reproduce the "white flag" phenomenon in the educational context, like in Portugal. From a different perspective, in Turkey, residency-based registration operates as a mechanism that restrains the freedom of school choice of the parents to choose schools which they find to be of good quality and which provide an education that is in conformity with their values (Akkan & Ruben, 2018). The phenomenon of

"religionalisation'' with the expansion of Imam Hatip schools (religion-based schools) manifests new spatial inequalities in the education system. The vast opening of Imam Hatip schools and the conversion of secular schools to Imam Hatip schools threaten the freedom of school choice. While the discourses of the state in advocating for the Imam Hatip schools are an expansion of freedom of choice for the religious majority, this leads to injustices among groups like Alevi, but also the secular middle-class who do not favour religious schools for their children. The enforcement of religious schools through the residency-based system pushes the families to move out of the neighbourhoods or send their children to private schools (Akkan & Ruben, 2018).

The debates in Austria also reveal that since flexibility was brought to residency-based registration in 2017, the educated parents with high socio-economic status have been able to have access to good quality schools outside of their neighbourhood zones. Such an informed choice that goes beyond the spatial boundaries is a class matter (Tiefenbacher & Vivona, 2018).

Freedom of education is a prevalent discourse in the context of the Netherlands that is being manifested in the school differentiation system. In such a system, the school choices of the "white" middle class that holds the majority operate as a mechanism of exclusion. In the Netherlands, where ethnicity and race are determinants of socioeconomic status, the debates draw attention to ethnicity-based school segregation and uneven ethnic distribution of pupils across schools between the white majority and the ethnic minority (Hiah, 2018). The denominational schools can deny students who do not comply with the community value that they represent, even though is not being operationalised in practice. Yet, the overrepresentation of minority groups in public schools reveals veiled segregation in place (Hiah, 2018). Revealed by the debates, the emphasis is on socioeconomic disadvantage rather than ethnicity, which implies the veiled influence of freedom of education and its institutionalisation of segregation in the school differentiation system that pertains to the stratification in the majority-minority relations and persistent inequalities among the ethnic minorities. The language of freedom around family values is also salient in Hungary. After 2010, to target Roma students, a series of exemptions were introduced by the Conservative-Christian government which supports the "religious and philosophical freedom" and the "right of recognised nationalities to operate their schools" (Kende, 2018, p. 30). Hence, the exemptions support a segregated education system that perpetuates the categorisation of differences and persistent inequalities in the context of Hungary.

The freedom of school choice, when accompanied by the cultural preferences and claims for community values, becomes a more complex mechanism of segregation that is being debated heavily in all contexts. The freedom of choice is being contemplated concerning the role of education in building the social cohesion of society, which is very much reflected in the context of the UK. The proliferation of faith-based schools is being discussed concerning the "balkanisation" of society, where cultural segregation emerges as a school choice among different ethnic and religious communities (Dupont, 2018). The freedom to choose the school that reflects the values of the parents could operate as a mechanism of cultural and ethnic segregation that sets the boundaries of majority and minority relations. Hence, in the UK, debates reveal a tension between making school culture responsive to family aspirations, which calls for the maximisation of parental choice and decentralised governance, and the prevention of disparities in knowledge acquisition, which calls for greater state oversight (Dupont, 2018). The discourses on the tensions that might appear between freedom of choice and the objectives of education defined in terms of equal access and social cohesion differ in their framing.

The debates on the different features of freedom for school choice and their reflection in school segregation manifest how mechanisms of educational arrangements aiming at parental freedom in decision-making could reinforce and reproduce categorical inequalities. The debates across different countries expose the tension between the freedom of education that benefits middle-class families as a "white flag" phenomenon and efforts in maintaining equal access to education. The debates also manifest how the value-driven choices and claims for education make the politics of equality in education an even more complex issue.

6. Conclusion

In our pluralistic societies, education is a contested area where the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn through different mechanisms. The debates in the country cases examined in the article vividly illustrate how the mechanisms of school segregation intertwined with spatial segregation, residency-based registration, school differentiation and school choice could reproduce "categorical inequalities" in a given context. As it is being deliberated, educational arrangements through different mechanisms categorise differences not just in accordance with the socio-economic status of the family but with more salient categories like ethnicity, race, and religion. In this respect, the role of education as a capability-building institution, particularly for children from minorities and vulnerable groups, becomes more contested. Although there is a consensus that education is a fundamental right that is being secured by constitutional laws as well as by the incorporation of international law in the domestic legal system, the country cases demonstrate diverse educational arrangements which identify the unequal terms of access to quality education in each context.

Dealing with different contexts that have their path dependencies in the arrangements of education and the historical construction of minorities provides significant

insights in understanding how different features of segregation in education operate as mechanisms of inequality for the disadvantaged students concerning their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and minority background. The spatial dimension of school segregation is evident in all cases, which is also intertwined with the ethnicity and socioeconomic status in different country contexts, as the case of Roma constitutes a particularly salient example. Residency-based registration rules can be strict or lenient, but it is mostly the middle-class parents, with the necessary economic and cultural resources and capital, who try and can find ways of putting their children in good schools, as is observed in many country cases. This defines a pattern where the "white flight" of the advantaged and the lack of resources (economic and cultural), as well as the "adaptive expectations," of the disadvantaged lead to the emergence of low-quality schools with their segregated nature. Political attempts to emphasise the good performance of the education system rather than address the exclusionary dynamics fostered by school segregation contribute to the persistent inequalities concerning the arrangements of education. This is also reinforced by the prevailing market-oriented trends which have not been the main focus of this article, yet hold importance for debates concerning equality.

Unless the "categorical inequalities" entrenched in the majority-minority relations in diverse contexts are not adequately addressed by the politics of education, they will continue to define the boundaries of educational arrangements in the capability development of children with disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet, it remains difficult to reach a conclusion concerning how equal access can be improved by policy intervention, especially since the categorical inequalities, in their spatial dimension, continue to be important regardless of the rules that regulate the registration and school admissions in different country contexts. Education reforms for a more inclusive education system could be welcomed by most associations who represent minorities and vulnerable groups as well as parents in all country contexts. However, the reform process would only be successful to the extent that it adequately addresses the controversies around the type of education that could positively respond to diverse claims of education and develop the capabilities of children unconstrained of their advantaged or disadvantaged background.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Cultural Education: Panacea or Amplifier of Existing Inequalities in Political Engagement?

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Abstract
Cultural education has recently been particularly emphasized as key for the promotion of equal opportunities, social cohesion and political engagement. While the relationship between political engagement and formal education has been extensively discussed, little research has been conducted on non-formal types of education, such as non-formal cultural education (NCE) in particular. However, the share of NCE programmes is becoming increasingly important as more and more formal institutions are reducing their cultural education programmes. This article examines, firstly, whether NCE actually promotes political engagement and, secondly, who effectively participates in NCE programmes. Using data from the eighth wave (2016–2017) of the German National Educational Panel Study, we implement a mediation analysis within ordered logistic regression models to disentangle the mechanisms at play. Our results indicate that NCE exerts a small but significant effect on political engagement directly and indirectly via political discussions and political interest. However, participation in NCE is strongly influenced by social strata. The advantages of NCE are therefore not evenly distributed across the German population.

Keywords
cultural education; equal opportunities; mediation analysis; political engagement

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1. Introduction

Political discontent (Holtmann et al., 2019), extremism, radicalisation tendencies (Holtmann, 2020), and social polarisation (Brähler et al., 2016; Müller, 2019; Rehberg, 2006) shape public debates in many European countries and demand innovative strategies that sustainably promote social cohesion and democratic structures. Access to and participation in educational programmes have been an integral part of discussions on political engagement for several years. Cultural and arts education in particular (hereafter referred to as cultural education) has received a lot of attention recently and has often been proclaimed as a panacea for some of these profound social challenges (Jessop, 2017). Besides knowledge of the arts themselves, cultural education aims to promote the maturity of children, young people and adults, critical thinking on social processes (Dumitru, 2019; Lampert, 2006), personality development and to provide spaces to challenge social traditions and values (Fietz, 2009). Cultural education might therefore offer the possibility of equipping individuals of all ages with many of the necessary skills to shape society and sustainably participate in democratic processes. Most of

these findings come from studies on formal cultural education provision within school curricula (Dumitru, 2019). In recent years, however, a decline of arts subjects in the German school curriculum can be observed. Although non-formal programmes previously provided a substantial part of the cultural education structure, the proportion of non-formal programmes has been significantly increased to compensate for the decline in formal programmes in Germany (Bock-Famulla et al., 2015; Liebau, 2018; Rat für Kulturelle Bildung e.V., 2015). Contrary to participation in formal education, participation in non-formal education is not regulated by law and therefore subject to amplified mechanisms of selection. Whether and in which programmes people participate is not simply a question of individual interests. Not only are personal interests equally determined by social structure, they are also complemented by other important factors of participation, such as the economic and time resources of families. Since participation in non-formal education programmes is dependent on several structural prerequisites and an increasing share of cultural education programmes is taking place in non-formal settings, the question arises, especially against the background of participation in democratic processes, to what extent and in which ways patterns of participation in non-formal cultural education (NCE) are influenced by social strata. If there are distinct mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that favour or disadvantage certain people, not everyone benefits equally from the opportunities that NCE programmes offer. Therefore, we first aim to examine the extent to which NCE influences political engagement. Afterwards, we investigate patterns of participation in NCE by individuals' socioeconomic and regional backgrounds (Blossfeld & Shavit, 2015; Bourdieu, 1984). This approach has the advantage of producing a robust, comparable and tangible result and thus providing empirical support for important discussions on the issue. Research on cultural education is both very broad and very traditional in its perspectives. A study that takes this into account and combines the different aspects is thus an important addition to the field.

2. Conceptual Framework: Cultural Education and Political Engagement

Cultural education has become increasingly politicised in both scientific and political discussions. Many practitioners, politicians and scientists have highlighted the distinctive effects cultural education seems to have on social participation and cohesion as well as on important soft skills (Fietz, 2009; Lampert, 2006). Based on past research, there is a relative consensus in academia that education as a whole has a positive impact on political engagement (Desjardins & Schuller, 2006). More than other disciplines in the education sector, cultural education can provide a unique space to make different social and political models conceivable and to test them without consequences. Art and culture often make it possible to change one's perspective on certain circumstances or to take on and try out new roles (Bockhorst, 2008; Fuchs, 2008). A theoretical point of departure for these considerations is provided by Theodor Adorno with his understanding of culture and teaching. Adorno is known as one of the most relevant representatives of the Frankfurt School and as a harsh critic of modernity. An important interpretation of his work in the context of cultural education was published in 2017 by Sharon Jessop. According to Jessop, Adorno understood culture as a questioning of the status quo and "resist[ing] heteronomous ways of thinking" (Jessop, 2017, p. 420). He would describe the plurality of cultures" as a site where resistance and critical thinking can happen in "a context of rich experience of incorrigible plurality" (Jessop, 2017, p. 420). The "plurality of cultures" can be understood not only as a plurality of cultures amongst the participants but a plurality of perspectives through engagement with cultural objects and activities. To him, "having culture" would be indicated by "demonstrat[ing] an interest in making connections and comparisons, in questioning what happens to be the case, and being personally entangled in the immanent criticality of the situation" (Jessop, 2017, p. 418). Criticism and culture would therefore be, ideally, inseparably united and education should always lean towards self-reflection. Jessop concludes that following Adorno, mass cultural education would be "the most powerful institutional tool in shaping and changing how people think and behave" (Jessop, 2017, p. 417). However, Adorno did not precisely specify how these skills could be taught or learned.

Moreover, according to Adorno, pure, critical culture has to be "disinterested" and therefore autonomous of the market. A disillusioning result of Adorno's is that only intellectual, privately wealthy people can create critical, autonomous culture, as they are the ones truly disconnected from the market (Gartman, 2012, pp. 48–49). Another important scholar in the field, Pierre Bourdieu, challenged this assumption in his later years and formulated another prerequisite for the production of critical, autonomous culture: diversity (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 157). Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argued in his work on social class, capital and taste that participation in cultural activities is essentially determined by social class. According to him, members of higher social classes are more likely to consume highbrow cultural programmes, while members of lower classes are more likely to engage in popular cultural activities. At the same time, social class enables different perspectives on the benefits of certain activities and promotes or hinders participation in these activities to a greater or lesser extent (Boudon, 1974; Bourdieu, 1981, 2000). Although Bourdieu did not rank highbrow culture and popular culture at this point, he moved towards Adorno's position on critical, autonomous culture in his later years, declaring that disinterested, autonomous culture is a "universal possibility" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 135). Though autonomy of art is now a common feature of both theories, Bourdieu

criticized the exclusivity of pure cultural production to intellectuals by claiming that only members of lower social classes, due to the sensitivity provided by their habitus, can address the economic foundation of their works (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 157; Gartman, 2012, p. 70). To achieve a more diverse production of critical culture, according to Bourdieu, more state funding is needed, since otherwise only a very exclusive group of people would have access to autonomous art (Bourdieu & Haacke, 1995).

In this article, we do not aim to discuss both theories in detail. Rather, we use both theories to compensate for the shortcomings of either (Gartman, 2012, p. 66). In the past, empirical research on cultural education has mostly relied solely on ideas from Bourdieu. We would like to show that such research, referring to Bourdieu alone, remains entrenched in the cultural dichotomy of highbrow and lowbrow activities and reproduces previously known patterns. The combination of Adorno's and Bourdieu's arguments that we propose in this article not only offers opportunities for diversification to research on arts education but also allows for the adoption of different, complementary perspectives and thereby the openness to discovering new, previously undiscovered aspects of cultural education.

2.1. Central Concepts and (Policy) Background

In the German formal education system, schooling is compulsory from 9 to 13 years. After ninth grade, children and young people have the opportunity to complete various types of education. The school system in Germany is organized on a federal level, i.e., different rules exist depending on the federal state and municipality, and in some cases the structures vary between the individual schools or school types. The school systems of the individual federal states differ greatly, but each follows a form of segregation. In general, students attend primary school together for the first four to six years and then transfer to a secondary school. The choice of secondary school is—with a few exceptions—made based on school performance in primary school. Depending on the federal state and the type of school, children have the option of earning the Abitur (A-Level or high school diploma in upper secondary education) after 12 or 13 years and thus the university entrance qualification. Not every secondary school (e.g., lower and intermediate secondary schools) in every state offers the option of earning an A-Level degree at the end of high school (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). Whether or not pupils continue their education in tertiary institutions is therefore highly dependent on their secondary schooling, as only individuals from upper secondary education receive a general university entrance qualification (see, e.g., von Below et al., 2013). However, an increasing number of vocational training programmes favour or even require pupils with degrees from upper secondary institutions as especially popular programmes have larger pools of applicants to choose from. Overall, the school-leaving qualification in Germany is of great importance for the further education of individuals and attractive occupational pathways (von Below et al., 2013).

Cultural education itself can be part of the formal education system by discussing literature in German classes or attending music classes. In voluntary study groups, many schools offer courses outside of compulsory classes to provide additional educational opportunities for their pupils, such as drama or chess clubs. In addition to these classes and clubs within formal settings, there are also many non-formal programmes of cultural education outside of formal educational institutions, such as music schools, education centres, cultural associations or choirs. However, the concept "cultural education" is not uniformly defined in Germany (Kolleck & Büdel, 2020). To avoid falling back into the dichotomy of high- and lowbrow types of NCE, we utilise a very broad definition of cultural education including socio-cultural as well as artistic-aesthetic aspects of non-formal education. In this sense, cultural education encompasses any learning of, with or through artistic and cultural objects or activities (Kolleck & Büdel, 2020). According to the open definition chosen in this study, NCE would be defined as all educational activities that do not lead to a formal educational qualification but are institutionalised, such as theatre or carnival clubs or extracurricular cultural education such as music or pottery classes. Activities that are carried out alone or with friends outside of institutionalised associations, such as private band activities, reading or other interpersonal but informal knowledge exchange are not included in this article. Depending on the type of cultural education programme attended, different stimuli could affect the individual. Cultural education supports the development of an individual's personality by recognising and developing their strengths and interests. In addition, individuals can learn to work together, be responsible and exert influence. It is also not uncommon, especially in cultural education, to change perspectives, for example when dealing with texts of any kind or testing out new ideas in the context of singing, reading, making music, carnival clubs, playing theatre or crafting. In addition, there is the possibility of practising new forms of cultural expression in the digital as well as the analogue world, thereby experiencing and tolerating diversity. At least in theory, cultural education thus provides several impulses that can promote critical and creative engagement with social challenges (Bockhorst, 2008; Fuchs, 2008).

In this context and following Adorno and Ashton (2007), we use a broad definition of "political engagement." We assume that political engagement takes place as soon as a critical examination of a certain topic has been realised since a thought of resistance has already emerged (Adorno & Ashton, 2007). More specifically, we understand all activities as political engagement that deal critically with current social phenomena or conflicts

and would theoretically be willing to represent this critical attitude to the public. The definition of political engagement pursued in this article thus differs from other concepts concerning the assumption that activities of political engagement have to demonstrate a (direct) influence on politics (van Deth, 2015).

2.2. Current Research and Hypotheses

Mass education seems to be an ideal prerequisite to promote critical thinking. Formal school settings, however, rarely allow for intensive and open discussions among students. In addition, most school curricula and syllabi provide relatively little time for cultural education (Blossfeld et al., 2015; Maaz et al., 2010). Additionally, formal education is per definition instrumental as it is targeted at achieving formal degrees of education. In contrast, research suggests that interactive learning methods such as peer discussions are key to fostering critical thinking and civic skills (Guiller et al., 2008; Oros, 2007; Szabo & Schwartz, 2011). Especially in heterogeneous groups, listening and responding to different and sometimes contradictory arguments offers opportunities to promote democratic soft skills (Oros, 2007, p. 309). Non-formal education does not aim at commonly accepted educational certificates. Hence, non-formal voluntary settings could provide an environment in which the "plurality of cultures" can be discussed extensively and outside of rational considerations. Against this background, we develop our first hypotheses:

> H1a: If individuals participate in NCE, they are more likely to be involved in political discussions.

> H1b: If individuals participate in NCE, they are more likely to be politically interested.

Though many researchers investigated participatory patterns in cultural activities, most research was done on formal cultural education or visits to cultural institutions such as museums or cinemas. A popular context for NCE, however, is association membership. Numerous studies have shown that active participation in voluntary organisations is strongly associated with a functioning democracy. Scholars as early as de Tocqueville (1969) found the relationship between voluntary associations and democratic behaviour evident and provided the basis for a fundamental branch of democracy research (Almond & Verba, 2015; Verba et al., 1995). Voluntary associations in general, but also in the context of cultural education, often provide mechanisms of socialisation, as they introduce individuals implicitly and explicitly to political issues (van Deth, 2000). Depending on the association, participants learn civic and organisational skills to varying degrees (Baggetta, 2009), as well as how to work in heterogeneous groups and networks (Putnam, 2001). Through these relatively low-threshold associations, the individual may become attentive to larger social and political issues (Quintelier, 2013) and develop or consolidate their democratic values (Hooghe, 2003). These experiences could then in turn be translated into active action, as one's creative possibilities and democratic responsibilities are strengthened. Thus, we pose our second hypothesis:

> H2: If individuals participate in NCE, they are more likely to potentially take part in political protest.

However, participation in such organisations is biased and not just subject to the individual's motivation to take part, but also to their opportunities. Critics argue that underlying resources and personality traits such as economic resources, social skills or proactive behaviour, stimulate individuals differently regarding civic and political activities and promote mechanisms of self-selection (Grotlüschen, 2016; Hooghe, 2003; van der Meer & van Ingen, 2009). Furthermore, resources—or a lack thereof—can prevent individuals from participating when they cannot meet the minimum financial and time requirements or may not even know about cultural education programmes. Especially in the context of cultural education, participation can be expensive, as musical instruments and artistic paraphernalia may need to be financed, or group excursions and membership fees may be charged. Furthermore, if young people are not able to reach the venue on their own, they have to rely on public transportation or adults to organise the transfer. Here, families with monetary or time constraints are yet again at a disadvantage. But it is particularly the motivation to participate in cultural education that is significantly affected by social strata. The most prominent studies regarding cultural participation come from the field of lifestyle research, which usually draws on the aforementioned Bourdieusian approach that people with higher social status on average are more likely to participate in cultural and arts activities. Though we do not solely look at the traditional high vs. lowbrow divide, our definition of NCE includes variables of both categories. Research shows that variables such as gender (Bennett et al., 2013; Christin, 2012; Coulangeon, 2013), education (Frey & Meier, 2003), income (Davies, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Katz-Gerro, 2011) and employment (Katz-Gerro, 2002) are very closely linked to cultural participation. Overall, there is a broad consensus in the research literature about the direction of the influence of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics on the decision to visit highbrow cultural institutions in particular, as well as on the frequency of these visits (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016). People in a higher social position are thus more likely to participate in highbrow culture and these lifestyles are again passed on within families to the next generations through socialisation and education (Blossfeld & Shavit, 2015; Ecarius et al., 2009). Men, people with higher education, more income and more prestigious occupations are therefore more likely to participate in highbrow cultural activities. Following

the expectation that more resourceful individuals are more likely to participate in non-formal education in general and against an understanding of NCE which includes traditional high-cultural aspects, the third hypothesis is derived:

> H3: Individuals with parents with higher social status are more likely to participate in NCE than individuals with parents with lower social status.

We expect that NCE programmes are subject to mechanisms of self-selection as well as mechanisms of socialisation. Certain variables promote participation in NCE programmes, while simultaneously the programmes themselves encourage discussions and critical thinking. Active membership in voluntary associations has often been associated with political engagement, as it provides human and social capital and also promotes soft skills (Bekkers, 2005) and the development of democratic values (Bekkers, 2005; Hooghe, 2003). NCE could build on these benefits and, in addition, promote awareness of plurality and critical reflection through its own mechanisms.

3. Data and Operationalisation

We use data from the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) to test our hypotheses (Blossfeld et al., 2011). The NEPS is carried out by the Leibniz-Institute for Educational Trajectories at the University of Bamberg. The panel study covers data on educational processes and developments, such as educational decisions, returns to education, different contexts of education and specific competencies. The NEPS monitors six cohorts from birth to old age. Since 2010, nine waves have been collected within this framework. As not all necessary variables are included in all waves, we have decided to conduct cross-sectional analyses using the eighth wave (2016–2017) of the third cohort of the NEPS. Target persons were all children at regular or special-needs secondary schools in eleventh grade as well as individuals that left school after grades 9 and 10 (NEPS, 2020; Skopek et al., 2012).

The indicator for participation in NCE is constructed using information on cultural club attendance and extracurricular courses. For the former, we included data on club attendance, such as theatre group, youth orchestra, club cultivating local history, folklore club, etc.; responses were (1) *yes* or (0) *no*. For extracurricular courses we used information on course attendance outside school in this or the previous school year (excluding sports): If so, what exactly did they do (classes in music schools, classes at *Volkshochschule*, classes at youth art school); responses were (1) *yes* or (0) *no*. Additionally, participants were able to fill in open answers on what specific classes they attended and if they attended any other courses in the past year. All of the open answers are categorized as cultural or non-cultural courses using a pre-designed scheme based on our definition of cultural education. We include all courses in the arts and culture such as pottery classes, piano lessons and synthesizer or woodcraft tutorials without a direct association with economic performance (e.g., German language classes). Individuals who participated in any cultural clubs or courses are coded 1, if they did not, they are coded 0.

We further propose to operationalise Adorno's understanding of resistance in terms of protest participation. Therefore, political engagement is measured using potential participation in authorised political demonstrations, as it captures the willingness to "resist" and advocate a certain issue. Contrary to actual protest participation, however, it is not subject to as many external factors such as time, place, individual circumstances and issues (Jenkins et al., 2008, p. 13). The participants were asked whether they could imagine themselves participating (again) in an authorized demonstration on a four-point scale ([1] *no, in no way*, [2] *rather not*, [3] *rather yes*, [4] *yes, in any case*). We also include two potential mediators of political engagement in the analysis, namely political interest (question: How interested are you in politics? Reponses ranged from [1] *not at all interested* to [4] *very interested*) and political discussions (question: When you meet with friends, how often do you discuss political issues? Reponses ranged from [1] *never* to [5] *very often*).

The models are fitted based on identified confounding variables. Therefore, variables are added to the model when previous research and literature indicate that both dependent and independent variables are affected. Based on previous studies, we include gender ([0] *male*, [1] *female*), household size, highest school-leaving qualification or current type of school ([0] *other*, [1] *lower secondary*, [2] *intermediate secondary*, and [3] *upper secondary education*) and immigration status ([0] *no/other*, [1] *first or second-generation*) into our analyses. As there is no reliable data on income available, we also add the Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations (CASMIN; for more information see Zielonka & Pelz, 2015) of parents to our analyses representative for socioeconomic status. We additionally include a variable indicating the type of residential area and approximate density of cultural programmes with (0) *centre* and (1) *periphery*. The final sample contains 2255 observations. Exclusion from the final sample is mostly due to missing information on the parents' highest CASMIN-Status, as interviews with parents were not always feasible during data collection.

4. Analysis

Our analysis is divided into two parts. First, we apply a mediation analysis (Urban & Mayerl, 2007) based on a successive ordered logistic regression analysis. To identify mediators, we conduct bivariate regression analyses to test the relationships between the independent variable and the mediators, the mediators and the

dependent variable, as well as between the independent variable and the dependent variable. If the coefficients show significant results that display the expected direction of the effect, the variables are included in the analysis as potential mediators. We then run successive ordered logistic regression models to investigate changes in the effect of cultural education on potential protest participation depending on the mediators. If there is a mediating effect, we expect the coefficient of the independent variable to decrease or disappear (H1a, H1b, H2). In a second step, and based on the same sample, we investigate patterns of participation in NCE. Therefore, we run a simple logistic regression model on NCE including important socioeconomic covariates. In doing so, we can roughly outline who participates in non-formal education programmes and who rather does not (H3).

4.1. Mediation Analysis

The bivariate regression analyses (Table 1) show the expected associations between mediators (M), independent variables (I) and dependent variables (D). If individuals participate in cultural education, they are more likely to show higher degrees of political engagement in terms of potential protest participation, political interest and political discussions with friends. Individuals who are more interested in politics and discuss politics more often are on average more likely to potentially participate in political protest. Therefore, we expect to find mediating mechanisms in the data.

In the case of the ordered logistic regression analyses, the data must meet the proportional odds assumption. Using a Brant-Test ($Chi^2 = 31.97$; $p = 0.194$), we confirm that all variables meet the assumption. We estimate three separate successive simple ordered logistic regression models, a bivariate model (OM1), a model including all covariates (OM2) and a model including all covariates as well as the two mediating variables (OM3). Table 2 shows the results of these analyses.

Even though the independent variable shows a strong and significant effect across all models, the coefficient is reduced once the covariates are added and once again when the mediating variables are introduced to the model. The final model (OM3) demonstrates that individuals who participated in NCE are on average 1.2 times more likely to show higher values in potential political protest (ceteris paribus). Furthermore, holding all other variables constant, females and individuals with parents in higher CASMIN categories are on average more likely to report higher values in potential protest participation. Notably, one's educational attainment or current school type shows no consistent and significant influence on potential protest participation. The reason could be that parental education and participation in NCE programmes cancel out the effect of individual education. The moderators, however, exert the strongest effect on potential protest participation. Very politically interested individuals are almost eight times more likely to report higher values in potential protest participation than individuals with no interest at all. Though this result is expectable, we also see that there is a strong increase in effect size between even the lower categories of political interest. Hardly interested individuals are still twice as likely to show higher values on the dependent variable than individuals without any interest. Similarly, the more often individuals have discussions about politics, the more likely they are to show higher values in potential political protest (ceteris paribus).

Figure 1 illustrates the results of OM3. The predicted probabilities on the Y-axis range from 0 to 1 and refer to individuals who have not attended NCE programmes (*no*) on the left and to those who have participated in these programmes (*yes*) on the right. The dashed or solid lines represent one of the four categories of the dependent variable as noted in the legend below the graph. Individuals are less likely to indicate that they would not (0.15) or rather not participate (0.38) in authorized demonstrations if they participated in any type of cultural education than their peers (0.18 or 0.40). On the other hand, the figure also shows a slight increase in predicted probabilities of protest participation amongst the (rather) approving population if they participated in cultural education (0.27 vs. 0.29). Overall, the predicted probability of (rather) not participating in political protest is lower for individuals that participated in cultural education, while the probability of (rather) participating in political protest is higher.

4.2. Logistic Regression Analysis

Based on the same sample, the logistic regression analysis (Table 3) shows that, in line with current research on the topic, socioeconomic factors such as the parent's highest CASMIN status and the individual's type

Table 1. Bivariate correlations between the dependent variable, independent variable and mediators.

	Dependent Variables		
	Potential Protest Part. (D)	Pol. Interest (M)	Pol. Discussions (M)
NCE (I)	+***(1)	+***(1)	+***(2)
Political Interest (M)	+***(1)	.	.
Political Discussions (M)	+***(1)	.	.

Notes: (1) Ordered logistic regression, (2) linear regression; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Ordered logistic regressions on potential protest participation.

	OM1	OM1 (OR)	OM2	OM2 (OR)	OM3	OM3 (OR)
NCE (ref. No)	0.440*** (0.087)	1.553***	0.281** (0.091)	1.324**	0.188* (0.093)	1.206*
Female (ref. Male)			0.229** (0.078)	1.257**	0.481*** (0.081)	1.618***
Secondary Education (ref. Upper)						
Other			0.459** (0.164)	1.582**	0.544** (0.167)	1.723**
Lower Secondary			−0.362 (0.199)	0.696	0.073 (0.202)	1.076
Intermediate Secondary			−0.181 (0.093)	0.835	0.032 (0.095)	1.033
CASMIN			0.130*** (0.022)	1.139***	0.107*** (0.023)	1.113***
Imm. Status (ref. No)			0.101 (0.146)	1.106	0.093 (0.149)	1.098
Household Size			−0.026 (0.027)	0.975	0.004 (0.028)	1.004
Periphery (ref. Centre)			−0.203* (0.0897)	0.816*	−0.149 (0.0912)	0.861
Political Discussions					0.441*** (0.0526)	1.555***
Political Interest (ref. Not at All)						
Hardly					0.665*** (0.169)	1.945***
Fairly					1.223*** (0.180)	3.397***
Very Interested					2.035*** (0.210)	7.654***
/						
cut1	−1.476*** (0.0594)	0.229***	−0.933*** (0.200)	0.393***	1.232*** (0.274)	3.428***
cut2	0.381*** (0.0488)	1.463***	0.981*** (0.200)	2.668***	3.352*** (0.283)	28.550***
cut3	1.791*** (0.0636)	5.997***	2.429*** (0.205)	11.340***	4.975*** (0.291)	144.700***
Observations	2255	2255	2255	2255	2255	2255
Pseudo R^2	0.004	0.004	0.02	0.02	0.081	0.081

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

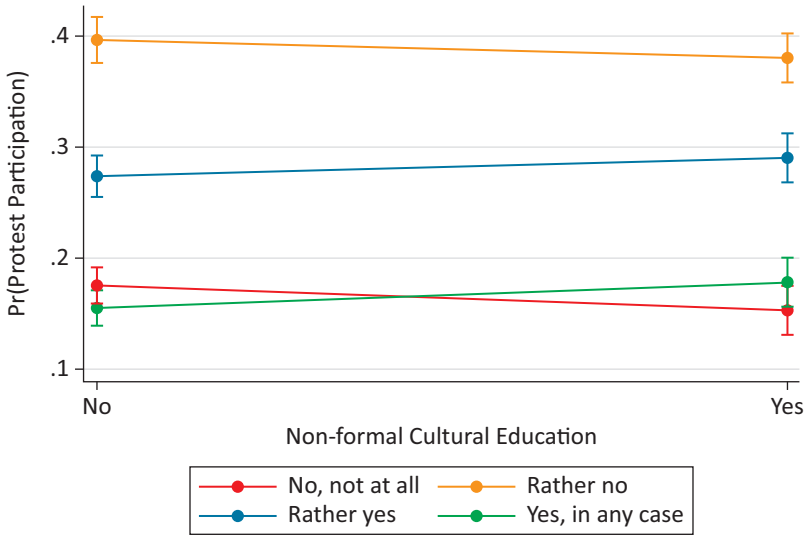

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities (predictive margins with 95% CIs) for potential protest participation by NCE.

Table 3. Logistic regressions on NCE.

	LM1	LM1 (OR)	LM2	LM2 (OR)
Secondary Education (ref. Upper)				
Other	−0.483* (0.212)	0.617*	−0.468* (0.215)	0.626*
Lower	−1.552*** (0.379)	0.212***	−1.539*** (0.383)	0.215***
Intermediate	−0.971*** (0.126)	0.379***	−0.971*** (0.129)	0.379***
CASMIN	0.138*** (0.0282)	1.148***	0.144*** (0.0293)	1.155***
Female (ref. Male)			0.612*** (0.101)	1.843***
Immigration Status (ref. No)			−0.127 (0.195)	0.881
Household Size			0.131*** (0.0346)	1.140***
Periphery (ref. Centre)			0.199 (0.116)	1.221
Constant	−1.489*** (0.189)	0.226***	−2.507*** (0.268)	0.082***
Observations	2255		2255	
Pseudo R^2	0.06		0.08	

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

of education are very important when looking at NCE participation. The individual's educational background alone accounts for approximately 6% of the unexplained variance in the dependent variable. In model 2, individuals in upper secondary education are on average (1/exp(−0.971) = 2.64) almost three times more likely to participate in NCE than individuals in intermediate secondary education and almost five (1/exp(−1.552) = 4.72) times more likely than individuals from lower secondary education ceteris paribus. Interestingly, immigration status and centrality of the area of residence do not significantly affect participation in NCE programmes. Contrary

to similar studies, an increasing household size does not prohibit extracurricular participation but fosters it.

Figure 2 illustrates the increasing predicted probabilities of participating in NCE by parental CASMIN status and individual education based on LM2 while holding all other variables at their means. Overall, individuals across all types of schools are more likely to participate in NCE when their parents' CASMIN status increases. Not only are individuals with higher education more likely to participate in NCE when their parents' CASMIN status increases, but they also show higher intercepts.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we aimed to take a closer look at the politicised topic of the acclaimed effects of cultural education and to draw conclusions about measurable consequences. The study focused on the political-emancipatory outcomes of NCE. In a two-part analysis, we first examined the indirect and direct effects of NCE on potential protest participation. Second, we investigated the extent to which participation in NCE programmes is limited by an individual's socioeconomic and regional background. This study drew on the theoretical aspects of two of the most prominent theorists on the function of culture and arts in society: Theodor Adorno and Pierre Bourdieu. Even if our data cannot exactly reflect both theories, this work makes a fruitful first attempt to empirically combine theoretical facets of both approaches. While previous studies in the fields of education and culture have often relied on concepts of one of the two theorists, we show that a combination might avoid the dichotomisation of highbrow and lowbrow activities and promote the discovery of previously unknown patterns of participation. In this way, our article also contributes to the diversification of theory-based empirical research in the field of cultural education.

Based on NEPS data, we conducted a mediation analysis using successive ordered logistic regression models. Our results indicated that both political discussions (H1a) and political interest (H1b) mediate the effect of participation in NCE on potential protest participation, while not accounting for the total effect of NCE participation on the dependent variable (H2). Our logistic regression analyses further suggested that individuals with parents with higher social status are more likely to participate in NCE than individuals with lower social status (H3). The results of the analyses of NCE were consistent with results from previous research on participation in cultural activities (Notten et al., 2015). Individuals in upper secondary education and/or with parents in higher CASMIN categories were significantly more likely to participate in NCE than individuals in lower secondary education and/or with parents in lower CASMIN categories. While all individuals were more likely to participate, when their parents are in higher CASMIN categories, upper secondary individuals profit most from their parents' status. Though we included only a few variables, they explained NCE participation to a relatively large degree. Overall, the estimations supported all of our hypotheses. These findings tie in very well with our theoretical considerations, but also underline the challenges of cultural education programmes and their impact. We see that access to culture is not yet sufficiently developed and that the diversity Bourdieu later emphasised is not yet fully achieved. However, we also recognize that sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors do not solely determine access and participation. Many other variables also influence participation. Presumably, promoting access and participation opportunities and diversifying participants in arts education is only realistic if lower-threshold programmes are created (Bourdieu & Haacke, 1995). Participation in cultural education programmes is linked to knowledge or awareness of programmes by the (potential) participants as participation only takes place when people

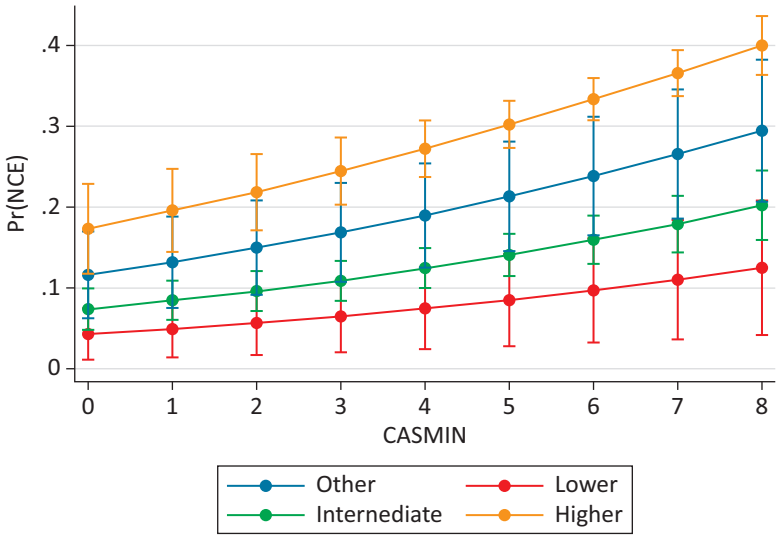

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of participation in NCE with 95% CIs by secondary education and CASMIN.

are willing to participate. Following Bourdieu's considerations, it can also be assumed that political participation (e.g., in the sense of demonstrations or potential participation in demonstrations) is subject to discriminatory mechanisms (Bourdieu, 1981, 2000; Harrits, 2011). Every barrier to participation, therefore, acts in addition to and concerning all other barriers and does not stand alone.

The findings presented in this article offer new, empirical insights into the often-proclaimed association between cultural education and political engagement. The analyses illustrated that NCE adds a small but significant factor to potential protest participation. This difference in NCE participation may just determine whether individuals participate in demonstrations. Our study also shows that participation in NCE exerts a direct effect on potential protest participation that is not accounted for by the variables in the model. Unfortunately, due to patchy and relatively superficial data in the area of cultural education, we can only speculate about the nature of the direct effect. One plausible possibility would be that the effect can be explained by unidentified or unmeasured mediating variables, such as personality traits or soft skills. Concepts such as critical thinking competencies or self-efficacy were not available in the data and therefore not included in the models. Similarly, we have no information on the specific content or didactic of the NCE programme. We therefore cannot specify how the content was presented in the NCE programmes. Programmes in *Volkshochschulen* (education centres) in particular are often delivered in relatively closed formats and therefore do not necessarily offer space for open discussions or alternative methods of learning. Nonetheless, non-formal education offers the advantages for cultural education that it is mostly free of performance pressure, largely non-instrumental and does not have to follow the strict structure and rhythm of most formal educational programmes.

The aim of the present study was not to explain (potential) protest participation (Skoric et al., 2016; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018) nor participation in cultural education (Notten et al., 2015) in total, as both concepts have been thoroughly investigated before. We did, instead, empirically demonstrate the links between both concepts. To identify causal relations between cultural education and political engagement, longitudinal data would be needed. Further research should therefore develop appropriate and comprehensive models to better understand the association between cultural education and political engagement. For this purpose, data that contain all the necessary information must be compiled, collected and prepared. At the same time, it is important to look at cultural education in an interdisciplinary and multidimensional way to be able to precisely understand the mechanisms. However, more data are needed to conduct such differentiated studies that take into account the different mechanisms.

Is cultural education a panacea for social cohesion and democratic structures? Our analysis shows that NCE at least contributes to fostering democratic behaviour and skills. At the same time, participation in non-formal education is highly selective and along social strata, not all people show the same likelihood to participate. Even though participation in NCE promotes certain aspects of democratic thinking, not all individuals have access to these programmes. NCE programmes therefore primarily reach and empower people who are already on average better situated and educated. Even if our analyses show no direct effects or inconclusive results on the effects of formal education on potential protest participation, formal education still exerts a significant effect on participation in NCE, which in return then affects political interest, political discussions and protest participation. In conclusion, NCE provides important tools to support democratic structures and addresses many of the current social problems. Participation in NCE, however, is highly selective. If these inequalities cannot be eliminated or addressed, then the benefits of NCE cannot be distributed equally across society and inequalities might be amplified.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Mission Accomplished? Critique, Justification, and Efforts to Diversify Gifted Education

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Abstract
Research on gifted education demonstrates how these programs contribute globally to the reproduction of social inequalities. Despite these findings, gifted education has been remarkably successful in the 21st century. However, the need to equate the inclusion of women, first-generation students, and students with a migration background in gifted education has simultaneously intensified. Both developments are embedded in profound transformations of the education system globally, especially in the social diversification of student populations and the concurrent demand for excellence in academic research. The German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung) is the largest gifted education program in Germany and one of the oldest worldwide. In recent years, the Studienstiftung has tried to diversify their students. Based on a discourse analysis, which uses the concepts of justification, critique, and regimes of justification, I examine official documents of the Studienstiftung between 1925 and 2018. In doing so, I show that the spirit of the Studienstiftung and their handling of social statistics raise doubts concerning the successful diversification of their students—as the Studienstiftung has claimed. Finally, I discuss several measures that might be useful to support social diversification in gifted education in the future.

Keywords
diversification in higher education; exclusion; gifted education; German Academic Scholarship Foundation; social inequalities; sociology of justification

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1. Introduction

Since their establishment in Europe and the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, gifted education programs have been remarkably successful over time. However, the ensuing expansion of gifted education has been consistently criticised by social scientists, who have demonstrated that gifted education is often linked to the reproduction of social inequalities, especially regarding class, race, and gender (see Böker & Horvath, 2018; Margolin, 1994; Staiger, 2004). In this article, I present a case study on the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung), which was founded in 1925, liquidated by the Nazis in 1934, and re-established in 1948 in the Federal Republic of Germany (see Kunze, 2001). The Studienstiftung is one of the oldest gifted education programs worldwide and by far the largest in Germany's higher education system.

The recent history of the Studienstiftung is characterised by a massive expansion (2005–2009), followed by harsh public criticism of its exclusion of first-generation students (FGS) and students of low social status, and intensive efforts to justify its selection procedure since 2009. The year 2009 can be considered a major turning point in the history of the Studienstiftung, where a general shift from excellence to diversity is observable (Böker, 2021). In general, the Studienstiftung had to react to the critique that it supported a "self-reproduction of

the German *Bildungsbürgertum* [educated elite]" and that their selection interviews "do not focus on specialised knowledge, but on knowledge about art and literature" (Kerbusk, 2009). Due to these critiques, the Studienstiftung introduced different measures like a new selection procedure, cooperation with organisations that focus on social equity, an additional recommendation of FGS by school principals, the sensibilisation of the selection committee to the issue of social inequality, school visits by Studienstiftung scholars to inform students about the opportunity to apply for a scholarship, and two social surveys. After the Studienstiftung published a social survey in 2016, it concluded that their selection procedure was fair and did not discriminate against students from lower social classes and FGS.

In this article, I shed light on the interplay of critique, justification, and organisational change concerning the plea for social diversity in higher education. I will show in depth how the Studienstiftung reacts to critique and how it adopts their selection and support procedures. I am interested in how these critiques and justifications are structured and how they have developed over time. I use a genealogical approach to relate recent efforts to include FGS in the history of the Studienstiftung since 1925. Two aspects challenge the recent conclusion that the Studienstiftung does not discriminate students from lower social class and FGS. First, the specific culture of Studienstiftung, which is rooted in their foundation in 1925 and tends to culturally exclude students from lower social class and FGS. Second, the strategies to construct and interpret social statistics, which originated in the 1970s, tend to make social inequalities in gifted education invisible and make it difficult to problematise and tackle them.

In the next section of this article, I discuss several studies that aim to describe why and how gifted education fails to support the social diversification of gifted students. Then, after a brief overview of the theoretical and methodological foundation of this research, I present two findings regarding the spirit of the Studienstiftung and its handling of social statistics, which deepen our understanding of the interplay of critique, justification, and organisational change. Finally, I discuss measures that could support the diversification of gifted students.

2. Why and How Gifted Education Fails to Diversify Its Student Population

The most common approach to describing the mechanisms that prevent diversification in gifted education can be found in the work of Bourdieu. He believes that the disproportional participation of working-class students in gifted education programs can be explained by the transmission of cultural capital within the family, the self-exclusion of potential candidates and the specific culture of gifted education programs (see Bourdieu, 2001). Above all, Bourdieu points out that these mechanisms are generally obscured by references to natural differences in the amount of giftedness. This ideology, which he calls the ideology of giftedness, is shared not only by the oppressed but also by the dominators (see Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 252–253). After studying almost one hundred years of justification of gifted education by the Studienstiftung, I can state that a reference to natural differences in the amount of giftedness, to explain unequal opportunities for participation, is seldom used in the official representation. Subsequently, when such a strategy is used, it is criticised in the mass media discourse (see Böker, 2021). This does not mean, however, that the ideology of giftedness does not exist; rather, it shows that the official representation of gifted education is organised differently.

Since the 1990s, social scientists have been intensively studying the social construction of giftedness and the interdependence of gifted education programs with the (re-)production of social inequalities. Following Bourdieu, Margolin (1994) describes how the writings of gifted education scholars at the beginning of the 20th century are linked to a specific culture. He shows that the understanding of gifted children as an exclusive, social, and needy group can be interpreted as a process of people-making, in which mainly researchers have been involved. However, the descriptions of gifted children are linked mainly to the vocabulary, values, and institutions of the white upper-middle class. Beyond that, the obvious underrepresentation of working-class and black students was for these researchers a proof of the supremacy of the white upper-middle class, which is why the lack of diversification among gifted students was not challenged. In this sense, the emergence of gifted children can be interpreted as a strategy of the dominant class to preserve a specific "social order, a class, a race, a community, a culture" (Margolin, 1994, p. 3). The emergence of gifted children as a social group is a good example of how the ideology of giftedness materialises and how it prevents the social diversification of gifted students.

Staiger (2004) sheds light on the processes of how official representation is arranged in gifted education programs. The starting point of her study is the observation of a highly disproportional lack of participation among black students in an exclusive gifted education program within the investigated urban high school. In contrast, black students are overrepresented among the school's student population in general. Staiger realises that giftedness is used as a code word for whiteness and argues that the program for gifted students can be read as a racial project. The handling of social statistics is a core element in obscuring this mechanism and establishing successful narratives about the school. The first narrative includes social statistics published on the official website of the school that show that students inside the regular school and the gifted program both perform at an excellent academic level. However, Staiger demonstrates that these statistics are arranged in such a way as to exaggerate the performance of

students in the regular school. While the performance of the regular school is comparable to other schools in the district, the students within the gifted program perform at an outstanding level. The second narrative is based on a success story that claims the inclusiveness of the school in general. Indeed, social statistics of the school are used to hide the racial breakdown within the gifted program. Furthermore, the school management refused to show social statistics to Staiger and even denied their existence. She needed several years to obtain the data, which was only possible by circumventing official institutions.

3. Justification of Gifted Education on the Level of Discourse

This article is grounded in the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD). This approach can be described as a "research agenda and a theory-methodology-methods package aiming to examine the discursive construction of realities in social relations of knowledge and knowing and in the social politics of knowledge and knowing" (Keller, 2018, p. 27). Offering a broad toolkit, SKAD helps to scrutinise power/knowledge regimes, especially concerning the interdependence between actors and discourse. I analyse written texts of the Studienstiftung, primarily annual reports and journal articles published between 1925 and 2018. Based on these official documents, I reconstruct the specific discourse of the Studienstiftung. As I am interested in how this discourse evolves, my research perspective can be described as genealogical. Concerning Friedrich Nietzsche, Foucault (1974, pp. 88–96) argues that history should not be told linearly, nor from the point of the present or by subduing it under just one principle. Instead, from a genealogical perspective, the history of humankind should be understood as a series of interpretations. SKAD enables us to understand these interpretations at the level of discourse. Established concepts to reconstruct patterns of interpretations in SKAD are interpretative schemes, argumentation clusters, classifications, phenomenal structures, and narrative structures (see Keller, 2018, pp. 32–35). However, as SKAD motivates researchers to adopt and develop their toolkit in concrete research projects, I integrate the concept of regimes of justification into SKAD.

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) argue that actors frequently refer to regimes of justification to justify something or someone in situations of crisis, uncertainty, or critique. According to SKAD, regimes of justification can be understood as different statements that share the same principle of justification. For example, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) reconstruct a domestic regime based on a traditional principle, an inspired regime grounded on creative and individualistic principles, a market regime built on a competitive principle, and three other regimes of justification based on different principles. In everyday life, social actors are confronted with different situations. That is why they must constantly refer to different regimes of justification and need to adapt them. In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) examine the interplay of critique, justification, and societal change. They analyse the spirit of capitalism, understood in a normative sense as the "ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, p. 8), and its transformation by reconstructing the plural arrangements of different regimes of justification. The authors argue that critique plays a major role in the transformation of the spirit of capitalism. Following Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), I have reconstructed the (changing) spirit of the Studienstiftung between 1925 and 2018 (see Böker, 2021). Thus, in the first part of my analysis, I focus on two regimes of justification, which are structured by the same principles. In doing so, I show how these regimes of justification might affect the diversification of gifted students (see Leemann & Imdorf, 2018, p. 14).

Furthermore, Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) differentiate between two different forms of critique of capitalism: artistic and social critique. While artistic critique sees capitalism as a source of disenchantment, missing authenticity and oppression, social critique refers to capitalism as a source of poverty, inequality, opportunism, and egoism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, p. 79). In the history of the Studienstiftung, the most common critique focuses on the social selectivity of gifted education, which is demonstrated by social statistics (Böker, 2021). As Desrosières (2014, p. 348) argues, "social critique often relies on statistical arguments. These attempt to express and make visible exigencies of equality and justice." However, the opportunity to construct social statistics is unequally distributed and related to power. Thus, following the works of Desrosières (2014) and Espeland (2015), I concentrate in the second part of my analysis on how the critique and justification of the Studienstiftung rely on social statistics, how these statistics are constructed and interpreted, how they are intertwined with organisational change and the question of diversification of gifted education.

4. Analysis

In 2009, the Studienstiftung was confronted with a harsh critique in respect to the low percentage of gifted students with lower social status and FGS in their gifted program. Seven years later, and after the introduction of several measures, the Studienstiftung points out that their selection procedure is fair and does not discriminate against any student group. To better understand the approach of diversification and the ostensible occurrence of equity in gifted education I use a genealogical approach. First, I look back to the founding of the Studienstiftung in 1925 and reconstruct an important regime of justification, which I call the "defence of the tradition of academic freedom." This regime is structured by inspired and domestic principles and linked to the

ideas of German *Bildungsbürgertum.* I show that these principles are still present today and are an ineluctable part of the spirit of the Studienstiftung, which makes the diversification of gifted students unlikely. Second, I go back to the early 1970s to show how the Studienstiftung have handled the public critique on failing equity for the first time in its history. Thus, I research the interplay of critique, justification, and organisational change. I can show that in the early 1970s, and since 2009, social statistics have played a major role in the justification process. However, the handling and interpretation of social statistics of the Studienstiftung raise doubts as to whether the diversification of gifted students has taken place. Both chapters start with a brief contextualisation of the researched period and the problems which the Studienstiftung has identified and tries to solve.

4.1. The Spirit of the Studienstiftung

The establishment of the Studienstiftung is linked to the fundamental crisis of the *Bildungsbürgertum* after the end of World War I. Members of this social class were confronted with shrinking incomes, declining assets, a disproportionally high number of deaths during World War I concerning the share of the population, and a loss of political influence (see Wehler, 2008, pp. 294–295). In addition, they were not able to compete financially with the rising mercantile upper-middle class (see Wehler, 2008, p. 285) and struggled against the educational aspirations of the middle class (see Wehler, 2008, p. 462). Furthermore, the reproduction of the *Bildungsbürgertum* through the acquisition of educational degrees was challenged by educational expansion. Eventually, members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* were not able to study in their preferred way as educated generalists. Due to this financial, political, and cultural crisis, the establishment of the Studienstiftung can be understood as an invention of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, since the Studienstiftung was mainly dominated by professors and their way of thinking.

This argument can be demonstrated by looking at how members of the Studienstiftung problematised the situation of the higher education system at that time. This can be summarised as a melancholic description of the decline of the German university. First, the Studienstiftung identified the expansion of higher education as a major problem and described it as a "massification [*Überfüllung*] of higher education" (Sikorski, 1930, p. 185) with several consequences, such as a "superior number of average students" (Paeckelmann, 1927, p. 75) and the "transformation of the university into an educational institution for average and below-average performing students" (Litt, 1930, p. 183). Second, the Studienstiftung described the decline of a specific German academic tradition (the tradition of academic freedom). The increase of instrumental rationality in the students thinking was seen as one reason for this development (see Paeckelmann, 1927, pp. 79–80). This thinking is manifest in the orientation of students towards examinations, the attempt to quickly attain a university degree, and the aspiration to learn specific methods to reach a predefined goal. It was supported by the implementation of an obligatory curriculum and partial tests, the financial crisis, and the danger of unemployment. For the Studienstiftung, another reason for the decline of the tradition of academic freedom was the exclusion of members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* from universities. The Studienstiftung argued that this exclusion was based on its financial crisis and the increasing selection of students based on plutocratic criteria. Thus, while students from the *Bildungsbürgertum* might have incorporated the desired tradition of academic freedom, their inability to study accelerated the threat to this tradition.

Against this background, Studienstiftung justified its existence by presenting itself as a solution to tackle the alleged decline of the German university by defending the tradition of academic freedom. Following Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the way Studienstiftung justifies this duty refers to two regimes of justification: The inspired and domestic regimes. This notable mixture becomes obvious in the descriptions of the tradition of academic freedom. It was characterised on the one hand by personality, freedom, openness, and subjectivity, and on the other hand by tradition, hierarchy, and ancestry. Furthermore, the tradition of academic freedom is based on the Humboldtian model of higher education, the Platonic academy, and German idealism. To do research in this tradition requires freedom, openness, and independence on the part of the researcher. The academic tradition needed to be defended in the selection and support of gifted students. Both procedures focused on experienced experts, who were responsible for recommending and selecting gifted students based on the entire personality of the candidates, which required face-to-face interviews and individual reports, and could not be captured by psychological testing methods (see Wirtschaftshilfe, 1926, pp. 30–31). Following the idea of the tradition of academic freedom, the Studienstiftung refused to define the group of gifted students. Spranger (1930, p. 165) emphasises this characteristic of the Studienstiftung and praises the indeterminacy and openness regarding the types of gifted students in the selection procedure. Concerning the support of gifted students, the Studienstiftung expected that the experts would assume responsibility for the education of the chosen scholars, following the tradition of academic freedom and preventing instrumental rationality. From the perspective of the Studienstiftung, this type of education was directly linked to students from the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Working-class students were especially unfamiliar with this tradition and needed to be educated in it.

The manner of problematisation and the mixture of the inspired and domestic principles in the justification process have remained intact until today.

However, many continuities and discontinuities can be observed. Many problems the Studienstiftung identified between 1925 and 1933 continue to be articulated. Even today, the Studienstiftung problematises the expansion of higher education, the "massification" of universities, the focus on average-performing students, and the regulations within higher education. Above all, instrumental rationality in students' thinking, for instance the understanding of academic education (*Bildung*) as vocational training (*Ausbildung*), is recognised as problem. When the Studienstiftung was re-established in 1948, the decline of the German tradition of academic freedom and the exclusion of members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* were not rearticulated. However, since 1948, the Studienstiftung has presented itself as a solution to preserve and support the value of academic freedom. It is the goal of the Studienstiftung to enable a few students to experience this, even in times of "massification," regulation, and the dominance of average performances. In contrast to the first episode of the Studienstiftung between 1925 and 1933, all students are able and have the same opportunity to internalise the value of academic freedom. One place where this experience is possible is the summer academies, organised by the Studienstiftung since the 1970s. During summer academies, small groups of Studienstiftung scholars work together with chosen professors on specific topics in a remote place. These events are celebrated by the Studienstiftung as opportunities to study in the "original sense of academia" (Studienstiftung, 1973, p. 15) and to do research without the constraints of everyday life, as Hans Castorp did in *The Magic Mountain* (see Zimmermann, 1996, p. 11).

To sum up, the spirit of the Studienstiftung has always been characterised by a mixture of inspired and domestic principles. The principles can be found in two regimes of justification: the "defence of the tradition of academic freedom" (1925–1933) and the "preservation and support of academic freedom" (since 1948), which are closely connected to the ideas of German *Bildungsbürgertum*. The establishment of the Studienstiftung in 1925 is linked to the fundamental crisis of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the problematisation of the decline of the German university, and the regime of justification "defence of the tradition of academic freedom." Some aspects of the tradition of academic freedom—such as the preference for education over vocational training, the rejection of instrumental rationality in the students' thinking, the emphasis of personalities, and the support of academic freedom—continue to be articulated by the Studienstiftung. As social scientists have shown, these aspects are linked to the culture of the upper-middle class (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 29–31; Brake & Büchner, 2012, pp. 13–15; Vester, 2015, pp. 154–155), while others (such as the concept of personality) are based on the *illusio* of the scientific field and do not consider external effects like social origin and gender (see Engler, 2001, pp. 449–462). Following Bourdieu (2001) and Margolin (1994), I argue that gifted education is based on a specific culture, which can strengthen the effect of self-exclusion of potential candidates, especially students with lower social status and FGS. Spiegler (2015) has shown that this is even true for some (not all) gifted FGS, who have been proposed by their school or university to apply for a Studienstiftung scholarship and who have been supported by the Studienstiftung. Thus, these students struggle primarily with the specific culture of the Studienstiftung and are not able to identify with the self-image of this organisation.

4.2. The Handling of Social Statistics

The handling of social statistics by the Studienstiftung is elementary to understand how the interplay of critique, justification, and organisational change may affect the diversification of gifted students. For the first time in its history, the Studienstiftung had to justify its work concerning the disproportionally low percentage of FGS and students from the lower class between 1971 and 1974. Two events are important for this imperative to justify. First, the publication by von Ferber et al. (1970) needs to be recognised. Already in the 1960s, equality of opportunity in the educational system became a public issue. This development continued in the 1970s and began to include gifted education. Von Ferber et al. (1970) researched the background of gifted students regarding gender, religion, and social background. They found that the underrepresentation of women, Catholics, FGS, and students from the lower class in the student population was even more pronounced in the population of gifted students (see von Ferber et al., 1970, p. 42). Second, the function of the Studienstiftung changed fundamentally under its new director Hartmut Rahn in 1970. The Studienstiftung realigned itself toward the research of exceptional giftedness in the United States. This research line was dominated by quantitative research and standardised testing, as impressively demonstrated by the founding of the Institute for Test Development and Talent Research of the Studienstiftung (ITB) in 1970, which was substantially involved in the establishment of a new selection procedure: the so-called *Oberprimaner-Auswahl*, which existed until 1983. In this selection procedure, schools are asked to choose 10% of their best students (based on their grades). These students were invited to participate in a standardised testing procedure developed and updated by the ITB. One-third of the best-performing students of this test was finally invited to a selection seminar. This development is quite impressive in light of the general criticism of standardised testing by the Studienstiftung between 1925–1933 and 1948–1969.

The realignment of the Studienstiftung was based on a description of a fundamental change in higher education in Germany, e.g., the increase in student population, the establishment of new higher education institutions,

and the understanding of studying and doing research (see Studienstiftung, 1973). The Studienstiftung problematised its lack of adaptation to this development, especially in its adherence to the traditional selection procedure, which was rooted in the recommendation of gifted students by schools and universities, and which few schools participated in. The justification for changes inside the Studienstiftung was accompanied by annual reports and detailed evaluation studies. Between 1971 and 1974, three evaluation studies were published to answer the question of whether the Studienstiftung reproduced social inequalities, especially regarding social class background, but without any reference to the study of von Ferber et al. (1970). In these four years, different strategies were used to show that the Studienstiftung offered equal chances for working-class students and FGS.

First, the Studienstiftung found that women, Catholics, FGS and students from rural areas were underrepresented in its program in comparison to its percentage in the student population (see Studienstiftung, 1971, pp. 61–73). However, the Studienstiftung externalised the reasons for this situation to other parts of the educational system. These social statistics were considered to be the result of an accumulation of social inequalities that had already affected the educational trajectories of young people. Thus, the problem could not be blamed on the selection process of the Studienstiftung, but on the "starting position, which is determined by the structure of the higher education system in Germany" (Studienstiftung, 1971, pp. 61–62). Ultimately, the Studienstiftung depended on recommendations from schools and universities in selecting its scholars. Nonetheless, the Studienstiftung recognised the need to establish new selection procedures because many schools did not use its right to make recommendations. As a result, it proposed the introduction of the *Oberprimaner-Auswahl*.

Second, the Studienstiftung arranged the social statistics in a way that showed an overrepresentation of working-class students in its program. In Table 1, the occupational group of the fathers of gifted students is differentiated along different age groups and an overall group. The basis for the calculation of the relative share is unclear because the absolute share is missing. Nonetheless, in their interpretation, the Studienstiftung focused on the relative share of working-class students of the overall group and ignored the falling relative share between the group of 55- to 59-year-old students (28.6%) and the group of 25- to 29-year-old students (5.3%) selected. One year later, the Studienstiftung compared the relative share of working-class students in the total student population in 1967–1968 (6.7%), the former selected students between 1948 and 1968 (11.5%), all selected students in 1971 (17.4%), and all selected students in 1971 entering the Studienstiftung via the *Oberprimaner-Auswahl* (27.9%; see Rahn & Müller-Hansen, 1972, pp. 40–41). Rahn and Müller-Hansen (1972) emphasise the substantial underrepresentation of working-class students in the total student population, which supports the strategy of externalising the problem of social inequalities to other parts of the educational system. Furthermore, the relative share of working-class students of the total population is compared to the relative share of selected students between 1948 and 1968. However, instead of using the group of 25- to 29-year-old students (5.3%), the Studienstiftung refers to the overall group (11.5%), which enables them to tell a success story: the overrepresentation of working-class students in its program.

Third, in 1974, the Studienstiftung told another success story, which focused on the percentage of FGS in the Studienstiftung. In the annual report of the Studienstiftung, Rahn (1974) argued that 50% of all selected students in 1972 entering Studienstiftung via *Oberprimaner-Auswahl* did not have an academic family background. He considered this result as proof of the social fairness of the selection process of the Studienstiftung in general. At the same time, he stated that in total 206 students entered Studienstiftung via

Table 1. Occupation groups of the fathers of former Studienstiftung scholars between 1948 and 1968.

	Age when the survey took place in 1968							
	55–59 years	50–54 years	45–49 years	40–44 years	35–39 years	30–34 years	25–29 years	Overall group
No information	—	1.5%	3.1%	2.5%	2.6%	3.8%	2.9%	3.0%
Scientist, researcher	—	2.9%	2.2%	2.5%	3.8%	3.8%	6.4%	3.9%
Schoolteacher	7.1%	10.3%	12.4%	9.9%	11.7%	12.4%	14.1%	12.0%
Public service, civil servant, employee	21.4%	22.1%	15.5%	19.3%	19.6%	20.4%	22.3%	20.1%
Economist	21.4%	22.1%	33.1%	26.7%	27.8%	30.1%	28.5%	28.7%
Worker, salaried craftsman	28.6%	8.8%	10.8%	13.8%	14.8%	10.6%	5.3%	11.5%
Professional	—	7.4%	7.4%	10.1%	8.5%	10.3%	12.4%	9.9%
Artist	—	—	1.6%	2.2%	1.9%	2.1%	1.7%	1.9%
Other	21.4%	25.0%	13.9%	13.0%	9.4%	6.5%	6.3%	9.0%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Studienstiftung (1971, p. 68).

Oberprimaner-Auswahl. However, he did not mention that the Studienstiftung had selected 838 students in total in 1972 and that the traditional selection process, based on the recommendations of schools and universities, was still the dominant way to enter the program (in total 431 students; see Studienstiftung, 1973, p. 26). This was the last social statistic regarding the social background of gifted students that the Studienstiftung would publish for 36 years.

In 2009, Middendorff et al. (2009) published a study with a focus on the social background of gifted students showing that students with low status were underrepresented in gifted programs in general. In the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, Kerbusk (2009) published a detailed evaluation of Middendorff et al. (2009). In particular, the social status of gifted students supported by the Studienstiftung was critically discussed. Kerbusk showed that gifted students with low status (5%), average status (14%), and above-average status (18%) were underrepresented in the Studienstiftung in comparison to the average of all gifted education programs (low status: 9%; average status: 19%; above-average status: 21%) and the total student population (low status: 14%; average status: 25%; above-average status: 24%). In contrast, students with a high status were overrepresented in the Studienstiftung (64%) in contrast to the average of all gifted programs (51%) and the total student population (37%). These results were the starting point of a debate about the reproduction of social inequality in gifted education programs, especially within the Studienstiftung. Just like in the 1970s, an external study by social scientists was the trigger for that discussion.

The attempt by the Studienstiftung to justify itself in the face of these criticisms is reminiscent of its handling of the social critique in the 1970s. The Studienstiftung published two evaluation studies in 2010 and 2016, focusing on the social origin of its students. However, these studies did not have the aim of problematising the actions of the Studienstiftung but were intended rather to ensure the quality of the selection and support of gifted students. The ostensible reason for these studies was the massive growth of the Studienstiftung since 2005, and the public perception that the Studienstiftung prefers students who are socioeconomically privileged (see Roth, 2009, p. 4). As in the 1970s, the Studienstiftung did not refer to previously published studies, in this case Middendorff et al. (2009) and Kerbusk (2009). Similarly, the Studienstiftung introduced an additional selection procedure based on the direct application of students without a referral from schools or universities and using a standardised test developed by ITB Consulting (the successor organisation to the ITB). In comparison to the traditional selection procedure, which is still based on recommendations (7719 candidates, 2202 confirmations), the new selection procedure (1074 candidates, 87 confirmations) does not have a significant impact on the selection of gifted students (see Studienstiftung, 2018). However, unlike in the 1970s, this new selection procedure has been followed by other measures, such as cooperation with organisations that focus on social equity, an additional recommendation of FGS by principals of schools, the sensibilisation of the selection committee to the issue of social inequality, and visits by Studienstiftung scholars to schools to inform students about the opportunity to apply for a scholarship.

As in the 1970s, the Studienstiftung uses several strategies to show that it offers equal chances for FGS and students from the lower classes. In the first evaluation study in 2010, the Studienstiftung found similar results to those of Middendorff et al. (2009) and Kerbusk (2009). First, it externalised the reason for the underrepresentation of FGS and students with a low social status to other parts of the educational system (see Roth, 2009). Second, the Studienstiftung referred to other studies that show that the socioeconomic backgrounds of students who apply for a scholarship are reflected proportionally among those who are selected (see Roth, 2009). Third, in 2016, the Studienstiftung published another evaluation study and established a new statistical category: Those students in the top 5% of the *Abitur* results. While social statistics show that FGS are still underrepresented (30%) in comparison to the total student population (50%), the Studienstiftung refers to the top 5% of best-performing students in the total student population (30%; see Studienstiftung, 2016a, pp. 9–10). The establishment of this new statistical category can be interpreted as a compromise of the demand to diversify the student population and the concurrent demand for excellence in academic research. However, this category has not been used in any social statistic before and its establishment is not explained, justified, or discussed. Thus, it remains unclear why the Studienstiftung focus on those students in the top 5% of the *Abitur* results and not on the top 10% (like it was done in the *Oberprimaner-Auswahl*) or 15% or 20%. Furthermore, the Studienstiftung points out that the percentage of FGS increased between 2010 and 2016 from 21% to 30%. But social statistics that focus on the social status of the students are not published. From the perspective of the Studienstiftung, these results show that "the current selection procedure is linked to fairness and equitable" (Studienstiftung, 2016b, p. 33). Fourth, after the establishment of a successful narrative, the Studienstiftung avoided the regular publication of social statistics about the social origin of its scholars, which could have been useful for a comparison with the student population.

To sum up, between 1971 and 1974 and since 2010, the Studienstiftung has used social statistics to react to critique and to justify its work. On both occasions, the specific handling of social statistics went along with the establishment of a successful narrative: The Studienstiftung does not discriminate against FGS, working-class students, or students from the lower class. Strategies like the externalisation of the problem to other parts of the educational system, the peculiar

construction of statistical categories to measure and compare the social background of gifted students to other students, and the avoiding of publishing social statistics after a success story is established are characteristic for the interplay of justification and critique. Thus, it seems like the specific handling of social statistics makes exigencies of equality and justice invisible. It raises doubts as to whether the diversification of gifted students has occurred and the goal to diversify the members of Studienstiftung has been accomplished.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Higher education institutions are globally confronted with the plea for social diversification of their members and the concurrent demand for excellence in academic research (see Bröckling & Peter, 2014). Lamont (2009, p. 15) points out that "grants and fellowships are becoming increasingly important as academic signals of excellence." The same is true for scholarships in gifted education programs, which offer a tremendous opportunity to expand economic, cultural, and social capital and a competitive advantage in the educational and occupational system. However, long-standing gifted education programs in Germany like the Studienstiftung have managed to avoid diversifying their members regarding class background. Based on a discourse analysis, I have shown that the spirit of the Studienstiftung and its handling of social statistics are two relevant elements regarding the interplay of justification, critique, and organisational change, which raise doubts that the recent efforts to diversify the student population of the Studienstiftung is a success story. Several social statistics points in the same direction: First, a social statistic, which was published by the German Bundestag, shows that the absolute share of selected FGS has increased from 710 to 807 students between 2010 and 2014 and decreased afterwards again to 714 students in 2017, while the amount of all supported students in the Studienstiftung increased from 11336 in 2010 to 12749 in 2017 (see Deutscher Bundestag, 2018, pp. 10–19). Second, some social statistics published by the Studienstiftung (2020, pp. 251, 257) point out that the percentage of students that receive full financial aid have fallen from 13.4% (2014) to 10.3% (2019), while the percentage of students that receive only the financial aid, which is independent of their parents' income, has risen from 60.9% (2014) to 71.5% (2019).

Finally, I would like to discuss some aspects that could be useful to support the diversification of gifted education. Historically, the Studienstiftung has always had windows of opportunity and persons who have thought intensively about the question of social equality in gifted education. The introduction of neediness as a fundamental criterion in the Studienstiftung, as already implemented between 1925 and 1933, could be the first measure. In 2009, the director of the Studienstiftung, Gerhard Teufel, proposed the introduction of social quotas in the Studienstiftung (see Kerbusk, 2009). Other gifted education programs, such as the Hans Böckler Foundation, have established special programs for financially needy students in addition to their regular program. However, this measure might conflict with meritocratic criteria like performance and the inclusion of low-income students leads to an exclusion of other student groups. A second measure could be the expansion of direct applications by students—thus moving away from the traditional recommendation by schools and universities. Many schools remain unmotivated to recommend students, thereby already excluding potential candidates, and the small number of scholars chosen via direct application renders this option less attractive. However, social statistics imply that direct applications can be a way to diversify students in gifted education programs. Another measure could be the continuous and comprehensive analysis of the social background of gifted students. In the past, the Studienstiftung has avoided publishing social statistics, doing so mainly in response to public pressure. A serious examination would provide an opportunity for self-criticism, remove the necessity for successful narratives, and promote a critical discussion of the handling of social statistics, e.g., the use of categories, indicators, and groups of comparison. Subsequently, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, which is the main donor to the Studienstiftung and other gifted education programs in higher education, could use its influence to establish obligatory guidance on when and how to construct social statistics in gifted education.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Constructing the "Competent" Pupil: Optimizing Human Futures Through Testing?

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Abstract
In the last decade, the German transition system has witnessed the large-scale introduction of so-called "analysis of potentials" (*Potenzialanalysen*) in secondary compulsory schooling. In most German Länder, 8th graders must participate in a two-day assessment center which combines psychometric testing with observations of their social and professional competencies in pre-specified tasks. The programmatic aim of these assessments is to "introduce pupils early to choosing a job" (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung [BMBF], 2017, p. 2) as well as to enhance the propensity of pupils to "take responsibility for their own future" (BMBF, 2017, p. 9). In the context of the German school-to-work system, the introduction of these new forms of diagnostics bear witness to a new preventive political rationality that aims at reducing the entry age into upper secondary education, reduce the recourse to so-called "transition measures" and optimizing transitions into an apprenticeship market that is characterized by structural inequalities and "mismatch" between pupils' job aspirations and the offers in apprenticeship places. However, little is known on the role of competency testing devices for the construction of further trajectories and aspirations and their role in the reproduction of inequalities in transitions from school to work. Based on an in-depth analysis of policy documents and competency profiles (the documents handed out to the pupils after undergoing testing), the article reconstructs the political rationale for the introduction of the so-called *Potenzialanalysen*. Based on a Foucauldian framework, we show how pupils are constructed as "competent" subjects. We show that competency assessments are part and parcel of a political rationality that aims at the promotion of a specific (future-oriented, optimized, self-regulated) relation to one's own biographical future on the side of the pupils. Our results demonstrate that competency profiles construct the process of choosing a job as an individualized project of the self and that they invisibilize structural barriers and power relations. In doing so, competency assessments potentially contribute to the reproduction of inequalities in post-secondary education through delegating "cooling out" processes from institutional gatekeepers to the interiority of persons.

Keywords
career guidance; competencies; education policy; Germany; governmentality studies; institutional ethnography; school-to-work-transitions; subjectivation; testing; vocational education and training

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1. Introduction

Despite a long history of critical debates on the pitfalls and problems of testing, standardized testing is proliferating in the world of education. The promise of testing in education is to help the just and effective channeling of students according to ability and to identify those students that are particularly gifted or that require specific support. In addition, testing plays an increasing role for the management and the measurement of performance of individuals, groups, and whole educational systems. However, critical perspectives on testing have highlighted that tests are concerned with a socially constructed, rather than with some

independently existing reality. They stress that testing itself is a deeply social, value-laden activity (Egbert, 2018) and that testing often serves a multitude of purposes and interests (Stobart, 2008). Tests do not simply measure an independently existing reality but "create what they are supposed to measure" (Hanson, 1994, p. 74; see also Hacking, 2004). The present study empirically unfolds the political rationalities and potential effects of testing through focusing on the recent large-scale introduction of competency testing in secondary compulsory schooling in Germany. Since 2010, so-called *Potenzialanalysen* (a semi-standardized competence assessment for 8th graders according to German-wide standards) have been implemented with the aim to reduce the number of pupils without a vocational degree and to smoothen their transition to work.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it aims to critically examine the political rationale that led to the introduction of *Potenzialanalysen* and to contextualize it within recurrent debates of the German transition system. Secondly, it aims at revealing the performative power of competency testing through an in-depth analysis of competency profiles (the documents handed out to pupils after performing a *Potenzialanalyse*). Drawing on theories of subjectivation and on actor-network theory, this article mobilizes the notion of textually mediated subjectivation devices for analyzing how competency assessments construct a specific, reflexive, and future oriented pupil with realistic job aspirations. With this in mind, we aim to address the following research questions: What realities do the competency profiles construct, and how does it configure, describe, and evaluate the pupils? How are further trajectories and aspirations constructed in the competency profiles and what are the implications for social inequalities? How is the federal policy of a wide-scale introduction of competency assessments translated and made durable on the level of the documents and artifacts used in the assessment procedure?

The research study contributes to the existing literature in several ways: Literature in the field of governmentality studies has described tests as technologies that enforce specific regimes of visibility that "performatively produce what they pretend to measure" (Lemke, 2004, p. 267) and aim at the formation of a specific, self-reflective individuality (Bröckling, 2015). Nevertheless, little is known about the use of such devices for the construction of further trajectories and aspirations and their role in the reproduction of inequalities in transitions from school to work. In applying the framework of subjectivation analysis to this field, the study aims to contribute to the emerging field of "empirical subjectivation research" (Bosančić et al., 2019). Research that focusses on vocational choice processes in the transition from school to work (Preite, 2019; Walther, 2015) has highlighted the role of "cooling out" processes for the pedagogical construction of (realistic) career perspectives. This article adds to that literature by showing that competency assessments constitute a central tool for the identity work involved in aligning the space of subjective possibilities to the structurally probable. Last but not least, the article contributes to the literature on documents and documentation (Alasuutari et al., 2020; Kelle et al., 2015) that attempts to theorize the role of non-human actors and artifacts and socio-material arrangements for pedagogical practices. It attempts to describe how a specific policy translates into a network of action in which the artifact competency profile constitutes a powerful and creative intermediary that mobilizes a whole series of people and events. The analysis is based on a documentary analysis of policy documents and working papers by the federal government accompanying the introduction of *Potenzialanalysen* and on the basis of competency profiles of the most commonly used competency assessment procedures. The analysis does not aim to reveal the differences between the procedures, but rather to focus on how the guidelines by the federal state have been locally translated and implemented.

The article is structured as follows. A first part introduces the specificities of the German educational system and reviews the political rationale for the introduction of competency assessments. The next section introduces the concept of textually mediated subjectivation devices from the background of governmentality studies and actor-network theory. Following the methodology section, we successively present how the competency profiles establish a specific regime of visibility that is put to use, both for the control, screening, and improvement of the human capital of individuals by government actors, *and* for fostering processes of biographic self-optimization of pupils. We conclude with a reflection on the role of new forms of testing for the reproduction of inequalities and cooling out processes in education.

2. Optimizing Transitions through Testing?

In Germany, nearly 50% of school leavers enter a dual apprenticeship after secondary schooling. While the German apprenticeship system is often touted for its low youth unemployment rates and a low skills mismatch (Piopiunik & Ryan, 2001), particularly for pupils with lower educational credentials, the transition from school to apprenticeships constitutes a bottleneck for the access to secondary education (Gaupp et al., 2011; Kohlrausch & Solga, 2012). As a collective skill formation system, the access to apprenticeship positions is regulated by means of an apprenticeship market—that means, training firms autonomously control access to the apprenticeship segment of upper secondary education. This proves to be a particular challenge for those pupils who follow lower secondary school tracks. Not disposing of an access certificate to higher education, they have to rely on the vocational education and training system and thus have to rely on the apprenticeship system to achieve an

upper secondary education degree. The situation on the apprenticeship market is somewhat contradictory: On the one side, training firms deplore that they are not able to find "appropriate" candidates to fill in their positions, while on the other side a consistent number of pupils leave the obligatory school system without being accepted as an apprentice in their preferred occupational field. Official reports characterize this situation as a "mismatch" between the job preferences of the applicants and the open positions (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020, p. 157).

Consequently, in 2018 nearly a third of a school leaver cohort do not directly enter an apprenticeship but have to fall back on offers of the so-called "transition system.'' Transition measures are preparatory courses that do mostly not lead to recognized degrees and function as a "waiting room" (Beicht, 2009) for the labor-market. The existence of this "transition system" has fueled a debate in German education policies and was a central point of contention between employers and the state since the early 2000s, where the former stressed the lack of inclusivity of the apprenticeship system and the potential social and individual costs of "delayed" transitions to work, while the latter stressed the lack of "apprenticeship readiness" (*Ausbildungsreife*; see Kohlrausch & Solga, 2012; Ratschinski, 2012) of pupils looking for an apprenticeship.

These discussions have been the main driver for the introduction of integrated, preventive transition policies: In order to reduce the recourse to the so-called transition system and in order to optimize the transition from school to work through reducing so-called "matching problems" on the apprenticeship market, an early, preventive and coordinated stance was to be taken. On the one side, a 2004 corporatist agreement between employers, the Federal Employment Agency and the Federal Government (the *Ausbildungspakt*) agreed to provide all young people "willing and able to train" with a training offer (Nationaler Pakt für Ausbildung und Fachkräftenachwuchs in Deutschland, 2004, p. 2). At the same time, these reforms where partially driven by the idea that—as the actors of the so-called *Ausbildungspakt* stated—"many of the vacant apprenticeship positions might have been staffed, if young people were better informed, were able to assess themselves realistically and would fulfill the minimal requirements for taking up an apprenticeship" (Nationaler Pakt für Fachkräftenachwuchs in Deutschland, 2009, author's translation). In 2008, during a conference with the title social mobility through education, the federal government issued the goal to reduce the number of persons without a vocational degree from 17,8% to 8,5% until 2015. This was meant to be achieved through making "career guidance in all schools compulsory… with the goal to extend the spectrum of occupational choices" (Bundesregierung, 2008, p. 9). At the same time, the government announced the implementation of a "systematic skill profiling before leaving school in order to smoothen the transition into further schooling and the apprenticeship system through… making young people aware of their strengths and weaknesses and better apprenticeship-readiness" (Bundesregierung, 2008, p. 9). The aim and scope of the envisaged reforms seemed to mimic a policy recommendation by the OECD that, while criticizing the "inefficiency and costliness" (Hoeckel & Schwartz, 2010, p. 20) of the transition system, also recommends introducing "assessment according to German-wide standards… at 7th grade" (Hoeckel & Schwartz, 2010, p. 22) and career guidance at an early stage. Following this recommendation, the federal initiative "Educational Chains towards Graduation" (*Bildungsketten bis zum Abschluss*) of the Ministry for Education, the federal employment agency and the Länder introduced *Potenzialanalysen* that were made compulsory for all pupils in the 7th and 8th grade. The initiative stressed the leitmotiv "prepare rather than repair" (BMBF, 2010, p. 2, author's translation) and aimed at installing a "preventive and concerted approach in order to avoid the need to repair educational trajectories through measures of the transition system" (BMBF, 2010, p. 2).

The large-scale dissemination of competency testing within the German transition system bears witness to a discursive shift in the framing of youth unemployment, in which the reason for "delayed" transitions to work is re-signified from a structural lack of apprenticeship places to a concern for the optimization of transitions and a lack of knowledge and career self-management of pupils transitioning to work. Garsten and Jacobsson (2004) describe this as a discursive shift from "lack of employment" to a "lack of employability." Lister (2003, p. 430) describes this as a "productivist reordering of social policy" that implies a new glance on the next generation as citizen workers of the future. Early monitoring and profiling (through competency tests) are part and parcel of a social investment approach that aims at "prepar[ing]… rather than repair[ing]" (Hemerijck, 2018, p. 811) and thus requires to identify "youth" based on risk factors prior to the occurrence of a specific life course event. Early intervention is supposed to prevent biographical detours, reduce later costs for the welfare state and to ensure a fast economic self-sufficiency. The view on youth as a "smart investment" is, for instance, reflected in the 2013 coalition agreement that expresses support for the extension of competency assessments: "No young person should be allowed to lose precious time in waiting loops….[W]e want to reach every young person, counselling takes a preventive stance… we will extend the successful initiative *Bildungsketten* so that as many young people as possible realize their potentials" (CDU et al., 2013, p. 55). Rather than intervening in the market mode of coordination of the vocational training system, the government decided to focus on measures that smoothen the problems of "mismatch" through an intensive scrutiny of cohorts of school leavers through intensive individualized assessment and through

"introduce[ing] pupils early to choosing a job" (BMBF, 2017, p. 2).

From a Foucauldian perspective, this new kind of transition policies can be seen as a form of biopolitical regulation of youth as "human futures," where the state regulates through "develop[ing] means to identify, train and foster their populations' innate capabilities and behavioral tendencies" (Lee & Motzkau, 2011, p. 9). Jessop argues that the change from a Fordist to a post-Fordist knowledge economy leads to a new focus of state policies: Rather than focusing on demand side intervention, policies focus on the enhancement of "structural competitiveness of open economies mainly through supply-side intervention and to subordinate social policy to the demands of labor market flexibility" (Jessop, 1993, p. 19). The skills and capacities of the labor force are seen as a central vector of state action. State policies thus increasingly opt for "a policy of growth… focused precisely on one of the things that the West can modify most easily, and that is the form of investment in human capital" (Foucault, 2008, p. 232). In this context, "the problem of control, screening, and improvement of the human capital of individuals, as a function of unions and consequent reproduction, will become actual, or at any rate, called for" (Foucault, 2008, p. 228). This becomes apparent in the policy rationale accompanying the introduction of so-called *Potenzialanalysen* according to which the problem of "mismatch" between young people's aspirations and the existing labor market opportunities are to be overcome by an early and systematic screening of competencies of all school leavers. In the same vein, authors that analyze the formation of subjects in post-Fordist economies highlight that the focus on competencies increasingly attempts to mobilize the subjectivity and "inner" capacities of whole persons (Traue, 2010) to be mobilized and displayed by workers. In this context, Traue (2010) highlights the central role of practices of testing that are crucial for the visibilization and readability of competencies. The intervention to reform transition policies through a stronger focus on competencies and testing aims to adjust transition policies not only to become an efficient instrument to optimize transitions, but it is also a strategy for the formation of "entrepreneurial" (Bröckling, 2015) and responsible citizens.

3. Contextualizing the Role of Competency Assessments in German Transition Policies

Hanson (1994, p. 19) defines tests as "a representational technique applied by an agency to an individual with the intention of gathering information." In the case of competency assessments, the gathered information, as well as the intention, for which that information is used, slightly differs from the intentions of commonly known testing regimes put to use in educational settings. Competency assessments in Germany are not primarily aiming at placement testing (like the classic SAT test or entry testing for universities in the US) but constitute a mix of formative and summative assessment. While officially, competency assessments aim at a pure formative assessment to "encourage students to reflect on themselves" (BMBF, 2015, p. 2; see also Kunert, 2014, p. 32), it also argues that a considerable range of the procedures used for competence testing in the framework of "educational chains" contain summative elements, for instance through providing standard values for different student populations, through employing psychometric vocational tests, and through displaying the fit between personal characteristics and different potential jobs in the final test report handed out to the pupils. On the one side, federal policy documents seem to stress the fact that competency assessments are meant to be purely formative and "should not specify a certain professional direction but open up the gaze to future options and possibilities" (BMBF, 2015, p. 4). On the other side, the concepts of some of the Länder at least explicitly define competency assessments as a combination of "scientifically recognized testing procedures, practical tasks to be evaluated, and elements of assessment centers" (MAGS NRW, 2018, p. 29). Until 2018, 13 of the 16 Länder had concluded agreements with the federal state, leading to a wide scale introduction of competency assessments in the German transition system. In order to be eligible for funding by the federal state, the Länder are expected to respect "quality standards" by the federal state (BMBF, 2015). This leads to the fact that the different Länder show a certain heterogeneity in terms of selected programs and concrete content of competency assessment. While Lower Saxony, Saxony, and Rhineland-Palatinate opted for a for a third-party program called "Profil-AC" to be conducted by teachers inside schools, other Länder (for instance North-Rhine Westphalia) allow for a large number of procedures, some provided by larger for-profit providers (HAMET 2 or Peakus), other designed by smaller non-profit organizations to be conducted off school site and selected individually by each school. Other Länder develop their own procedures (Hamburg). As the guidelines of the federal ministry postulate, all procedures have a duration of 1–2 days, containing three to four tasks to be completed alone or in a group, and are inspired by "assessment centers" used in applicant selection by firms and aim at the observation of "competencies" by professionals. Most procedures include some kind of standardized, psychometric test, be it for the assessment of career preferences (Kompo7, Peakus) or even for cognitive abilities (Profil-AC). Many procedures contain instruments for self-assessment and self-reflection, and all of them finish with a personal feedback and the handing out of a competency profile. Competency assessments are not meant to focus on scholarly aptitude, intelligence, or other proxies for educational success. Rather, while the choice of the testing procedures put to use are left to local actors, the federal administration defines five fields of competencies, including "methods and planning competencies,

social competencies (communication skills, ability to deal with conflict, criticism and teamwork), personal competencies (reliability, flexibility, independence, ability to concentrate) practical skills (dexterity, orderliness, work speed and accuracy)" (BMBF, 2015, p. 3, author's translation) to be evaluated using standardized individual and group tasks (usually consisting in standardized task to be fulfilled in a group, young people are then observed and rated according to a fixed observation schedule). In most procedures, students then have to fill in a self-evaluation form and discuss the test results with the persons establishing the pupils' competence profile. As the name of the program under which competency assessments are funded ("educational chains") suggests, competency testing in 7th or 8th grade is the starting point of a larger network of linked activities of career counselling, short term internships and job-search activities. In this process, the personal competency profile in which the results of the tests are written down is attributed a central role. At least in theory, it links the different stages and events of the educational chain towards a successful transition, from the feedback of the results to parents, to the establishment of "learning contracts" between teachers and pupils based on the profile, up to career counselling outside of school or the use of the competency profile for a job application. In some sense, it "serve[s] as [an] interface between multiple social worlds and facilitate[s] the flow of resources (information, concepts, skills, materials) among multiple social actors" (Roth & McGinn, 1998, p. 42).

4. Theory and Methodology: Competency Profiles as Textually Mediated Subjectivation Devices

Particularly, authors that have analyzed the implicit normative constructions of career guidance policies describe a paradigmatic shift: "While career guidance traditionally has been about job matching, it is now intended to support individuals' employability and encourage them to perform skills and competences….Career guidance is constructed as an asset to support individuals' investment in the self" (Bengtsson, 2011, p. 623). This is also expressed in the "quality standards" regarding competency assessments by the federal state. The latter aims at "not simply testing observable skills and knowledge" (BMBF, 2015, p. 2); rather, they claim to "take a look at the whole person in their respective contexts through biographical approaches" and to "encourage students to reflect on themselves" (BMBF, 2015, p. 2, author's translation). Technologies of competency testing play a central role in this process. A number of authors have considered the role of standardized testing as a new mode of exercise of power in post-disciplinary societies: As Foucault has shown, the technology of "examination" increasingly supersedes hierarchical surveillance of disciplinary societies and expands from disciplinary institutions and hospitals of the eighteenth century to schools and pedagogical sites such as schools (Foucault, 1979, p. 184). He claims that paralleling the development of the psycho-disciplines, the examination combines "the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement" (Foucault, 1979, p. 184), that through imposing "on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (Foucault, 1979, p. 187) not only objectifies the individual as a "calculable man" (Foucault, 1979, p. 192), but in which each individual "receives as his status his own individuality, and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the "marks" that characterize him and make him a "case" (Foucault, 1979, p. 192).

Building on Foucault's work, Lemke (2004) and Bröckling (2015) describe a changing focus in the technologies of testing in post-disciplinary societies. Lemke (2004) points out that historically, with the emergence of testing, staff selection procedures were strongly modelled into the demands of production processes in Fordist economies and focused on "individualized and isolated workers, composed of a finite set of testable qualities, their aim was to assign the appropriate place in the production process" (Lemke, 2004, p. 265). In contrast, new forms of testing, like competency assessments do not operate with pre-established statistical, technical and social norms to be measured, but artificially simulate and anticipate working situations in which candidates are invited to display their authentic self through an open performance (see also Illouz, 2008, p. 66). As Bröckling (2015, pp. 161–162) suggests, these technologies aim, beyond the *evaluation* of existing characteristics of a person, to the *formation* of a specific, self-reflective individuality. This view is supported by Kaminski (2013, p. 186) arguing that the subjectivating effects of testing lie in opening spaces of possibility and leading the person to become what they potentially are within the borders of those spaces.

Research in the Foucauldian tradition has thus abundantly shown that contemporary forms of testing play a central role for inculcating a new ethic of desirable self-formation. Tests, so it goes, propose models "for setting up and developing relationships with the self" (Foucault, 1988, p. 29), and are part of those "pedagogies of expertise" (Rose, 1998, p. 93) that lead to the "the inculcation of particular kinds of relations that the human being has with itself" (Rose, 2004, p. 42). In so doing, they partly create what they are supposed to measure (Hacking, 2004; Hanson, 1994). They perform a "construction of identity through assessment" (Reay & Wiliam, 1999, p. 343). Nevertheless, this field of research has mainly focused on reconstructing the role of testing in an abstract manner. Testing is seen as relevant insofar it contributes expression of a specific "type" (Bröckling, 2015) of subject, that comes into existence by being addressed as such through discourse. Through the focus on discourse, such a perspective does only provide a limited theoretical vocabulary for analyzing the role of concrete material artifacts for subjectivation processes.

That said, Foucault's work displays an abundant interest in the exercise of power through very concrete technologies and practices (see, e.g., Matthewman, 2013). His detailed analysis of the architecture of the prison, the examination as a special microtechnology of social control, the development of detailed "records, individual dossiers, new classificatory systems and timetables dictating activities to be undertaken" (Foucault, 1979, p. 11) show that Foucault was preoccupied with the concrete tools and technologies through "which subjects are transformed into objects of knowledge within organizational matrixes" (Matthewman, 2013, p. 276). Therefore, I draw on actor-network theory to develop the notion of a "textually mediated subjectivation device." In this sense, the competency profiles analyzed in the next section are to be seen as a special microtechnology that allows to define and classify people and that constitutes the point of "contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Actor-network theory focusses on the objects and texts that mediate the practice of testing and highlights how they are interwoven in a network that is made up of humans and things, and that "functions across far flung regions of time and space" (Fenwick, 2010, p. 112). Such a perspective proves particularly useful for the analysis of educational standards such as the diffusion of competency assessments as a specific screening procedure in German transition management. In his analysis of a statewide curriculum reform in the state of Virginia, Nespor (2002) shows how standardized tests act as immutable mobiles, traveling across time and space to "enroll" human as well as non-human entities into a network. Nespor (2002) points to the fact that standardized tests, once settled in a fixed representation link together, mediate massive networks of agents and mobilize a whole series of people and events to align with its forms. This becomes obvious in the case of the so-called "educational chains," where the diffusion of an "assessment according to German-wide standards" (Hoeckel & Schwartz, 2010, p. 22) happens through a textually mediated enrollment of sites ranging from the practices of testing to those sites, in which the use of the test results is envisaged (schools, career guidance, employers, and finally the pupils).

As Prior (2008, p. 822) suggests, documents, such as the competency profile are not only receptacles of content, but also "active agents in networks of action." As such, they have the capacity to enroll and inscribe human actors into a specific regime of visibility. Firstly, through its specific affordances, its display of information and the way it addresses, configures, and positions the pupils, it invites them to see and to describe themselves through the evaluative vocabulary of the test. In doing so, pupils might come to know themselves as the kind of person that the test is supposed to measure. Furthermore, the competency profile acts as an intermediary, which "embeds a history of network constructions, struggles, and mediations which have settled into one fixed representation" (Fenwick, 2010, p. 123) that allows one to compare and summarize the student population and act upon them politically.

5. Analyzing Competency Profiles: Methodological Considerations

Standardized documents such as the competency profile can be thought of as "standardized artifacts" (Wolff, 2004, p. 284) that bear "institutional traces," allowing to make inferences on the "activities, intentions and ideas of the creators of the document as well as the organizations they represent" (Wolff, 2004, p. 284). Institutional ethnography highlights that texts are an ideal starting point for analyzing "ruling relations" (Smith, 2005) as they regulate local practices through establishing connections to dominant, extra-local political and economic programs: "Texts… are mechanisms for coordinating activity across many different sites… institutional ethnographies are designed to reveal the organizing power of texts, making visible just how activities in local settings are coordinated and managed extralocally" (Devault, 2006, p. 294). These ruling relations do not only operate through prescriptive rules, but the material artefacts themselves carry—as Nicolini (2013, p. 228) puts it:

> The script their designers embodied into them, and for this reason, they convey a particular culture of action. As a result, cultural artifacts constitute a means of transmission of social knowledge by carrying inscribed within them objectified norms of cognition, assumptions about how work should be carried out and the purposes of their use.

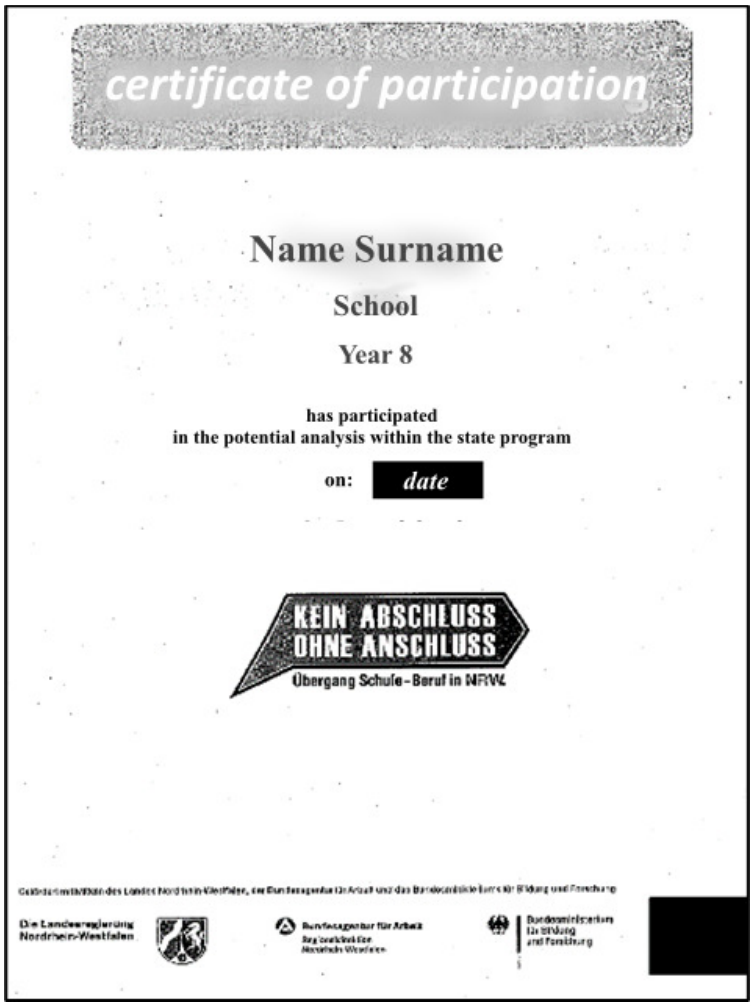
In the same vein, Latour has coined the term "inscription" (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 259) to designate the fact that material artifacts (such as documents) carry specific action programs inscribed by the designer, the manufacturer, etc. As Roth and McGinn describe (1998, p. 45), while being contingent upon their reading to the context of particular moments of interpretation, inscriptions serve particular interests: "Inscriptions are usually crafted to be relevant to particular purposes," for instance, to "to keep track of people, objects, information, money, organs, and so on." A document suggests specific ways of using it, contains and highlights potentially institutionally relevant categories, and specific local doings and declare them an "institutionally actionable" (Smith, 2005) reality. For the analysis of competency profiles, I am focusing on the programmatic and institutional traces they contain. Competency profiles handed out to the pupils can be conceived of as "institutional scripts" that "streamline[s], organize[s], include[s] and exclude[s] information by instructing staff… to attend to certain themes and categories of information" (Berrick et al., 2018, p. 41). The concept of an institutional script focusses both the encoding of the script into institutional principles as well as its concrete organizational enactment.

In this article, the competency profile handed out to the pupils after the competency assessment is highlighted. Practices of testing as well as the subsequent uses of the competency profiles are left out, even though they are part of the whole complex of testing practices. The analysis follows a documentary approach and follows Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) and Charmaz's (2006) suggestions regarding ethnographic research on documents. Additionally, the analysis is informed by ethnomethodological document analysis (Wolff, 2004).

The contribution focusses on the competency profiles as a document (and not their situated use) to display their rationale of construction, their display of information and to show how they address the pupils and construct them as a specific kind of person in the light of the evaluative frameworks of the competency assessment. The analysis is based on 6 competency profiles, including the profiles of those procedures most commonly used in Germany. The analysis shows how the documents take up and translate to the federal standards of the "educational chains" initiative. As a consequence, the analysis focusses on selected sections that are similar in all documents.

6. Analysis and Results

The analyzed competency profiles are between 3 to 16 pages in length and very similar in structure. They all contain a cover page with the name of the pupil and the name of the organization that conducted the assessment. The competency profiles are structured into four sections. They all contain a short, written statement on how the pupil fared in different competency areas, a graphic illustration of the five fields of competencies mentioned in the federal standards in term of a quantified scale (mostly from 1 to 5), and a graphic illustration that opposes self-assessment of the pupil with external assessment by the procedure. Most profiles also contain a graphic illustration that opposes the measured competencies of the pupil to the competencies required for different vocational fields. In addition, some profiles contain instructions for further steps and/or additional forms to be filled in and signed by the pupil. The competency profiles start with a cover page (Figure 1). Here, the combination of logos, the title caption and the pupil's name give the document an immensely official make-up and resembles an official diploma that claims, on the


certificate of participation

Name Surname

School

Year 8

has participated
in the potential analysis within the state program

on: *date*

KEIN ABSCHLUSS OHNE ANSCHLUSS

Übergang Schule - Beruf in NRW

Figure 1. Cover page of a competency profile.

one hand, epistemic authority, while on the other it is strictly attached to an individual. This indicates that the "ostensible purpose of the text" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 39) seems to be to officially recognized a person as possessing certain qualifications and meeting certain standards. The design of the document suggests that it addresses a "defined circle of legitimate or involved recipients" (Wolff, 2004, p. 284).

Rather than being intended for the use by the individual person (and alleged holder of these qualifications), it is designed for the use in "official" contexts, where the logos of official, recognized institutions serve as warrantors for the validity of the reported content. As tests come with the implicit claim that the tested performance at a specific moment in time can be projected to future situations (Ott, 2011, pp. 158–159) the competency profile serves as an "immutable mobile" (Latour, 1987) that warrants the validity of the test for different actors and that allows the test results to travel across space and time. As such, the competency profile "serve[s] as [an] interface between multiple social worlds and facilitate[s] the flow of resources (information, concepts, skills, materials) among multiple social actors" (Roth & McGinn, 1998, p. 42). The competency profile constitutes a writing device for "coordinating different actors" (Callon, 2002, p. 210) for instance, vocational counsellors, human resources departments, parents and last but not least, the pupils themselves.

Figure 2 shows the graphic illustration of the five fields of competencies. The different fields of competencies (in the grey field, e.g., social competency) are subdivided in specific competencies (e.g., in the white field: "ability to communicate, ability to work in a team") that are then rated as a numeric value from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). This section of the competency profile is particularly telling when asking the analytical question: "What is omitted? What is taken for granted?" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 142–143). The numeric display of test results hides considerable information about the context in which the result was obtained, the intentions of actions or the mood of the person while performing the test. The different translations, implied in performing a test (observing, categorizing, scoring, adding up, and writing down), are invisibilized and "blackboxed." Results are displayed as a "mechanically objective" (Daston & Galison, 1992, p. 82) fact, as the way information is displayed "attempts to eliminate the mediating presence of the observer" (Daston & Galison, 1992, p. 82).

On the other side, the reduction of information into a numeric value substantially increases the generalizability and the comparability of information. Only a quantified display of information allows the recorded values to be compared, and thus to evaluate the competencies of a person. This process of translating and valuating different, previously incommensurable qualities into a common metric can be called "commensuration" (Espeland & Stevens, 2008, p. 408). Once commensurated, comparisons are possible, both within the same competency profile (in relation to their other competencies, e.g., student A is a rather "socially competent" person) and between persons (student A disposes of "higher" competencies than student B). It is important to highlight that it is an achievement of the document in the ethnomethodological sense that consists in "making the circumstances of their production invisible" (Wolff, 2004, p. 289).

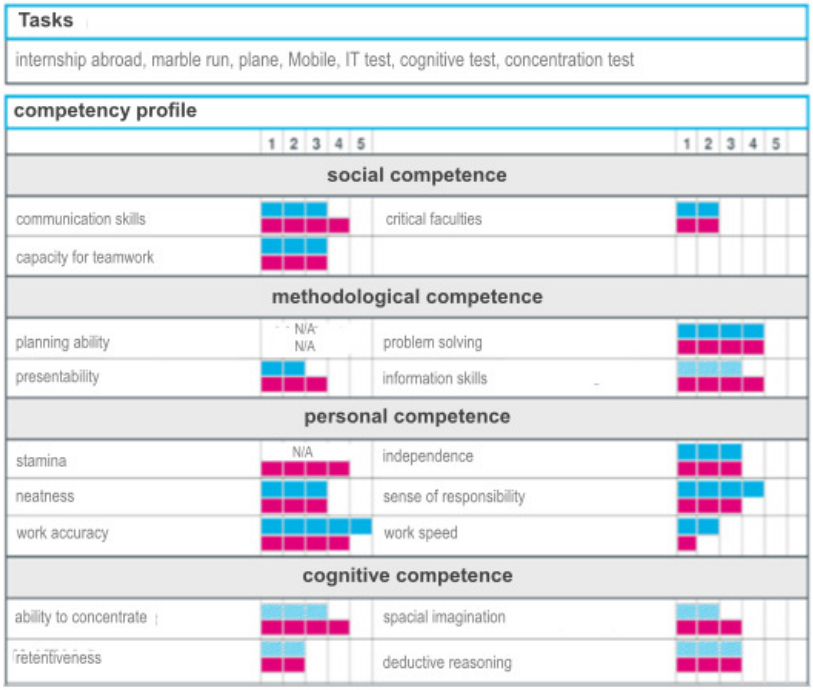


Figure 2. Graphic illustration of competencies in competency profiles.

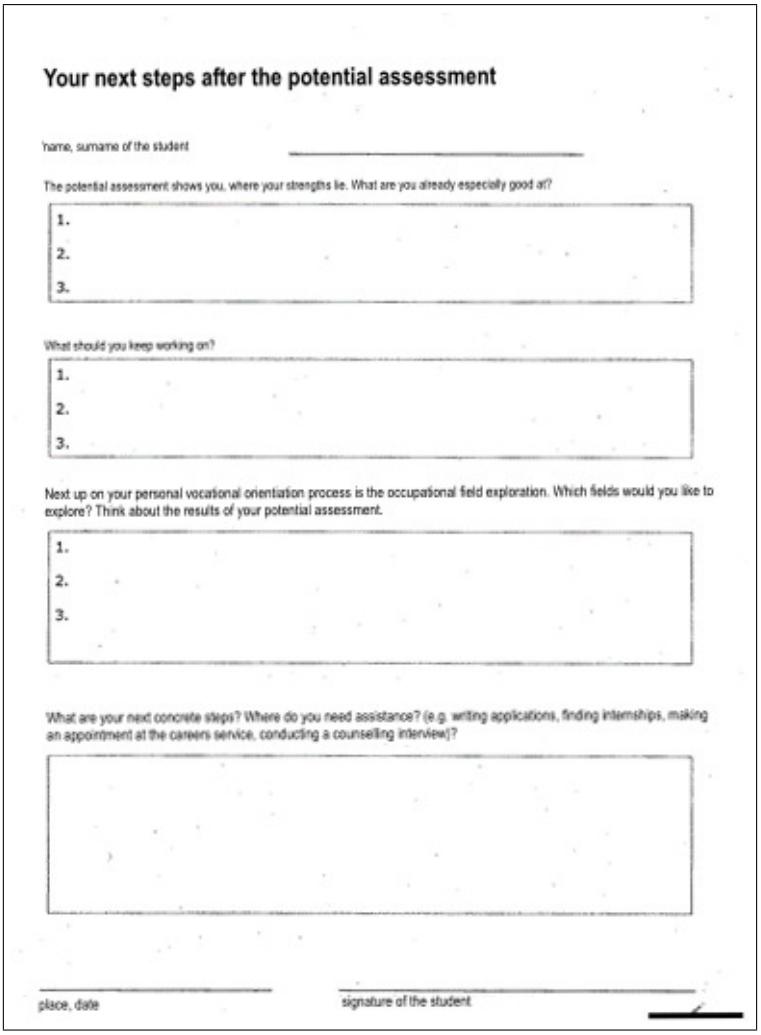
A specific feature of the so-called *Potenzialanalyse* in Germany is that it combines external assessment with self-assessment. This means, after each task during the assessment process, young people are asked to rate themselves. These ratings are also included in the competency profile in the graphic illustration (Figure 2) for each competency field self-assessment of the pupil (blue) with external assessment by the procedure (purple). At a glance, the reader of the document is confronted with a comparative illustration of derogations between the external assessment and the subjective self-appraisal of the person. In this illustration, subjective self-assessment and allegedly objective external assessment by the testing procedure is intertwined. The form transports a specific regime of visibility, that combines a specific way of "being seen" with an invitation to see and apprehend oneself through a specific evaluative matrix. With McLean and Hoskin (1998), one can argue that the form, qua its inscriptions, "configures the user" (McLean & Hoskin, 1998, p. 529) in a specific manner: The form, as a valid representation of knowledge, maps the pupil in terms of five categories of competencies, constructing an image of an individual who is potentially deficient in terms some of these categories.

The pupil is configured both as an examinee and primary object of grading, as well as a an individual capable and willing to reflect on oneself and to accept the epistemic authority of the test. It invites the user to perform a self-evaluation from the background of the evaluative categories figuring in the form. This applies even more as the official purpose of the analysis of potentials does not consist of a strict test of aptitudes measuring the fit between persons and jobs but aims at "encourage[ing] students to reflect on themselves" (BMBF, 2015, p. 3, author's translation). Pupils are thus not merely expected to receive the results passively. Through self-reflection, they also accept the authority of the external assessment and the obligation to transform themselves. Differences between the "subjective" self-assessment scores and the "objective" test scores demarcate deviance from the norm. This deviance from the norm becomes the object of an internal process of self-reflection. As the next figure shows, pupils are asked to individually reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, as identified in the competency assessment. The document displays a normalizing judgement that "makes it possible to qualify, to classify and… establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault, 1979, p. 184).

Once identified, the deviance from the norm can be made object of institutional scrutiny. Deviance is made "institutionally actionable" (Smith, 2005) for social workers, the school or career guidance professionals. As it is stated in a guideline of the *Bildungsketten* initiative for so-called "career start counsellors" (*Berufseinstigsbegleiter*innen*), "the results of the *Potenzialanalyse* should form the basis for the individual work with the young persons. They should give hints on what competences can be developed through individual support" (BMBF, 2013, p. 2, author's translation). Career start counsellors are financed by the federal employment agency and provide individual counselling in schools before graduation for young persons in "special need of support" according to the definition advocated by German legislation on employment promotion (Article 49). At least implicitly, the divergence of self-assessment and external assessment in a competency profile is equated with a legal category of being in need of special support. The production of a space of visibility of deviation from the norm thus has a double performative function. Firstly, it opens up a space of possibilities for the treatment of those young persons who bring in low competences, and more importantly, those whose self-assessment does not (yet) correspond to the external assessment. Secondly, it delineates a space of possibilities and restrictions for the internal reflection on future biographical pathways a young person may legitimately hold.

This performative aspect of the competency profile also becomes visible in its last section. Most profiles contain instruction for further use and additional forms to be filled in and signed by the pupil. The section called "Next Steps After the Potential Assessment" mostly figures at the very end of the competency assessment and provides information on the intended use of the document and the way it is transferred into successive practices. The document is structured into three sections deemed to be filled out by the pupil. The first section opens with the question: The potential assessment shows what your strengths are. What are you already particularly good at? The second section begins with the question: What should you work on in the future? It is telling that the first and second questions do not explicitly refer to the results described on the previous pages but leaves it to the pupils to judge by themselves which of the described competencies are to be evaluated as "strengths" and "weaknesses." As such, the completion of the form invites the pupil to an introspective self-exploration, a form of self-reflection that leads to choosing a specific evaluative vocabulary for self-description. The form invites to a valuation of the self from the background of a prospective process of self-discovery, and it fosters a specific, future-oriented, strategic posture towards oneself.

The subsequent section of the document (Figure 3) asks the student to write down three professional fields they want to explore based on the results of the assessment of potentials: "The next step of your personal career guidance process consist of the exploration of different occupational fields: Which occupational field do you want to explore? Please consider the results of the potential analysis" (from the competency profile). The first part of the sentence frames the choice of a future profession as a personal, individual matter to be constructed by the individual, and highlights its processual, open-ended character (career guid-



Your next steps after the potential assessment

name, surname of the student

The potential assessment shows you, where your strengths lie. What are you already especially good at?

1.
2.
3.

What should you keep working on?

1.
2.
3.

Next up on your personal vocational orientation process is the occupational field exploration. Which fields would you like to explore? Think about the results of your potential assessment.

1.
2.
3.

What are your next concrete steps? Where do you need assistance? (e.g. writing applications, finding internships, making an appointment at the careers service, conducting a counselling interview)?

place, date

signature of the student

Figure 3. Next steps after the competency assessment.

ance process) consisting of clearly defined consecutive steps. It re-inscribes this personal matter into a specific institutionalized event (the exploration of occupational fields are mandatory internships in the framework of the *Bildungsketten* program organized by the schools). The seemingly "open-ended," individualized process is channeled into a very specific and concrete desirable outcome (the mentioning of three occupational fields). The phrasing leaves no doubt that the results of the test are expected to be considered within the formally free and self-guided reflection process.

These results show that the test does not primarily aim at classifying individuals according to fixed statistical norms and matching their characteristics to specific job positions (otherwise, it would authoritatively propose a vocational field to be explored). Much more, it configures the user as a "responsible self-observer" (Born & Jensen, 2010, p. 328) that acts upon themselves. While the range of possible vocational choices is not authoritatively prescribed by the test, it positions the choosing individual to responsibly justify vocational choices with reasonable arguments, respecting his own personhood ("What are you good at?"), but also with respect to the external evaluation ("Please consider the results of the potential analysis"). The document contains a field for a signature of the pupil, conferring an official status to the document. The contractual form as an "enforceable exchange of promises" (Yeatman, 1998, p. 230), potentially holds the signing party accountable for the future, and the document may be invoked by different actors and institutions for exactly that purpose.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The exemplary analysis of competency profiles, aimed at reconstructing their rationale of construction, the way information is displayed and finally, the ways in which it configures its readers. I have argued that the document addresses the pupil and constructs them as a specific kind of person in the light of the evaluative framework of the test. The document addresses the reader as a "responsible self-observer" (Born & Jensen, 2010, p. 328), that acts upon themselves. These findings reflect theoretical accounts on testing that focus on their performative nature: Through enforcing a specific regime of visibility, tests "performatively produce what they pretend

to measure'' (Lemke, 2004, p. 267). As Hanson (1994, p. 4) puts it, the contemporary individual is "not so much described by tests as constructed by them."

The competency profile invites pupils to see and to describe themselves through the evaluative vocabulary of the test and, as such, come to know themselves as person disposing of or lacking the competencies measured. The specific performance of the competency profile consists in making the circumstances of its production (the testing process itself) invisible, and of making comparable different pupils through quantified commensuration. As such, they also provide a specific form of knowledge that is used both for the control, screening, and improvement of human capital of individuals by government actors, and for fostering processes of biographic self-optimization of pupils. Furthermore, as the analysis has shown, the competency profile potentially serves as an "immutable mobile" (Latour, 1987) that allows the test results to travel across space and time. As part of the larger actor network of the "educational chains" initiative, it links together and mediates a whole series of people and events, potentially coordinating the vocational choice processes of young persons with the institutional calendars and standardized career counselling activities of different organizations.

Our results demonstrate that competency profiles construct the process of choosing a job as an "individualized project of the self" (Dahmen, 2021, p. 228). In doing so, competency assessments potentially contribute to the reproduction of inequalities in post-secondary education through delegating "cooling out" processes from institutional gatekeepers to the interiority of persons. As described in the first section, in vocational training system pupils from the lower tracks of the school system (have to) adapt their job aspiration to certain possibilities when arriving at the end of obligatory schooling (Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002). The implicit message of the competency profile confirms the ideology of a "free choice" of vocational options. This invisibilizes structural barriers of the vocational training system, characterized by a restricted number of apprenticeship places in the most popular occupational fields.

While the pupil is addressed as formally free to choose possible occupational fields based on their inclinations, they are also asked to internalize the limitations of the external assessment, as proposed by the competency assessment. In doing so, the instrument "competency profile" potentially plays an important role for processes of "cooling out" (Walther, 2015). On the one side, it affirms the social value of individualized personhood and autonomous job choice in which each and every one can realize their very own inclinations and potentials, on the other side, it strives towards the legitimation of unequal positions of members of a society. Tests and testing are part of a "positivist meritocracy" (Hanson, 1994, p. 272) that promises a quasi-scientific placement of persons according to ability. The "mechanical objectivity" (Daston & Galison, 1992, p. 82) of competency assessments does give a scientific guise to the sorting processes at the end of obligatory schooling.

Cooling out processes imply that "that individuals do not only ascribe failure in achieving full social participation to own failure but accept lower social positions as adequate for themselves because and appropriate to their capacities" (Walther, 2015, p. 29). The competency assessments supply the subject with a "a new framework in which to see himself and judge himself" (Goffman, 1952, p. 456) and in which he comes to see himself as a person that does (not) dispose of specific competencies. Competency profiles spell out the space of the possible and the young persons (potentially) align their self-assessment to these categories: "As I am this or that kind of person, I might consider choosing this or that job" (from the competency profile).

The instrument invites the young person to apply the epistemic matrix of the instrument into their own self-scrutiny, and to align and synchronize the classifications of the instrument with their own self-understanding. The novelty of these new forms of subjectivation is—in comparison to cooling out processes performed by gatekeepers and teachers—that the limitation of structural possibilities (e.g., what possible jobs enter the larger field of envisioned futures) does not happen in a prescriptive way. Rather, the structure of competency tool strives towards a subjective incorporation of structural limitations. The adaptation of the "possible" to the "probable" (Bourdieu, 1990), the coupling between what you "want" and "what you can get" operates through a process of textually mediated self-formation. As Hanson (1994, p. 272) puts it, tests "not only condition the expectations and promises that society holds out for various categories of people but also color the expectations and prospects that individuals imagine for themselves."

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The New European Political Arithmetic of Inequalities in Education: A History of the Present

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Abstract
The article describes the emergence and development of positive epistemology and quantification tools in the dynamics of inequalities in education. It contributes to a history of the present at a time when datafication and experimentalism are reappearing in educational policies to justify the reduction of inequalities across international surveys and randomised controlled trials. This socio-history of metrics also sheds light on transformations about relationships historically established between the welfare state and education that have shaped the representation of inequalities and social programs in education. The use of large-scale surveys and controlled experiments in social and educational policies developed in the 1920s and 30s, even if their methods and techniques have become more sophisticated due to statistical progress. However, statistical reasoning is today no less persuasive in justifying the measurement of student skills and various forms of state intervention for "at-risk" children and youth. With the rise of international organisations, notably the European Commission, demographic issues related to school population and the reduction of inequalities have shifted. It is less a question of selecting the most talented or gifted among working-class students than of investing in human capital from early childhood to improve the education systems' performance and competitiveness for the lifelong learning economy and European social investment strategy. This article attempts to illustrate this new arithmetic of inequalities in education at the European level.

Keywords
education; epistemology; inequalities; metrics; policy; welfare

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1. Introduction

Through several chronological tables, Desrosières (1998, 2002) and Thévenot (2016) showed how statistical thought defines a way of thinking simultaneously the society, modalities of action within it, and its modes of description. Statistics are conceptualised, legitimised and institutionalised through time between sciences and the State. The statistical argument permanently combines a "tool of proof," strongly characterised by mathematical formalism and a "tool of coordination," implemented particularly by administrative registers and various survey methods.

Inspired by Desrosières and Thévenot, our article is based on research carried out by historians in social sciences and statistics, and discourse analysis based on materials produced by international organisations (reports, recommendations, technical, and statistical documents) that show how metrics have guided social policies in governing population with major consequences in knowing and measuring inequalities (Dolowitz et al., 2020; Foucault, 2002; Miller & Rose, 2008). Indeed, to acquire accurate knowledge and reliable measurements in social and educational policies, the State historically gave these sciences opportunities to master a calculative space and to produce cognitive and technical representations of inequalities.

Our research is situated in an international but heterogeneous space of sociological studies on quantification and the role of numbers in developing society and

the economy. Researchers inspired by the history and philosophy of sciences have studied the influence of statistics and probabilities on state administration and public policies (Gigerenzer et al., 1990; Hacking, 1990; Porter, 1995). Others have criticised the performativity of metrics (ranking, ratings, indicators, benchmarks) in the economy, organisations, and societies (O'Neil, 2016; Power, 1997). For example, Porter (1995) demonstrates how the authority produced by quantification and standardised calculations have influenced decision-making, while quantitative expertise has been developed in search of "mechanical objectivity." This authority and mechanical objectivity have combined and extended historically into policy areas controlled by the State and its bureaucratic administration. The authority of numbers is not only technical or methodological: It is also moral and social because the use of numbers responds to demands for justice, accountability, or impartiality. In the same vein, Espeland and Stevens (2008) explain, borrowing from Austin's theory of language, that quantification and numbers, like words, are part of grammar and conventions, which forge representations while possessing a perlocutionary dimension, even if their meaning may vary in time and space.

Like Lampland (2010), our article emphasises quantification techniques and their formal representation that are instrumentalised in the design of standards, but we do not study practices or the effects of quantification in making the self, behavioural changes, and individual experiences, including self-tracking and algorithms generated by digitalisation (Lupton, 2016; Neff & Nafus, 2016; Popkewitz, 2018). Even if we have previously studied the lifelong learning self and agency in the making of European statistics (Normand & Pacheco, 2014), our research is close to those examining comparisons and commensurations induced by the international extension of statistics into rankings and accountability tools and systems (Espeland & Sauder, 2016; Hutt, 2016, 2017). We have previously identified some modes of classification, categorisation and standardisation related to the fabrication of measurement in education and its informational structure embedded in European statistics (Normand, 2020). In doing this, we have followed French studies on quantification which, after Desrosières and Thévenot, based on the theory of conventions, have shown some links between social categorisations, quantification and conventions as well as the political economy of coding, or investments in a form that participate in the politics of numbers (Desrosières, 2011; Diaz-Bone & Didier, 2016; Thévenot, 1984, 2011, 2019). These perspectives, both pragmatic and historical, allow us to work on the socio-political and epistemic constellations that transform governmentality and the welfare state. We also characterise, in the following French studies, the role of quantification in the economisation of education, particularly neo-liberal reforms guided by human capital theory that frames educational activities and organisations from a market perspective (Callon, 2010; Callon & Muniesa, 2005; Chiapello & Walter, 2016; Muniesa, 2014).

Inspired by the sociology of quantification initiated by Desrosières and Thévenot, in choosing specific epistemic periods the first part of this article shows how political calculation networks and technologies have served to build population governance and welfare with some consequences for conventions related to inequalities in education (Bulmer, 1978; Normand, 2013, 2020): These tools, such as IQ tests, have been institutionalised to control and measure the intelligence of the population; statistical studies have been greatly used to justify and support social and educational policies; social experiments have been developed to target social interventions.

The second part of the article illustrates a certain continuity in these relationships between the welfare state, sciences, and population governance at the European level. However, knowledge and metrics developed by new governing sciences, even if they still aim to improve the "quality of the population," shape a metrology that can be named "new political arithmetic." Indeed, the latter strongly modifies technical, cognitive, and political representations as conventions in measuring inequalities. While PISA is a new measuring instrument of inequalities in education, based on differences in student achievement from psychometric tests, the international survey has also been part of continuous transformations related to equal opportunities, their metrics and conventions since the 1920s.

The article not only continues the history of statistical reasoning applied to education by showing some continuities and discontinuities related to established links between statistics, metrology, and the State, at a time the European Commission (EC) is more influential. From a history of the present, it also studies the demographic and population governmentality associated with reshaping metrics, as was the case in the 1920s and 30s, through new relationships and conventions set up between the welfare state, education, and large-scale surveys. It also demonstrates that this new governmentality in education, through statistical rationalisation and design, include policy concerns on the welfare states in Europe that necessarily impact education and its quantification.

2. Tests, Large-Scale Surveys, and Controlled Experiments: The Invention of Governing Sciences for the Welfare and Educative State

The history of the present aims to resist the presentism that characterises the study of politics and governments. Indeed, current socio-political arrangements and cultural meanings sometimes accommodate less perceptible transformations that could be highlighted by a genealogical approach. Here, we are interested in political, but also methodological and epistemological investments that have enhanced governing technologies and types of rationality that are still in use today. As Michel

Foucault did for his archaeology of knowledge, it is possible to distinguish different periods when epistemological and political conditions are met for new statements that transform social representations and systems of thought. Popkewitz (2013) takes up these ideas in education by showing how a certain social epistemology shaping knowledge and science in education is situated in specific historical and social formations. These systems of reason build discourses and categories used to understand educational issues but also to direct modes of existence among educators and children. Following these theoretical assumptions, we propose here to characterise some important historical moments in the invention of governing sciences that characterise stable and durable links between the welfare state, education, and metrics of inequalities, even if these relations are then called upon to be transformed. We are particularly interested in the state's unceasing quest for the "quality" of the population for which, according to some theories, education plays an important role, while it needs to select and guide people through education systems (which refers to measuring the capacities of the educated), and in mastering scale games for governmentality (through indicators and experimental methods).

Our first epistemic period (*the quest for large-scale surveys*) is related to the 1920s and 30s, when a part of US social sciences relied on statistics and methods inspired by natural sciences (Bulmer, 1984). Experimental and social research had established links with medicine and psychology, while the latter had become credible expertise for social reforms. These scientific standards were also widely implemented in the field of education. Gradually, positivist sciences based on statistical methods paved the way in the 1950s to social planning and large-scale surveys focusing on poverty and inequalities that are still in use today.

At the same time, in the UK, during the second epistemic period (*the welfare state, eugenics, and statistics*), eugenicist thinking was concerned about improving the population quality and selecting gifted and talented people for economic development. The alliance between sociologists, social reformers, charities, and eugenicists seemed self-evident (Bulmer, 1985). However, metrics in social sciences were scattered in local survey projects and large-scale surveys were only developed after WWII under the umbrella of a governmental service while they changed the representation of inequalities in education (Kent, 1985; Whitehead, 1985). The idea of "human stock" forged by eugenicists and social biologists has been later reformulated into "human capital" by economists.

In the 1950s, our last epistemic period (*social indicators, planning, and controlled experiments*), a new science of social indicators emerged in the US, followed by social experiments which legitimised new welfarist interventions and were progressively borrowed by the OECD and its member countries. This experimentalism served to advocate evidence-based methods disseminated in US welfare and education and later extended to an international audience through policy borrowing and lending (Normand, 2016).

2.1. The Quest for Large-Scale Surveys and the Institutionalisation of Governing Sciences

During the 1920s, US psychology abandoned an individualistic perspective in data collection to build more totalising statistical tools and approaches (Danziger, 1994, pp. 68–87). Administrators wanted school systems to rationally and efficiently allocate individuals according to their mental abilities. This implied new selective practices (standardisation of curricula, classifications by age, student testing) but also the choice of statistical populations according to standards inspired by the Galtonian orthodoxy (Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). As a result, mental testing played a central role in US psychology while, in the meantime, school administrators legitimised this academic discipline to lead reforms on behalf of efficiency despite racial and eugenicist segregation and selection (Callahan, 1962).

However, mental tests made it possible to work on individual differences and statistical series while classifying individuals according to eugenicist assumptions (Danziger, 1994, pp. 113–117). Studies on treatment groups were then published in specialist journals and such devices were adopted in psychology (Dehue, 2001). McCall (1923) enshrined the method in his textbook *How to Experiment in Education?* He justified this type of experiment with the possibility of saving money for the wasteful school administration. The book set out complex schemes of controlled experiments and randomisation for school districts.

At that time, part of the US sociology shared scientific and positivist views with psychology and justified empiricism based on systematic observations and "unbiased" and "ethically neutral" procedures (Bannister, 1987). With Franklin H. Giddings and his fellows at Columbia University, statistical studies were developed in this direction (Camic & Yue, 1994). Franklin Stuart Chapin, like Giddings, was attracted by Karl Pearson's thoughts in his book *The Grammar of Science* (1892). In *The Elements of Scientific Method in Sociology* (1914), he argued that statistical methods could establish universal laws for society and should be at the top of the hierarchy among methods used in social sciences (Bannister, 1987, pp. 144–160). During these years, Chapin's Department of Sociology was the locus in advocating these new conceptions under the umbrella of the American Sociological Association, but also the influence of George Lundberg and Harold A. Phelps (Platt, 1996, pp. 212–223). These sociologists were greatly inspired by the spread of the Vienna Circle's ideas, while John B. Watson's behaviourism and Percy W. Bridgman's operationalism strengthened the vision that social sciences could be brought closer to natural sciences.

Beyond these major epistemological and methodological premises, the type of research advocated by

Giddings and his fellows required a new scientific organisation. The latter was supported by major US foundations, notably the Rockefeller Foundation (Platt, 1996, pp. 142–150; Turner & Turner, 1990, pp. 41–45). The foundation helped to develop large-scale statistical surveys with the creation of the Institute for Social and Religious Research. Research funding was supplemented by other foundations (e.g., Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, Carnegie Corporation). For these institutions, social research was called to improve the social and physical well-being of populations but also to rationalise social activities through efficient management.

In 1923, the American Political Science Association and the American Sociological Society joined together to create a special council, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) to better coordinate research efforts and to develop so-called scientific methods. Charles Merriam, the head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago, managed the SSRC's activities with the Laura Spelman Foundation. During the Great Depression, many SSRC members participated in William F. Ogburn's report on recent social trends. Influenced by statisticians such as Pearson, the sociologist proposed a "comprehensive and unbiased examination of facts" through major surveys on the US society (Bannister, 1987, pp. 179–187). President Hoover, who had committed the US to broad social reforms, hoped that these surveys would provide a scientific and prospective vision for his federal welfare policy (Bulmer, 1983).

This brief account of the history of US social sciences sheds light on how the welfare state metrics were developed at the crossroads of large-scale surveys and social experimentation. By moving away from social work, and by claiming to become an objective science like psychology, sociology also asserted itself as a governing science, capable of guiding social policies. This trend was confirmed in the 1960s with the launch of anti-poverty programs, which were supported by large-scale surveys on inequalities in education, particularly the one launched by Tyler (1966) for the Johnson-Kennedy administration (the forerunner of the National Assessment of Educational Progress) and another by Coleman et al. (1966), which had a great impact on compensatory education policies in the US.

2.2. The Welfare State, Eugenics, and Statistics: The UK Political Arithmetic During the Inter-War Period

In the UK, during the 1920s, eugenics was inspired by Francis Galton and used knowledge on heredity and social biology as well as statistics to develop psychology and to measure intelligence (Sutherland & Sharp, 1984, pp. 25–56; Wooldridge, 1994). Karl Pearson was one of the main representatives of this research field. His Galton Eugenics Laboratory (1907–1933) was the most famous biometric research centre in the country. It revolutionised the application of statistical techniques by compiling voluminous data on populations. Orthodox eugenicists such as Pearson advocated the principles of natural selection and the strict application of biological laws, but natalists were more in favour of extending social legislation to protect children and to develop new institutions (guidance clinics, nursery schools, day-care centres). This new social philosophy wanted to provide adequate pensions, marriage bonuses, family allowances or tax reductions for the most talented individuals.

William Beveridge, the father of British welfare and then Director of the London School of Economics, after leading eugenicist surveys on fertility, promoted the idea of family allowances and wage supplements to raise birth rates. Orthodox eugenics, concerned about regulating the "human stock," gradually joined natalists and "positive" eugenics was finally promoted by researchers such as Alexander Carr-Saunders (Schneider, 2002; Soloway, 1990, pp. 193–202). At the London School of Economics (Scot, 2011), there was a strong interest in economics, statistics, and social biology for analysing social problems.

The Department of Social Biology was implemented in 1925 at the request of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, the one which had funded US research. Beveridge had appointed Lancelot Hogben to head the department (Wooldridge, 1994, pp. 263–270). Hogben wanted to promote a new "political arithmetic" by measuring the population quality and fighting against wasted talent while he was eager to challenge assumptions shared by eugenicist psychologists (Wooldridge, 1994). Nevertheless, Hogben supported the eugenicist vision of the planned elimination of undesirable types and characteristics within the society (Hogben, 1938). However, he encouraged Gray and Moshinsky to lead their research project that developed a radical critique against the psychometric orthodoxy and IQ testing for measuring social inequalities.

After WWII, David Glass, a disciple of Hogben, who had been appointed Professor of Demography at the London School of Economics, became the mediator between pre-war eugenics and the sociology of social mobility and large-scale surveys on social inequalities (Glass, 1954). In this intellectual climate, a group of sociologists including Floud, Halsey, and Martin undertook a study on the role of social selection in education and access to secondary schools (Halsey et al., 1956). Using the measurement of IQ and comparing their results with those of Gray and Moshinsky, they showed that middle-class scholarship students, when displaying the same intellectual abilities as middle-class children, equalised their chances of access.

Then, this nascent sociology of education began to study talents and environmental factors that impact intellectual development and academic achievement. It also raised some expectations about reducing waste and promoting a more egalitarian society (Halsey et al., 1961). It helped, along with other sciences, to promote the UK

comprehensive school, which then spread over internationally during the 1960s with a strong scientific and political focus on reducing inequalities in school achievement. These ideas were borrowed by the OECD. Under the dual influence of the UK and the US, OECD member countries embarked on school democratisation policies to facilitate the access of working-class students to secondary and higher education, while social class—replacing IQ—became the variable used to analyse and compare inequalities in education.

2.3. Social Indicators, Planning and Controlled Experiments in the US

During the 1950s, the support of US foundations for local social studies had declined to favour large-scale surveys developed by research institutes. This new research model had strong implications (Turner & Turner, 1990, pp. 105–121). The accumulation of statistical data gave a heuristic advantage to structuralist and functionalist theories that were promoted by researchers such as Talcott Parsons, Robert K. Merton, and Paul F. Lazarfeld. At the same time, new methodologies for investigating social inequalities were developed (Haverman, 1987). This explains the success of James Coleman's large-scale survey supported by the Kennedy-Johnson administration with the technical support of the Educational Testing Service, an agency conceptualised during WWII within the Navy to improve IQ testing (the transition from IQ to SATs for the entrance examinations in US universities; Lemann, 2000).

In the late 1950s, the Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare published social indicators in a document titled Health, Education and Welfare Indicators and Social Trends. William Ogburn's students were involved in the development of these new statistics (Cobb & Rixford, 1998). Under the leadership of Raymond Bauer, Albert Biderman, and Bertram Gross, social indicators were considered tools for guiding welfare policies (Bauer, 1966). This work was a follow-up to Ogburn's report, and it was enriched by articles published in the journal *Social Indicators Research*. It inspired the OECD methodology in building indicators on inequalities in education, which were judged useful for planning, until the publication of the Education at Glance series (Henry et al., 2001).

Meanwhile, federal agencies, notably the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) were implementing public policy evaluation programs by empowering social science researchers within the Planning, Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS). The Federal Ministry of Health, Education and Welfare was also developing the evaluation of social programs (Haverman, 1987, pp. 166–176). These were the first steps towards accountability policies that were later imposed in education as a measurement of student inequalities between students, particularly through the reuse of the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), originally designed by Ralph Tyler and later resumed by the Educational Testing Service (Jones, 1996; Lehmann, 2004). In the late 1960s, the psychologist Donald T. Campbell had also published an article that became a reference for evaluators (Campbell, 1969). *Reforms as Experiments* advocated the idea of extending the "laboratory logic" to all of society (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Together with his colleague Stanley, Campbell set a new "standard" for the social sciences by considering the researcher as a "methodological servant of the experimental society" (Campbell, 1975).

Subsequently, these ideas of "social experiments" were strongly developed in a political climate of reducing public expenditure due to the Vietnam War's consequences, as social programs were losing their scope in favour of more targeted and less costly schemes. The first large-scale social experiment was conducted in New Jersey by the Poverty Research Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison after a request from the Office of Economic Opportunity, the federal agency in charge of fighting against inequalities. The 1970s was the "decade of experimentation" (Greenberg & Robins, 1986). Millions of dollars from the federal budget were spent on social programs based on controlled experiments in welfare, policing, and justice (Young et al., 2002). They were used to evaluate some incentive effects of social reforms, particularly in studying educational behaviours among young people through various programs: New Chance, LEAP (Leadership, Education and Athletics in Partnership) in Ohio, and Learnfare in Wisconsin. In education, one of the most important experiments was the evaluation of class size reduction in Tennessee (Mosteller & Boruch, 2002). US evidence-based research in welfare and education policies was later legitimised internationally through the OECD (references blinded for peer-review). It also served as a landmark for human capital economists to improve their methods and analytical models through experimentalism.

3. The European Political Arithmetic and Social Investment Strategy: Between International Surveys and New Governing Sciences

Today, in Europe, the new conceptual and methodological apparatus of the welfare state corresponds to changes in social interventions targeting populations. Ideas for improving the "quantity" and "quality" of the population, or the "human stock," have been replaced in a common vision shared by social reformers in terms of "employability," "inclusion" and "care." The vocabulary of "soft skills" or "special needs" has replaced the eugenicist lexicon (idiots, backwards, retarded, under-gifted or unfit students) used to describe students "at risk" who suffer from cognitive, affective, sexual, social, and emotional "deficits." These new categories are not only shaping representations, but they are also produced by knowledge and metrics forged by new political assemblages

involving multiple agents and institutions (Maire, 2020; Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2020).

By political assemblages, we mean the empowerment of different epistemic communities, expert groups and policymakers gathered at the national level and around the European Open Method of Coordination (OMC; see Normand, 2010). Actor-network theory makes it possible to study these assemblages in education by analysing alliances, circulation and translation within different spaces and calculation centres from the local to the global (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick & Landri, 2012; Latour, 2005). This sociology of measurement helps to characterise some principles and components related to this international and European calculability as political instrumentalism and technology (Gorur, 2014). Between science and government, metrics articulate tools, knowledge, and agents which bypass the State and its national sovereignty (Gorur, 2011). However, similarly to the 1920s and 30s, demographic issues such as population governance remain at stake for policymakers. According to EU reports, the ageing of the population, as well as the welcoming of new migrants and women in the workforce raise concerns about maintaining a sufficient employment rate to ensure the global competitiveness of the European economy. Early childhood education, as well as social inclusion and youth "at risk" appear to challenge national education policies and to call for a new relationship between education and the welfare state.

Consequently, the epistemological and metrological matrix of the welfare state, as it has been analysed in the first part of this article, is redefined. A new alliance between psychology and economics leads to new metrics combining tests, indicators/benchmarks, social experiments, and large-scale studies. They benefit from a growing recognition of evidence-based research methods and big data, while international and European comparative surveys increasingly guide national policymaking. Indeed, PISA survey metrics promoted by the OECD and the EC have become standards to measure investment in human capital, the inequality gap in school achievement, and the performance of education systems.

In the last section of this article, we illustrate this "new European arithmetic" which transforms conventions of inequalities in education, while promoting new population governmentality and investment in education, beyond the rhetoric on a knowledge-based economy and social cohesion.

The challenge is no longer to promote a "talent pool" or "birth control" through supportive social policies, but to prevent school drop-out risks, to ensure early investments in human capital, and to develop lifelong learning cognitive and non-cognitive skills for enhancing employability and competitiveness on the European labour market. PISA and its components have replaced mental tests in measuring student skills to reduce educational inequalities.

The statistical argument has also changed. Whereas it had been based on governing student populations during compulsory schooling, particularly by scrutinising guidance and selection methods and their effects as they are revealed by major surveys, and discussing different ways of social reproduction and meritocracy, the economisation of statistical reasoning, through new metrics, has led to a focus on human capital and its psychological features, while also contributing to the analysis of input-output relations in terms of effectiveness and performance. Thus, measuring inequalities has been converted into detecting achievement and performance gaps throughout lifelong learning according to predictive patterns that substitute a neo-liberal rationale for eugenic assumptions.

Finally, in the last section, we analyse how links between the welfare state and education are also transformed. The universalist, redistributive and planning state, regulated by social indicators, becomes both experimentalist and investor, eager to control its social costs and to rationalise its interventions towards at-risk students who are selected in limited educational programs and assessed by most recent econometric and evidence-based methods.

3.1. Measuring Skills and Targeting Youth at Risk: A New Definition of the Welfare State Based on Human Capital Investment

Among economists, the definition of "human stock" has evolved. Initially focused on "degeneration," "deficiency" and testing the "unfit," it gradually took a more positive turn in promoting the "talent pool" and "investment in human capital." It opened access to secondary and higher education promoted by the OECD during the 1970s. Today, the theory of human capital is based on a predictive conception of children's development based on measuring skills from an early age, which would facilitate their inclusion and employability in the labour market required by the knowledge economy.

Leading economists, such as Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, are also interested in international surveys because they consider that they measure the quality and efficiency of education systems and they predict human capital investment quite well (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). With other metrics designed and relayed by psychologists, they developed research and studies on the limitation of school dropouts, early school leaving and the improvement of cognitive, social and emotional skills for "children at risk." Therefore, randomised controlled trials promoted by these "experimental economics" penetrate the social and educational field which is considered to be a vast laboratory.

These conceptions of human capital are also defended by Esping-Andersen, the theorist of the New Welfare State (Esping-Andersen et al., 2001). For him, future cohorts of very modest young people, due to low fertility, will have to support a large and quickly-growing elderly population. It is, therefore, necessary to invest in the productivity of young people as early as possible

to ensure a sustainable welfare state in Europe over the coming decades.

The other explanation lies, according to Esping-Andersen, in the rapid increase in skills that are required by the knowledge economy. Reforms in European countries need to target young people who leave school early and have higher unemployment rates. These low-skilled people are unlikely to obtain high pensions and risk poverty at the end of their lives. Cognitive (and non-cognitive) skills are therefore essential to ensure good career paths and lifelong learning, to maximise the "return on investment."

Finally, as Esping-Andersen argues, it is important to fight against child poverty by reducing the economic precariousness of mothers at the bottom of the income scale and to promote their inclusion into employment. The other mechanism is to support parents' investment in their children's cognitive development. Interventions should take the form of targeted measures for "at-risk" children identified in early childhood and at the lowering stage of compulsory schooling.

Compared to eugenics, the argument appears much more progressive. It is no longer selecting the best talents and most gifted from early childhood, but investing in the cognitive development of students facing the greatest difficulties in school achievement. However, the predictive dimension attached to risks related to the loss of human capital is part of the same rationalist calculation to reduce inequalities between students, whereas metrics developed by psychologists, endorsed by economists, make this calculation objective and comparative.

3.2. Statistical Reasoning and the Economisation of Lifelong Learning

At the European level, PISA data have been gradually included as indicators for the OMC while human capital economists have created a network to advise the EC on education policies. The European Expert Network on Economics of Education introduces itself as a "think tank" aiming to improve decision-making and policy-making in the European education and training area (Normand, 2010). The OMC is based on quality indicators and benchmarks that monitor education systems in compiling statistical data (Alexiadou et al., 2010).

This statistical system for lifelong learning has been designed to facilitate the recognition of learning activities outside the formal education system (self-training, on-the-job training) and to value individual investment in education and training. Demographic challenges are one main motive used to improve human capital through lifelong learning as an alternative way to compulsory schooling developed during the 20th century (Normand, 2020). The OMC metrics include, in addition to PISA data, indicators on "school dropout" rates, early school leaving, and investment in education that are particularly valued by human capital economists.

The economic reasoning behind this European statistical building was earlier formulated by Tuijnman (2003), a former economist for the World Bank and the European Investment Bank. He was also involved in the development of major international surveys. For him, skills development in education can be represented as a production function, corresponding to a mathematical expression linking inputs (physical, financial, and human capital) to outputs (measuring success in different skills, values, and attitudes). Lifelong learning is seen as an "insurance policy" to minimise "market risks" associated with uncertain costs and risks in human capital investment.

This argument shows how European statistics legitimise an economic conception of paths and careers throughout people's lives, as well as a kind of new lifelong learning agency framed by the certification of skills, which opens times for greater mobility and flexibility on the European labour market (Normand & Pacheco, 2014). The methodology of most economists, according to McCloskey (2002), is also based on a belief in positivism. Rhetoric is the art of imposing appearances on others to gain an advantage. The rhetoric of positivists has a strong persuasive power because it takes a form that has already succeeded in persuading most people: That of the natural sciences. By using this rhetoric, economists hope to convince as many people as possible that their discourse is more valuable than those of other experts or policymakers, and to gain economic (income) and social (reputation) benefits, especially from international organisations. They also build barriers to entry into the market of economists so that individuals claiming the title of economist are obliged to use their language, which is based on mathematics and statistics. Through this language, persuasion is achieved through the production of arguments and not necessarily empirical evidence. It is developed through the coherence, fluidity, or simplicity of the discourse under the cover of statistical significance tests which condition the publication of results, even if these tests are often subject to methodological bias.

3.3. The European Commission and Its Social Investment Strategy: Towards a New Welfarist Education?

The EC social investment strategy aims to sensitise European countries to implement new welfare state interventions through a vision combining economic competitiveness, innovation, knowledge society and human capital (EC, 2013a, 2013b). This European strategy challenges past welfare policies and targets people and their skills to maximise their opportunities in contributing to European jobs and growth through the development of social innovation and entrepreneurship. It explains why the EC has defined priority areas at the crossroads of welfare and education: Early childhood education and care, youth cognitive skills, behavioural knowledge, and early school leaving and drop-outs.

Endorsing this new conception of welfare, some countries have been engaged in social activation

policies since the mid-1990s, mainly in Northern Europe (Hemerijck, 2013). This approach gained momentum after the publication of Esping-Andersen's book *Why We Need a New Welfare State* (2002), under the Belgian presidency of the European Union, after the OMC had been launched. Since 2010, which was the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion, the EC has taken up these new welfarist concepts to formulate its Europe 2020 strategy "for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (EC, 2010). Then, the Social Investment Package for Growth and Cohesion (Hemerijck, 2018) was created. The SIP identifies priority policy areas and target populations for social investment. In 2015, the EC carried out a comparative review of member states' respective progress in implementing these policies (EC, 2015), and then in 2017 established the "European principles of social rights" to "build a more social and fairer Europe" (European Commission, 2018, p. 31).

The EC social investment strategy promotes a conception of the welfare state as an "investor" in policies capable of activating the "capabilities" of young people, facilitating their adaptation to new "social risks" and reducing their reliance on social assistance (Morel et al., 2012). Shaping an "autonomous," "responsible," and "competent" individual is the main objective in terms of employability and inclusion into the labour market. This new role of the welfare state as an investor in human capital is justified in terms of early intervention, the development of cognitive and non-technical skills throughout life. It is also formulated in the idea of a "return on investment" after a given period of training in terms of efficiency and productive performance. These assumptions are very close to theories shared by human capital and new welfare theorists.

The welfare state is also considered an "experimenter." According to EU documents, the development of social experiments and innovations must be supported by programs and funding mechanisms such as tax incentives that extend the welfare third sector, beyond non-profit organisations, to develop a European market open to business and social entrepreneurship (Nicholls & Murdock, 2011). These social experiments and innovations have to be directed towards "at-risk populations," with some capacities of dissemination and scaling-up when their effectiveness is proven. Recommendations are also addressed to promote policy evaluations based on classical instruments related to social investment as well as those borrowed from evidence-based research methods. In addition, private actors are also asked to develop a range of assessment tools for their social impact and actions (ROI, scoreboards, social audits, benchmarking, cost-benefit analysis, quality of life indices, and triple bottom line). In summary, the EC is preparing member states to welcome the US social experiment and evidence-based research paradigm into the European welfare and educative state.

4. Conclusion

What can we learn from this article characterising some diffuse and complex policy borrowing and lending mechanisms and partially explaining why social investment metrics are currently developed at the European level? Firstly, issues of welfare and education must be considered simultaneously to analyse the production of knowledge and tools measuring social inequalities. This knowledge depends on governing sciences, which affect the modalities of the welfare state interventions and the representation of populations at stake. Metrics are used to define the quantity and quality of these populations, but this definition and measurement varies from time to time. Even if human capital investment remains a strong argument, universalist policies seem progressively abandoned in favour of more welfare-targeted and experimental programs considered less costly and more profitable for reducing inequalities. Similarly, experimentalism and positivism gain a new legitimacy in measuring social and educational interventions, particularly through indicators and benchmarks, randomised controlled trials and evidence-based research methods.

Demographic challenges are still major concerns for welfarist reformers who are eager to reproduce a skilled population and sustaining economic development. At the same time, governing sciences have been transformed to consider (and also to justify) new modes of training and skills expected from the labour market but also changes in welfare programs more open to business, social innovation and entrepreneurship.

Of course, the economic rationale is not alone in legitimising this new trend. As it can be observed in the past, reformist arguments are also mobilised to advocate changes for social justice and the reduction of inequalities. Today, there are many voices to defend social inclusion, gender equality, second-chance programs, soft skills, etc. The transformation of welfare is also based on reformist proposals and projects carried by organisations and activists committed to making the life of people better and reducing social inequalities. However, in the process of rationalising welfare state interventions and adapting them to the labour market, as well as to cost-efficiency measurements related to budgetary constraints, metrics also serve politics by other means.

By adopting a history of the present, this article has sought to take a reflexive and critical distance from reformist discourses that take data provided by large surveys and other big data as evidence. This genealogical approach shows that issues of governing school populations, but also of selecting, reproducing, and recognising individual capacities, reveal certain social and political conventions on inequalities. These conventions are never stabilised: They evolve with the progress of quantification techniques, but also with changing values, beliefs, and interests, about what is fair and good for educating the young generation. This is also a matter of constructing equivalence between metrics and norms,

which corresponds to equivalent words in Latin: *norma*, the square that measures and the rule that prescribes.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

"You Can Make a Difference": Teachers' Agency in Addressing Social Differences in the Student Body

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Abstract
Teachers are key players in transforming the education system (van der Heijden et al., 2015). They shape educational processes, influence school policies, and make day-to-day decisions that have a direct effect on students (Vähäsantanen, 2015). Yet we currently know very little about whether they can contribute to the creation of social equality of opportunity. This article focuses by way of example on the experiences and interpretative schemes of teachers in Germany, as the country is known for its highly selective school system. It draws on data from an exploratory study based on 20 narrative interviews (Rosenthal, 2018) with schoolteachers at three comprehensive schools in East and West Germany, which were selected because comprehensive schools in Germany see themselves as a more equal-opportunity form of education. The article begins by identifying four types of teacher action orientations in addressing the social differences of schoolchildren. Unexpectedly, only a few teachers exhibited a socially conscious inclination to act—for example, by providing targeted support to schoolchildren from socially disadvantaged households. In the second step, by comparing teacher biographies, school environments, and historical imprints, the article attempts to identify certain conditions under which teachers perceive themselves as responsible for addressing social differences among students. Beyond illustrating the interplay of biographical experiences and school culture, the study's east–west contextualization opens up a new perspective for examining the lingering implications of the German half-day schooling model even after the introduction of all-day schooling in 2003. One possible conclusion is that the transformation of the German school system from a half-day to an all-day model has not taken the tasks of teachers into account, which, as this article points out, would be important in making them aware of schoolchildren's different social backgrounds and their effects on achievement.

Keywords
comprehensive schools; educational inequalities; Germany; teachers; school policies; social support

Issue
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1. Introduction

The German education system is highly selective. In general, after the fourth school year, schoolchildren are sorted into a three-tier school system on the basis of performance, with each tier leading to different qualifications. It is a selective process in which the student's social background is the central predictor of educational success or failure (Becker, 2003; Pietsch & Stubbe, 2007). These outcomes are explained by the interplay of two factors: first, the early tracking (after the fourth school year) that is typical in Germany and the accompanying parental decision about transitioning to secondary school (Boudon, 1974); and second, the non-neutral expectations of the schools themselves, which tend to favor middle-class behaviors (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998). The role of teachers in the reproduction and transformation of educational inequalities within this system has been widely acknowledged but is currently not fully understood (Fullan, 1993; Li & Ruppar, 2021). This article focuses on teachers as important players in addressing and tempering the impact of social

inequality on education associated with students' different social backgrounds.

After an overview of the current state of research, I present the design of this study, which explores teachers' experiences and interpretative schemes through interviews. In line with the premises of Blumer's concept of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969), I understand teachers as powerful actors. I identify four types of action orientations presented by teachers. I then briefly introduce these orientations and discuss how they can contribute to reproducing or transforming social inequality. It is on this basis that I pose this highly relevant question: Under which conditions do teachers provide targeted support to schoolchildren from socially disadvantaged households? My findings suggest that the few socially sensitive teachers draw on their own biographical experiences and organizational goals to justify their actions in addressing equal opportunities. It becomes clear that strategies of action aimed at equalizing opportunities require special conditions that are rare in Germany.

2. Teachers' Role in the Reproduction of Social Inequalities

The role of teachers in the reproduction of educational inequality has been observed repeatedly (Li & Ruppar, 2021). The decisive factor is their perception of the pupils' social class, which they negotiate in relation to the expectations of the school and how the students adapt in response to those expectations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998). In Germany, all teachers are legally bound to provide equal opportunities (Article 3 of the German Basic Law) and support services in cases of underachievement, but this does not always happen. Bourdieu-inspired habitus research explains this as an entrenchment of teacher thinking in *middle-class ideals* that are central to the reproduction of social inequality (Lange-Vester, 2012, 2015; Schumacher, 2002). As research shows, this is the case for all teachers, whether they are upwardly mobile or status preservers (Kampa et al., 2011; Kühne, 2006). Most of them have proven themselves in school and are convinced of both the functionality and fairness of performance-based selection in the education system (Becker & Birkelbach, 2011; Lange-Vester, 2015). In keeping with the findings of Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963), teachers' actions can be explained by their membership in the school organization. Especially at the intersection of status transitions, where teachers act as *gatekeepers*, it becomes apparent that they become actors of institutional discrimination in a selective education system (Gomolla & Radtke, 2009). As part of this gatekeeping, they relate their expectations to the supposed requirements of the secondary education system, such as the need for a supportive network (Hollstein, 2008). Here, too, it becomes apparent that teachers disadvantage the disadvantaged and favor the advantaged, a phenomenon known as the Matthew effect (Merton, 1968). Research on the teaching profession points to the influence of *biographical socialization* (Fabel-Lamla, 2004; Lortie, 2007) and discusses the need for biographical reflection. Ethnographically inspired educational research also points to the importance of the *classroom setting*, in which teachers are continuously required to categorize or rank students under temporal and situational pressures (Kalthoff, 1996; Zaborowski, 2011). The process of selection or sorting schoolchildren from one type of school to another overrides the pedagogical process that aims to educate and socialize children (Ballantine et al., 2017; Streckeisen et al., 2007).

Information on how teachers can be enabled to create social equality in opportunities is rare even though it is a mammoth task that faces all European countries in equal measure. Out of five interpretive schemes among teachers, a study by Streckeisen et al. (2007) identified one type that prefers to support pupils rather than to single them out. These are social-democratically politicized and pedagogically child-centered teachers who work in inclusive comprehensive schools (referred to as *Gesamtschule* in Germany; Lange-Vester et al., 2019; Streckeisen et al., 2007). The state of research indicates that teachers are not to be understood as free-floating actors, as is often the case in interview studies. Their actions must always be considered in the context of their embedding in the school organization and social environment. Widening this perspective through reviewing the international literature points to a connection between educational politics, social orders, and teachers' activities. Teachers in the Finnish or Canadian school systems see themselves as having a stronger responsibility to support disadvantaged students than those in the German system (Artiles, 2011; Vähäsantanen, 2015). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study from 2003 stated that students in Germany felt less supported than in 22 other OECD countries (Geißler & Weber-Menges, 2010).

However, the conditions under which teachers perceive themselves as able to address social differences among students—and educationally disadvantaged students in particular—and as responsible for doing so still need to be understood further.

3. Design and Methods

This study is exploratory and specifically looks at teachers who can be expected to develop an orientation for creating social equality. To clarify this predilection, I draw on Blumer's understanding of actors in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), which maintains that actors subjectively interpret their social realities and act on the basis of these interactively negotiated and situationally generated interpretations. According to this concept, people act out and reproduce social reality on a daily basis according to their interactively generated interpretations of this reality ("interpretative schemes"), but they can also reject or transform it (Schwalbe, 2008).

If teachers therefore understand social inequality as a challenge to pedagogical action, then they also develop corresponding strategies for action. These (inter)actions do not emerge in an entirely new or free space but are rather "interlinked."

Having an interest in meaning-making and interpretative schemes means being sensitive to the interactions that one has with others and society at large. Cultural or socio-historical contrast is a good way to include this perspective. As a consequence, my empirical study also explores a socio-historical contrast by means of an east–west comparison in Germany. The focus here is on the type of school that has made the creation of equal opportunities a central part of its agenda in Germany since the 1970s: the comprehensive school (Tillmann, 1988).

I will now explain the decisions behind this study design, after which I will present the basic data that underpin this study.

3.1. Socio-Historical Contrast

It is well known that divergences in teachers' orientations and interpretative schemes are consistent with the education system as well as socio-cultural influences (Derouet, 1992). Even within Germany, there are regional differences that stem from the federal structure of education, as the country's education policy falls under the jurisdiction of its federal states. Even today these can be traced back to two socio-historically and politically divergent systems, those of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). That lends itself to a natural comparison: Alongside the socialist school system (*Einheitsschule*), which made proportional equality of opportunity an ideological goal, there was a selective, tiered school system, still dominant today, that was based on the meritocratic principle (Geißler, 1993; Solga, 1995; von Below et al., 2013). This might explain why Zaborowski (2011) and Hollstein (2008) found evidence of divergent educational concepts and perceptions of inequality in East and West Germany. Research on justice also shows that equality is still negotiated as a central principle of justice in East Germany, whereas in West Germany the meritocratic idea of performance is predominant (Noll & Christoph, 2004).

In this study, I focus on federal states with comparable educational policies (von Below et al., 2013): Brandenburg (of the former GDR) and Lower Saxony (of the former FRG). It is worth noting here that teachers in Brandenburg underwent a radical system-transformation process after the unification of Germany in 1989–1990. This transformation led the teachers to experience multiple uncertainties; they were retrained, whereas everything remained the same for their colleagues in Lower Saxony. The question this raises is whether there is a persistent east–west divide between teachers' understandings of their responsibilities, especially with regard to social inequalities.

3.2. Comprehensive School

For my sample, I engaged in organizational case studies (e.g., expert interviews with school heads, analysis of reports, and observations in everyday school life) with three comprehensive schools.

The comprehensive school, which starts after the fourth school year and is designed to lead its pupils to all possible qualifications, is quite common internationally (e.g., Denmark, France, Finland, UK) but remains an uncommon school option in Germany. Only 10 percent of all students in Germany attend this type of school. Although comprehensive schools could be observed to have a noticeably positive effect on the creation of equal opportunities during the 1970s (Fend, 1976), more recent statistics have indicated that the heterogenization of the school system has diluted this previously striking effect (Maaz et al., 2013). Comprehensive schools have since moved away from the original idea oriented along the lines of the Finnish school system; they now award numerical grades, offer courses differentiated by performance, and provide "open" voluntary afternoon care—as opposed to "bound" all-day care—that is organized by external professionals.

The three selected institutions have the following typical differences: Schools A and B in Brandenburg followed the GDR polytechnic school model up to 1991. Whereas School A has not implemented newer pedagogical concepts and discourses, the school head in School B initiated a course of participative reform, which introduced a closer parental involvement and instituted a "bound" all-day concept. Since the end of the 1990s, the lack of profile-building at School A has caused an unintentional "brain-drain" effect. It has had trouble attracting and retaining high-achieving students. At the same time, School B has acquired a good reputation for itself. In contrast, School C in Lower Saxony, which has been a comprehensive school since the early 1970s, is typical of the rare West German reform-pedagogical counterculture. It has earned an image as a "special" (Levin, 2008) and yet popular school that features obligatory all-day schooling, no differentiation of schooling along performance lines, and no numerical grading until the end of the eighth school year. The culture of School C aims to reduce social differences, whereas schools A and B do not follow a similarly clear concept. Schools such as these likewise provide different frameworks for the everyday activities of teachers. But do these frameworks have any impact at all on teachers' day-to-day activities?

3.3. Interview Collection and Analysis

At the heart of this study are 20 interviews with teachers who were over 50 years of age at the time the interviews were conducted and thus socialized in the different political systems of the GDR and the FRG. With this empirically informed contrast, this interpretative study embeds the teachers' subjective views in the specifics of both an

organizational and a socio-historical context in order to take seriously the challenge of the interplay of qualitative educational research (see, e.g., Mehan, 1992).

In the interviews, stimuli were specifically used to produce narratives about their biographies and the situations they experienced in everyday school life (Rosenthal, 2018). The focus was on telling stories with the narrative constraints of detailing, condensation, and story closure (Schütze, 2014), which is a helpful interview strategy to overcome the very common patterns of justification and argumentation. Asking, for example, to tell the story of the situation with a boy sitting under the table produces a different kind of data than asking that teacher to justify how he or she handled the same action.

The interviewed teachers were recruited through project presentations in three schools between 2011 and 2013. All but two of the teachers in the sample are female. This is not particularly surprising given that nearly 70 percent of German teachers are female. Nine teachers in the sample are upwardly mobile, which is uncommon because teachers in Germany are mainly from academic backgrounds (Cramer, 2010), although this state of research is often disputed owing to poor data on the subject (Kampa et al., 2011; Lange-Vester, 2012, 2015; Lange-Vester et al., 2019). The teachers in the sample represent all disciplines and variously teach from the fifth to the 13th school year.

The fully transcribed material was analyzed in three steps. First, the text types were differentiated in order to distinguish between narration, argumentation, and description (Schütze, 2014). The aim here was to assume a homology of narratives and experiences (Rosenthal, 2018) that would be fruitful for the analysis of action orientations. The narrations were then analyzed with sequence-analytical methods and merged into case descriptions, with a particular interest in reconstructing latent interpretative schemes and action orientations. Following this, I proceeded by systematically comparing the data within each interview and across the interviews. This ultimately led to my identification of the four action orientations detailed below. The next step was guided by a coding paradigm (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) that I adapted into two variants—one for teachers' transformative role and another for their reproductive role (see, e.g., Behrmann, in press).

This article therefore presents four action orientations of teachers and examines the conditions under which the idea of a more equal comprehensive school affects their actions.

4. Teachers' Action Orientations and the Reproduction of Social Inequality

My empirical material makes clear that nearly all teachers consider the reproduction of educational inequalities to be a challenge in the current school system. But only a few teachers exhibit a socially conscious inclination to counter-act this tendency.

4.1. Teachers' Action Orientations

The four identified action orientations differ in terms of how the parents are involved as well as in the attribution of responsibility for educational success and failure (see Table 1). I will briefly present each of these and then discuss the extent to which they aim to create equal opportunities in daily school life.

4.1.1. Pupils as Individualized Achievers (I)

A teacher who has been at School B in Brandenburg for 26 years outlines her educational goal as follows:

> Yes, what I have always tried to pass on to my pupils is the fact that they have to work hard, you have to work hard, even if you don't always feel like it… and it is also up to every child nowadays….Every child has the possibility to also achieve such a [successful] path. (Teacher D, School B; all quotes from the interviews have been translated by the author)

This teacher later expands on the biographical experience of her own educational ascent. She believes in the meritocratic promise of achievement without taking into account the different starting positions afforded by different social backgrounds. From this teacher's point of view, pupils themselves are responsible for their own successes and failures. Teachers with this orientation also have no interest in gaining detailed knowledge of the pupils' living environments. Becoming close to the pupils runs counter to their professional self-image and the meritocratic ideal: Family life should not have any effect on school life. Thus, in this strategy of action, the teachers treat all achievements equally, regardless of the pupils' social background.

4.1.2. The Engagement of Third Parties (II)

If a student is not able to keep up in class, teachers with this orientation contact the parents and ask them to support their child's learning at home: "And I can specifically ask for parents, but sometimes, especially in German [class], I want the parents to help me a bit" (Teacher G, School B). This teacher describes giving a father tasks that include reading aloud and practicing grammar. In this way, the teachers assume that parents are, in theory, capable of supporting them, an assumption that is not always tenable in the face of contemporary structural changes in families. The responsibility for educational success thus lies with the parents at home. These teachers perpetuate the idea that underpins the German half-day school model (Gottschall & Hagemann, 2002), which imagines a division of tasks between an edifying and supportive parental home and a school that focuses on the teaching of content. This takes neither dual working parents nor educationally disadvantaged families into consideration:

Table 1. Teachers' orientation in addressing social differences.

	Pupils as individualized achievers (I)	Engagement of third parties (II)	"Pupils in context" as a pedagogical task (III)	Socially informed supportive action (IV)
Parental involvement	Nearly no contact	As learning support (selective)	Starting point for pedagogical work	Work alliances
Attribution of responsibility for educational success/failure	Schoolchildren	Parents and schoolchildren	Pedagogical concept	Teachers' actions

> In the educational institutions of our children—rom nursery, kindergarten, primary school, secondary school—We have always been involved and it was not only about our children, but it was about how to support the school, how to support the teachers, how to help the children. (Teacher D, School B)

This expectation of a supportive parental home is based on the middle-class-specific ideals that pervade the teachers' lives. Only a few parents are able to offer this support at all.

4.1.3. "Pupils in Context" as a Pedagogical Task (III)

This third action orientation does not presuppose parental cooperation but rather makes the involvement of pupils and parents the responsibility of the teachers. These teachers aim to establish a working alliance:

> If you take education seriously, you can't have several ways of education running in parallel; you can't say, "Okay, this is what the parents do, and this is what the school does." If something doesn't work out, it's always the other person's fault. (Teacher B, School C)

This makes the pupils' starting conditions and their family environments something to be observed and taken into consideration. Teachers who adopt this orientation seek to find out what the possibilities for learning are in the home, what the German-language competencies are in the family, and how parents and children interact. It is about more than just grasping the socio-structural categorizations (e.g., occupation) of the parents; these teachers seek to gain an insight into everyday life (e.g., joint school trips), lifestyles, and educational milieus (e.g., Grundmann et al., 2011). To do this, these teachers build up a close relationship with the pupils and the parents. Visits to the parents' homes and simple telephone calls are possible methods of establishing proximity and shaping a trusting relationship, the basic building block of a necessary working alliance. Neither parental cooperation nor learning success as an individual achievement is assumed by these teachers. Educational success requires a collaborative effort that is equally linked to the social curiosity of the teacher and their pedagogical activities.

4.1.4. Socially Informed Supportive Action (IV)

Teachers with this action orientation tie a broader personal mandate for action—a mission, so to speak—to the students' perceptions of their socially divergent contexts: "I feel a great need for action and then I act; that is, I invest a lot of time and energy and, yes, love….I give them my attention" (Teacher L, School C). As these teachers themselves acknowledge, they go one step further and make an understanding of the social conditions of the pupils not only the starting point for their pedagogical work but also for their personal supportive action. They are teachers who offer additional learning aids, who provide pupils with learning materials in their mother tongue, or who deal with emotional hurdles through forms of reinforcement. The motto: "I won't change the world, but I may be important for one [pupil]" (Teacher L, School C) is what drives them; they feel responsible. Every success story of a pupil who has managed to graduate from school, even though this was not expected at first, makes the success of this action strategy visible. Teachers with this action orientation say to themselves: "You can make a difference" (Teacher L, School C). The visible effects of their action strengthen their self-esteem (Hattie, 2010). The flip side lies in the fact that the teachers also see themselves as responsible for the failures of pupils, and this commitment can weigh heavily on them.

4.2. Consequences: Creating Equality or Inequality?

Despite their different points of view, all teachers in my sample would say they aim to create social equality of opportunity with their action orientations. However, it is not obvious but rather more subtle that the first two orientations have the effect of perpetuating social inequalities. The orientations that prioritize individualized achievement (I) and the engagement of third parties (II) were only found among the teachers of the two East German schools, especially among the teachers at School A. In what could be seen as a continuation of the education system of the GDR, they teach pupils as if they were a homogeneous group. As one teacher noted: "Today, you have a lot of individualists; we used to be more of a mass" (Teacher D, School A). The consequence is that differences in learning backgrounds are

ignored and disadvantaged pupils are put at a further disadvantage. This is one factor that contributes to schools being far from socially neutral settings that provide equal opportunities for all (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998). Other studies have indicated that these strategies of individualizing performance and engaging third parties are widespread in Germany (Hollstein, 2008; Lange-Vester, 2012; Streckeisen et al., 2007; von Below et al., 2013) as well as in other countries (Lareau, 2011).

Research has not distinguished the other two action orientations—namely, putting pupils in context (III) and engaging in socially informed supportive action (IV)—in German-speaking countries so far. The first of these indeed offers a potential means of reducing inequalities. By relating their actions to the establishment of a working alliance with parents and pupils, as is the case in School B and especially School C, teachers with this orientation act in a socially sensitive manner. This includes empowering pupils who are socially distant through linguistic interaction routines, setting expectations appropriate to the situation, and taking sociocultural differences into account. This expands the pedagogical scope of action to include the necessity of familiarizing pupils (and parents) with school expectations. There are seven teachers—including a few from the reform-oriented school in East Germany (School B), but mostly those from the reform-pedagogical comprehensive school in Lower Saxony (School C)—who subscribe to this action orientation. Paying closer attention to parents and pupils is anchored in the reform-pedagogical concept that School C promotes through its internal culture.

It is therefore not surprising that there are only four teachers in this sample who integrate socially informed supportive action into their pedagogical mission, and they are found only in School C. On the basis of their experiences and knowledge of the pupils' personal situations, these teachers develop pedagogical strategies to provide socially sensitive support. They acquire a social relationality through close, emotionally influenced encounters with individuals from diverse backgrounds. As a consequence, the teachers relate the pupils' achievements and their behavior with their personal lives and extracurricular environments. This brings the diagnostic competence, social wisdom, and experience of teachers to the fore, and the provision of emotional and social support transforms the teacher's role into that of a guide who accompanies the development of students on a case-by-case basis (Pantić, 2017). In Germany, this building and cultivation of personal relationships results in a shift in teachers' self-conception and possibly requires conceptual or social support of its own.

To summarize, then: Teachers in East Germany seem more likely to assume that everyone is able to perform equally and has parents to support them. Supportive teachers who explore the students' learning backgrounds are predominantly found at one institution, School C in Lower Saxony. But these explanations are superficial and ignore the divergent or shared spaces of experience and organizational embeddedness. It is rather the school as an organization that seems to have the most significant influence on teachers. Furthermore, the teachers from School C would seem to be special cases, because most of them intentionally applied to teach there, which is unusual for German teachers. Even if this study is exploratory and highly selective, it is possible to identify conditions that might be helpful in empowering teachers to address social inequalities.

5. Socio-Cultural Heritage: The Arrangement of Education in the GDR and the Post-Reunification Transformation

The finding that only the East German teachers prioritize the assessment of individualized performance (action orientations I and II) needs to be explained. To this end, I will focus on the most central aspect to teachers' orientation (Behrmann, in press), that is, the unintended side effects of the political transformation of the all-day school system with the abolition of working with parents and the all-day involvement of teachers.

When it comes to the teachers' day-to-day experience, these shifts go along with fundamental changes in dealing with parents and pupils. More than one teacher expresses the sentiment that they "were… damaged by the reunification, so everything that had to do with parents was supposed to be left out of the school. They really said we weren't allowed" (Teacher B, School A). Prior to reunification, teachers in the GDR were accustomed to being in close contact with parents, which may even have been a politically ideologically motivated act. The GDR system offered them a concrete opportunity to align their everyday work with the ideal of equal opportunity in that East German teachers were able to provide supplemental care services after the formal end of the school day. In this way they disentangled themselves from their role as knowledge giver, focusing on pupils' individualized performance in the morning and becoming a supportive mentor in the form of a life and learning companion in the afternoon. Owing to its ideological nature, this extracurricular sphere of activity vanished after 1990. German reunification threw the former East German teachers back into the role of knowledge givers and transferred the responsibility for afternoon care to other (extracurricular) institutions.

It could therefore be said that unified Germany, unlike the GDR, has not provided a political mandate to create equal opportunities that has translated into these teachers' everyday actions. As a result of these experiences, the East German teachers in my sample conceive of inequalities as a concern of school policies and systems, not as a responsibility among their daily practices. In this regard, we are talking about a legacy educational model of the GDR that has not been carried forward. The East German teachers in turn tend to perceive the emerging educational inequalities as a failure of the educational policy of a united Germany. They take

issue with the abolition after 1990 of the *Einheitsschule*, which taught all children together from their first to their tenth year of schooling. After the reunification the process of early selection was introduced after the fourth grade and the division of secondary education into multiple performance-based paths. All of this, in their opinion, worked against the creation of social justice that had previously been made possible under the GDR. As one teacher concludes: "When social democracy says we want equal opportunities for all, that is simply a lie, it cannot work like that" (Teacher B, School A).

Therefore, it may be that teachers were more accustomed to addressing students' social backgrounds during the GDR era, but the transformation of the school system changed their role and diminished their opportunities to support schoolchildren in such a way that they now see less potential to address social differences.

6. Enabling the Conditions that Create Equality: Equality as a School Norm and the Importance of Support

In addition to this unique aspect of the reunification experience and the effects of the transformation of the education system on teachers' orientations, this study is able to identify broader factors in how teachers might be enabled to contribute to eliminating inequalities and shrinking divides. While analyzing the interviews, it became apparent that the teachers were not sufficiently sensitized to the significance of social disadvantage and privilege either during their academic studies or when they entered the profession; rather, school norms and biographical experiences informed their perspectives.

6.1. School Policies and Norms: A Regime of Equality

As has already been stated, the notion of creating equality goes hand in hand with a pedagogical approach that takes the family lives of the pupils into account. This relationship-building results in a shift in German teachers' understanding of their profession. Traditionally, maintaining social distance to their students, focusing on knowledge, and assessing performance by means of assigning numerical grades have characterized their work (Gudjons, 2006). If their school's policy were to prioritize addressing social inequality and offering support to disadvantaged students, then this is likely to become the task of its staff, as was seen partially at School B and especially at School C. Two points of the school's organizational framework deserve emphasis for activating teachers' agency in addressing social equality: the intensification of *working with parents* and a *collegial discourse*.

Not merely paying more attention to students' parents but also experiencing the conditions in the students' homes can make teachers aware of the various efforts that pupils make to meet school expectations. Schools can help initiate a working alliance between parents and teachers, for example, encouraging teachers to visit family homes can create a greater awareness of the divergence of lifestyles. Teachers who are more familiar with different parents and homes are better able to socially relate to the student's learning situation and the ways in which it might deviate from their assumptions (see also Lyons et al., 2016; Naraian & Schlessinger, 2018; Pantić, 2017).

Strategies of socially sensitive action are only discursively exchanged at School C. In my observations of and participation in daily school life, I noticed that teachers, school heads, and other employees discussed how they can support a pupil's interest in learning. In this event teachers' knowledge about a student's social background would become explicit knowledge that could inform pedagogical practice. Social inequality is thus no longer a taboo subject, which opens the possibility for socially informed supportive action.

Only School C has a conceptual framework that coordinates the teachers' actions to create equality. And apparently teachers' addressing social differences as part of their pedagogical routine—as the East German case highlights—requires organizational or conceptual justification. In School C this strong interlinkage exists between teachers' orientations and school policies and norms. But it should be noted that School C is part of a rare counter-political sphere.

School B does show some tendencies towards the readjustment of parental involvement and the establishment of a pedagogical discourse along these lines, but they are not as sustainable. In School A, on the other hand, parents are only contacted when there are visible problems (per orientation II). The school has no intention of developing a closer personal relationship between its parents and teachers.

This study therefore indicates that there is a need for some form of mandate or legitimization that would empower teachers to adopt a more active orientation toward addressing social differences in the student body. One way that this could be achieved is by mandating that teachers be involved in all-day schooling either by way of higher-level educational policy reform or via school-level policies and norms. The interviews indicate that, in response to certain requirements, teachers seem to adapt their pedagogical practices in a collegial environment more quickly and more dramatically than one might assume (Terhart, 2013).

6.2. Biography and Subjective Experiences: Received Support

The teachers' biographical narratives make it clear that their ways of dealing with social diversity or socially divergent values as well as their forms of communication, aspirations, and resources are guided by subjective experiences:

> Because of my own biography, I was also lucky that I had this math teacher at the *Aufbaugymnasium*

> [another route to the baccalaureate]. He always knew that I had to take the bus for an hour-and-a-half every morning to get to this school and that just did me good; I know how much good it does, doesn't it? (Teacher L, School C)

This teacher is among those four teachers who are sensitive to social differences (orientation III) and are themselves from families of lower social backgrounds. It might seem surprising that upwardly mobile people would act in a socially sensitive manner, as prior research has found that status demarcation is more likely to take place among these status groups (Hollstein, 2008; Weckwerth, 2014) whereby one's own performance is recognized as a determinant of success and reproduced as a norm. My reconstructive analysis points instead to a central effect of their specific experience. In distancing themselves from their original milieu and coping with social ruptures, these upwardly mobile individuals found support to be a significant contributor to their success. Their success stories are thus no longer based on individual achievements but rather become stories of the social and emotional support they experienced. This narrative of support likewise breaks with the thesis of middle-class membership along a key biographical dimension (Lange-Vester, 2015). This is underscored by the finding that no East German teacher in this study sample attributed any significance to the idea of student support. If one considers that upwardly mobile East Germans often benefitted from a political "anti-privilege" counterculture (Miethe, 2007), it is clear why they attribute their success solely to their own performance and tend to focus on pupils' individualized performance.

One way to increase teachers' capacity for appreciating and accounting for social differences might lie in increasing their awareness of the importance of parental support, which is still taken for granted by most actors in the German school system.

7. Conclusion

By drawing on a purposive sample of 20 teachers from three comprehensive schools in East and West Germany, this study identifies four different orientations toward creating (in)equality through teachers' activities. Even if comprehensive schools in Germany offer a valid alternative to the inequitable categorization and sorting of schoolchildren, only a few teachers' action orientations overtly aim to create equality. The first two action orientations, which involve focusing on individualized performance and engaging parents' support, have already been explored in other studies (Hollstein, 2008; Lange-Vester et al., 2019; Streckeisen et al., 2007) and seem to be the major ones. The latter two types demonstrate social sensitivity in that they relate the social conditions under which students attend school to their performance, effort, and development. One could therefore state that teachers have the potential to be key players in transforming educational inequalities (van der Heijden et al., 2015). Furthermore, my study has identified fundamental conditions that make it possible to expand or shift the teachers' roles so that individualized support becomes one of their tasks.

First, the *importance of support* is particularly emphasized by teachers from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who themselves benefited from support (Sleeter, 2001). The middle-class thesis has largely prevailed, and even if precise data—both national and international—are lacking (Heinz & Keane, 2018), one can assume that teachers with a lower social background are rare (Kampa et al., 2011; Kühne, 2006). However, it is now necessary to examine whether the knowledge on the significance of support can be passed on to other actors who do not have the same benefit of direct biographical experience.

Second, socially sensitive teachers are most likely to be found in schools that focus on equal opportunities normatively and practically (see also Levin, 2008). *School policy* can make equal opportunities a priority—for example, by organizing binding work with parents and initiating collegial discourses about social inequality. Policies that celebrate or publicize different schools' approaches to addressing social differences could open up a larger discourse about teachers' strategies and raise broader awareness about this responsibility.

A new perspective, one that has yet to receive proper attention, is opened up by the contrast of East and West Germany. The central position of teachers in the GDR enabled teachers to reconcile tasks: teaching in the morning and providing support in the afternoon. In Germany, *all-day schooling* has been in place since 2003, but the majority of the schools adopt a model that follows the classical idea of half-day schooling. Recent political efforts to establish some form of all-day schooling also involve a division of responsibility between teaching (by teachers) and daycare (by other professions) that has not been examined in terms of its role in (re)producing social inequalities. As the results of my study indicate, all-day contact with students could make teachers more attuned to social differences and the tacit requirement of support that is vital to success in the school system.

This explorative study shows that, if schools are to take equal opportunity seriously and address the mechanisms of reproducing social inequality, we need to consider in this discussion how teachers are involved in all-day schooling and extracurricular activities and what effect these arrangements might have on the perpetuation or redress of social inequality. Further research is required to shed brighter light on the different varieties of all-day schooling. This is because teachers' sense of agency in addressing social differences may depend on whether schooling takes place in the form of lessons, as in France; or in a mix of lessons and other activities, as in Finland; or a separation of half-day lessons by teachers and afternoon activities supervised by other parties,

as in Germany. For the sake of our increasingly pluralistic European society, it is important to pursue these areas of research in order to gain a better understanding of teachers' agency in addressing social differences among the student body.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Article

Study Preparation of Refugees in Germany: How Teachers' Evaluative Practices Shape Educational Trajectories

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Abstract
Recent research shows that a remarkable share of refugees who have arrived in Germany over the past few years is highly qualified and has strong educational and academic aspirations. Preparatory colleges (*Studienkollegs*) and language courses of higher education institutions are the two main organisations providing obligatory study preparation for non-EU international study applicants in Germany, including an increasing number of refugees. So far, research on conditions for refugees' successful transitions into and through study preparation, and eventually into higher education, is scarce. The article fills a research gap on the organisational level by considering the established norms and rules of study preparation organisations and the key role of teachers in shaping successful pathways into higher education. Based on central concepts deriving from the sociology of valuation and evaluation, categorisation, and evaluative repertoires, the article aims to illustrate the organisational norms and rules in play shaping teachers' experiences and perceptions of their students' ability to study. The qualitative analysis of seven expert interviews shows how teachers differentiate between students with and without a refugee background in terms of performance and reveals opportunities and constraints to take refugees' resources and needs in study preparation programmes into account.

Keywords
Germany; organisational rules; refugees; study preparation system; teachers' evaluative repertoires

Issue
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1. Introduction

In the sequel of the influx of refugees and asylum seekers since 2015, the German higher education (HE) and study preparation system is facing a new organisational challenge: An increasing number of highly qualified refugees aspire to start or continue studying at German higher education institutions (HEIs). For migrants, access to education and especially HE is of fundamental importance regarding their future social status and participation chances in host countries. HE serves as a stabilising psycho-social intervention and a sustainable basis for refugees to plan a new life (Crea et al, 2015; Morrice, 2013). German HEIs and preparatory colleges, the so-called *Studienkollegs*, initiated support measures and academic preparation programmes for prospective refugee students to respond to the growing demand (Fourier, et al., 2020; in this article, the term "prospective refugee student" is used for asylum applicants participating in measures of study preparation regardless of their current residence status). Yet, research on the role of educational organisations and teachers in the reproduction or transformation of educational inequalities concerning refugees' transition into HEIs is still scarce.

Whereas some studies critically investigate institutionalised norms of the (German) academic culture (Baker & Irwin, 2019; Berg, 2020; Klaus, 2020; Struchholz, 2021; Wojciechowicz, 2018), others have recently evaluated policy barriers to meaningful participation of prospective refugee students (Lenette et al., 2019; Molla, 2020; Stevenson & Baker, 2018; Unangst, 2019). Also, some case studies investigate institutional reactions and

frameworks that shape the programmes for refugees (Marcu, 2018; Unangst & Streitwieser, 2018; Webb et al., 2019) or discuss the opportunities and limits of tailored study preparation offers to respond to refugees' specific resources and needs (Baker et al., 2020). In the German context, studies concentrate on the challenges posed on the governance of HEIs (Beigang et al., 2018; Berg et al., 2021; Schammann & Younso, 2017). However, only a few studies have looked into study preparation while focussing on the microlevel (Grüttner et al., 2018, 2020; Halkic & Arnold, 2019; Reinhardt et al., 2018). Thus, many research gaps remain, especially in the area of study preparation. In this article, I follow the call to go beyond the issues and problems of refugees (Baker & Ramsay, 2019) and turn the attention to the organisational level and the role of teachers as important gatekeepers working in obligatory study preparation programmes (Hamann & Beljean, 2019; Palanc, 2019).

Preparatory colleges and language courses of HEIs are the two main organisational frameworks providing obligatory preparation courses for non-EU international study applicants in Germany (Schröder et al., 2019). This article aims at deepening the understanding of study preparation organisations and the role their norms and rules might play in bridging disrupted educational pathways, eventually leading into HEIs. In particular, the analysis fills a research gap by considering teachers' experiences and their perceptions of learners and especially refugees in detail. Therefore, I analyse teachers' everyday evaluative practices in study preparation courses. From the perspective of the teachers, I examine how organisational norms and rules are present in their working experiences and influence their leeway in teaching. My main interest is to explore the categorisation criteria underlying teachers' performance assessments and how they evaluate refugee students' "ability to study." I will especially look into teachers' perceptions of (supposed) differences between students with and without a refugee background.

2. Access Routes and Study Preparation: The Institutional Context in Germany

The following section is meant to give an introduction to German HE access regulations and study preparation for non-EU international applicants with and without refugee status. Also, I will discuss some implications for prospective refugee students' chances to navigate within this unfamiliar and complex educational environment.

Following Saner's (2019) analysis of admission to art colleges, HE admission generally represents an institutionalised series of tests to evaluate and verify the applicants' quality concerning formalised requirements, in which candidates are continuously re-evaluated in various assessment situations. In the German context, refugees, like other international students who gained their HE entrance certificates in non-EU countries, have to prove the equivalence of their qualifications and are thereupon channelled into distinct HE access routes (Schröder et al., 2019).

If degrees are recognised as "direct higher education entrance qualification" by the Central Office of Foreign Education (ZAB), as established by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK), applicants have to participate in recognised language courses to prove a C1 German language level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is defined as a very high level of effective operational proficiency (see Figure 1, left track). These tailored language courses are mostly offered by HEIs. International study applicants are admitted to these courses if they can provide a recognised B2 language certificate. The regulations often additionally require passing a standardised German language test. Admitted students complete these language courses by passing an accredited final assessment test and thereby meet the formal requirements for admission at a HEI.

Applicants who are denied the equivalent qualifications (the "indirect higher education entrance qualification"; see Figure 1, right track) have to prove not only their language skills but also their "subject-specific ability to study." Therefore, they have to attend study preparation courses of so-called *Studienkollegs*. Since there are limited places in these courses, they have first to pass an entrance examination encompassing language tests in German and, depending on the desired subject, mathematics. The special-subject courses usually take one year and prepare the course participants for the final exam, an accredited German C1 and subject-specific assessment test. By passing the final exam, applicants fulfil the requirements to apply for admission at a HEI.

However, as almost all German HEIs have limited capacities in the popular subjects, it is actually a matter of grades if successful participants of study preparation courses, regardless of what track they have to follow, are finally admitted to their favourite study programmes. This holds true for desired subjects like medicine and pharmacy, veterinary medicine, and dentistry ("national admission restrictions" according to the German Rectors' Conference) or, depending on the respective HEI, even electrical or mechanical engineering and other technical subjects.

Especially for prospective refugee students, proving the equivalent subject- and language-specific "ability to study" can become an arduous process (Dippold et al., 2021; Hirano, 2014; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Like their fellow international applicants without a refugee background, they are channelled into these routes, which can be characterised as a process of multiple selections. Each step poses a risk of failure and raises questions about whether they can ever achieve their academic goals. Every step requires a considerable transfer of cultural, social, and economic capital as well as appropriate information and guidance to navigate an unfamiliar education system (Bajwa et al., 2017; Cin & Doğan, 2020). Moreover, anchored in the lasting impact of this

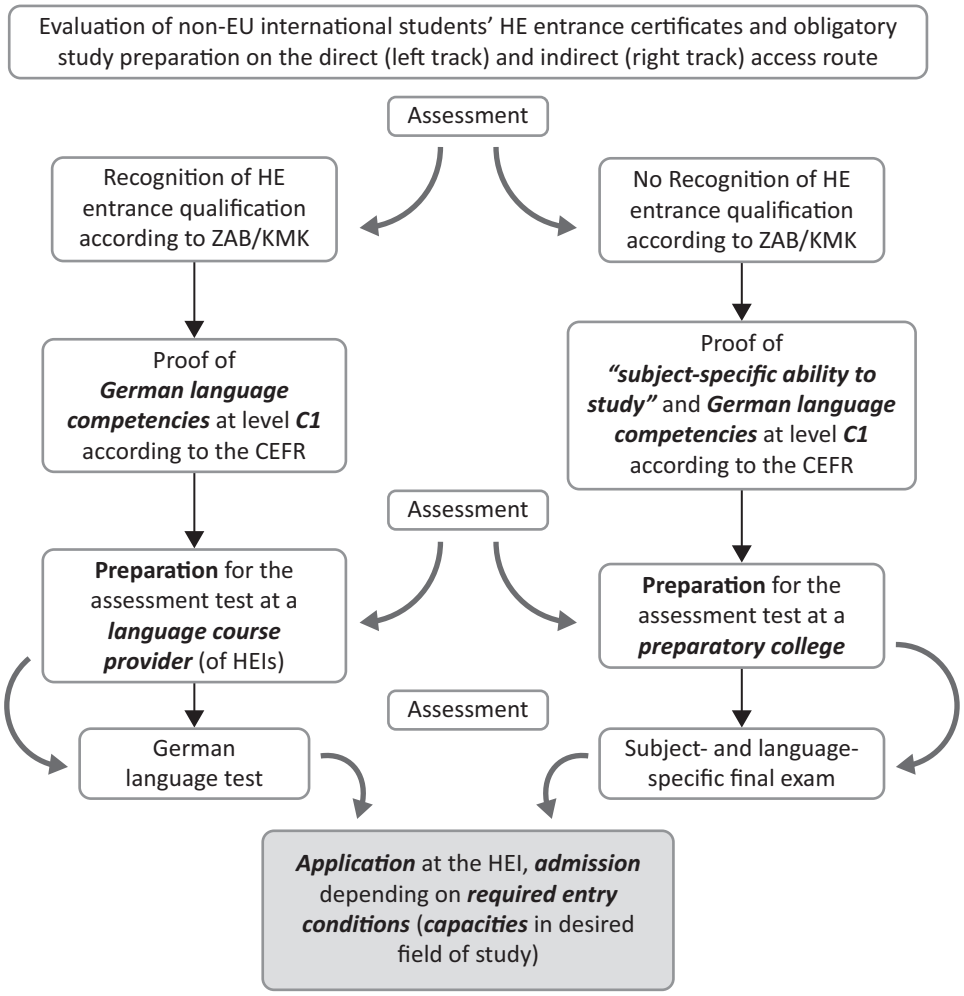

Figure 1. Evaluation process of non-EU international students' HE entrance certificates and obligatory study preparation on the direct and indirect access route. Notes: ZAB stands for Central Office for Foreign Education; KMK is that Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs; CEFR stands for Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Source: Own graphic following Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture (2021).

migration channel, which "creates specific opportunities and constraints for migrants" (Sandoz, 2018, p. 224), refugees' pathways to HE are further shaped by intersecting legal, institutional and social contexts, dependencies and connected resources in the host country (Berg, 2018; Détourbe & Goastellec, 2018; Sontag, 2019). This specific social position often leads to an amplification of barriers whereby refugee students are particularly disadvantaged (Lambrechts, 2020).

3. Heuristic Framework: How to Conceptualise Teachers' Assessments in Study Preparation?

The terms and concepts used in this article and in the following analysis are not oriented towards formal theories in the sense of determining causes and effects, but rather provide a heuristic for the systematic description and explorative analysis of teachers' evaluations in study preparation, as well as the standards and criteria for these evaluations and the teachers' ideas about their legitimacy. In particular, the analysis focuses on the subjective perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of teachers in study preparation courses concerning learners with and without flight experience. Based on a qualitative analysis of expert interviews, I will investigate which criteria teachers use to distinguish between the performance, abilities, and personal characteristics of these two groups of learners.

For this purpose, the analysis is guided by concepts deriving from the programmatical foundation of sociology of valuation and evaluation (SVE) by Lamont (2012). To come closer to the research goal of understanding (e)valuative practices, SVE is particularly concerned with the question of how everyday acts of value ascription and evaluation establish and stabilise orders (Krüger & Reinhart, 2016), but also how prevailing orders might be irritated to potentially reduce or even overcome social inequalities (Lamont, 2012). Evaluative practices are omnipresent in HE systems, be it in benchmarking processes, excellence initiatives, or, as shown in the previous section, in recognition procedures to determine equivalence of formal access qualifications and in

admission and selection procedures of HEIs. Evaluation is founded on practice- and experience-based social and cultural processes that usually involve intersubjective agreements on referents for the comparison of entities such as goods, characteristics of particular persons or social groups, the negotiation of criteria and legitimate actors for their application, and relational approaches to distinguishing these entities (Lamont, 2012, p. 205). I assume that key concepts of SVE, categorisation and legitimation as central "sub-processes of (e)valuation" (Lamont, 2012, p. 206), are appropriate for analysing the tension between established organisational norms and rules, evaluators' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations, and their everyday actions and decisions. Studying how categorisation and legitimation, as social and cultural processes that vary between contexts, are brought into practice can provide insights into how "evaluative repertoires" are constructed by social actors (Pernkopf et al., 2011, p. 953, following the argumentation of Michelle Lamont on national evaluative repertoires). As Lamont (2019, pp. 116–117) further points out, the notion of repertoire refers to intersubjective, shared bodies of knowledge that actors draw on to assess their environment and to act sensibly in it.

Therefore, the analysis uses the two fundamental assessment situations in pre-study programmes, the admission test and the final exam, as starting points to look into the criteria the teachers apply to categorise the performance, skills, and personal characteristics of their learners. Since teachers have to make difficult decisions concerning their students' transitions with the potential to influence educational trajectories (Maier, 2016), I will explore if and how they rely on organisational norms and rules in their evaluative practices. Especially in admission and selection processes of HEIs "contingencies of value" are continually negotiated, as Strandvad (2014, p. 138) points out, and substantiates the influence of organisationally structured social interactions on "how people do things and thus how values and conventions become installed and maintained." Considering teachers' everyday practices, Horvath (2019, p. 125) shows how they use social categorisation criteria in making pedagogical distinctions and points out that "these constructions of differences are embedded in organisational and institutional arrangements of the educational system." Furthermore, I am interested in teachers' interpretations and reasoning when reflecting on their evaluative practices beyond the standardised assessment situations, especially in their everyday perceptions of and interaction with learners. I assume that such patterns of interpretation and reasoning (in the analysis, I refer to them as "teaching standards"), also contribute to the construction of evaluative repertoires in the sense that they regulate professional practices in educational organisations and influence teachers' everyday actions and decisions (Cuadra et al., 2017).

By looking into how teachers apply categorisation criteria in assessing their students' "ability to study," it is, therefore, possible to identify the evaluative repertoires of teachers working in study preparation organisations. As the research focus of this article is to analyse how these evaluative repertoires might shape refugees' pathways through study preparation and into HE, I will use this framework to show how teachers differentiate between students with and without a refugee background in terms of assessment and how they contribute to the social construction of refugee students' ability to study in their everyday actions.

4. Data, Methods, and Analysis

The following qualitative analysis is based on data provided by the project "Refugees on Their Way Into German Higher Education" (WeGe). Fourteen expert interviews (Bogner & Menz, 2009) were conducted in late 2019 in the two main organisational types of study preparation for non-EU international students in Germany: language course providers, representing the track of direct HE entrance qualifications (eight experts), and special subject courses of *Studienkollegs*, representing the track of indirect HE entrance qualifications (six experts). To establish contact with potential interview partners, I reached out to contact partners from study preparation organisations in which a quantitative survey of course participants had already been realised within the framework of the research project. All experts are experienced professionals and hold managing as well as teaching positions. For the following analysis, the original sample was reduced to the seven interviews with teachers working in *Studienkollegs* (three interviews) and language course providers of HEIs (four interviews). Professionally, the experts have an academic background as teachers, mainly of German or German as a foreign language, while two (also) teach mathematics.

For the interviews with the teachers, I used a pre-structured interview guideline (Gläser & Laudel, 2010) which aimed to generate ex-post narrations with a focus on professional experience in teaching within the context of study preparation. Among other issues, the first part of the interview guideline addresses the experts' experience with the course participants in different areas at the level of day-to-day interactions. The second part of the interview guideline was focused on their experiences with the increasing proportion of refugees in the courses as well as on organisational changes concerning the teaching of refugees.

For the qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004), the expert interviews were coded based on a preliminary system of categories with a focus on the following analytical questions: (1) How do the teachers relate standards of evaluating the students' "ability to study" to the norms and rules of the organisation? (2) What "evaluative repertoires" can be identified based on the categorisation criteria the teachers apply in their assessments? (3) What does that mean for shaping refugee students' transitions to HEIs?

The coding was orientated at "gradual category formation" (Mayring, 2004, p. 268) from the material by identifying which codes have to be subsumed under existing categories or are to be developed into new categories. In the first step, the coding was concentrated on revealing patterns in the teachers' narrations of their everyday experiences concerning assessment situations in their organisation. In the second step, I shifted the coding focus to the standards they refer to in their evaluation of the students' "ability to study" and how they relate them to organisational norms and rules. In the next step, I applied the dimensions "categorisation criteria" and "evaluative repertoires" as sensitising concepts to systemise the categorisation patterns the teachers rely on in evaluating the students within and beyond the standardised assessment situations, especially in their everyday perceptions of and interaction with learners. The last coding step was focused on the significance of a refugee background in the teachers' evaluation of their students' "ability to study" and developed the network of relationships (Böhm, 2004) between the sequences entailing the teachers' narrations on how they experience refugee students in comparison to their fellow course participants without a refugee background.

5. Investigating Assessments: The Interplay of Organisational Rules and Teaching Standards

Both assessment situations, the admission test and the final exam, represent the fundamental goals of the study preparation organisations to recruit and select students in line with the established formal requirements for study applicants with non-EU HE entrance qualifications. As the professional practice of the teachers is especially concerned with providing an appropriate study preparation, it is possible to look into the standards they refer to in their evaluation of the students' "ability to study" and how these are related to organisational norms and rules on the one hand and to their everyday experience of and interaction with learners on the other.

The organisational capacities in study preparation result from the financial resources and the accordingly available teaching staff as well as the actual number of applications. Therefore, admission depends on the applicants' results in the entrance assessment and the current course capacities. The teachers notice that due to restricted capacities, highly qualified applicants still have to be rejected, as one teacher explains: "There are really many, many applicants who do very, very well in the admission test but nonetheless we have to reject even excellent students due to limited capacities in the courses" (translation by the author).

Overall, the teachers tend to think of admission regulations as legitimate. The admission test can serve as an instrument that mediates between restricted financial capacities and the standard of "fairness," as this quote reveals: "We rank the performance and we admit the applicants on this basis. I find our system fair and adequate. This way the maximum number of course participants will be 25. We do not admit more than 25."

Despite this standardised procedure in the admission process the teachers tend to assess the performance of the students as heterogeneous. They strive to adjust the lessons and to reduce the heterogeneity, as this teacher points out:

> Even if I differentiate between individual start conditions, it does not always work out in 90 minutes to satisfy the requirements of all the different learning cultures and learning styles. Generally speaking, these different conditions are permanently impeding my teaching.

In the view of the teachers, the regulation of the final exam ensures that successful course participants fulfil the performance standards in line with the formal requirements of HEIs in terms of the language- and subject-specific "ability to study." HEIs normally specify which certificates are accepted for admission. In response to these requirements, the teachers adjust their lessons to prepare the students as appropriately as possible to pass the final exam, as this teacher states:

> That is a fact and I have to take that into account. Therefore, we have to modify contents [and], if necessary, processes and scopes, and so on, to observe the next step, in our case the next educational step at university.

The significance of the assessment situations reflects how teachers' experiences and actions are influenced not only by personal assessment standards but at the same time by organisational norms and rules. Besides positive opinions, neutral statements, as well as critical positions, can be found in terms of legitimate standards for evaluative practices in the context of study preparation. However, the teachers share the experience to only influence how they develop their lessons rather than change the admission rules of pre-study programmes or HEIs. In particular, they criticise limited opportunities for individual support and responding to the students' heterogeneous needs during their lessons. Fulfilling the established performance standards seems to be rather a question of capacities than one of prior qualifications. Overall, the teachers rarely refer to learners in their narrations on the key assessment situations, the entrance exam and the final exam. Furthermore, it remains unclear how they differentiate between learners, they rather refer to learners in general.

6. Categorisation Criteria and Evaluative Practices: Exploring Evaluative Repertoires of Teachers

In the coding procedure, a set of categorisation criteria emerged, which was on the one hand connected to performance-based, "formal accounts" (Hasse, 2015,

pp. 56–59), in terms of learners' language- and subject-specific "ability to study." At the same time, the teachers use criteria that refer to "collective accounts" (Hasse, 2015, pp. 59–62) as a form of individual-case based argumentation to justify their pedagogical distinctions. Both can be seen as interpretative patterns available to teachers to explain their perceptions and decisions towards relevant others (Hasse, 2015, p. 56). Concerning the teachers' everyday experiences of the students' performance and how it can be evaluated, both forms of accounts are closely intertwined. In the following, I illustrate how their understanding of learners' resources, necessary for successful study preparation, is informed by experience-based assumptions of appropriate learning skills and conditions for successful learning in general. In this regard, they do not distinguish between refugees and learners without refugee experience.

The teachers refer to the respective education system of the home country to distinguish between students' performances during the course, as this quote shows: "And in chemistry, there is quite a wide range, how many chemistry lessons they took in their home countries….Often, these are the structures that were common in the home countries."

In addition, this reference to the education system encompasses not only subject-specific competencies but also the level of German language competency and foreign language skills in general:

> I mean the grades of the school leaving certificates are not comparable. They are different, actually, in mathematics, physics, but also the language competencies in German. That is related to the issue of whether I have been confronted with a foreign language at all. And that is important.

From the perspective of the teachers, certain attitudes towards learning and already acquired learning strategies play a key role for successful learning in German study preparation courses: "Facts are learned. They do not learn how to learn, how to continue learning, how to learn independently, alone, how to learn autonomously, how to gain knowledge autonomously."

In addition, some teachers tend to relate their interpretations of the home country education system to the supposed cultural contexts they are embedded in, as this quote shows:

> In terms of discipline and self-organisation, I think, in general, discipline is rooted more firmly in East Asia….Occasionally, it can be noticed this "I have to struggle through. Maybe I am not really interested, but I simply have to do it now." That is somewhat stronger pronounced there compared to other cultures.

Following the experiences of the teachers, the students' social resources and especially social relations with the student community are of fundamental importance to make the best possible use of the performance potential. This teacher, for example, views a reliable network and social ties to German-speaking friends and fellow students as a crucial advantage to cope in study preparation: "Social integration. Friends, acquaintances, points of contact, groups. Not to be alone, that surely is important." Another teacher highlights the self-responsibility of the students to make German-speaking friends:

> To what extent they are not exclusively with their community but realise that it is helpful to join a university's sports group, if they talk to neighbours speaking other languages, other native speaking languages and somehow recognise not to stay solely with their community… therefore, accepting [that] "I have to establish contact [with] the German language and at university." That also is important.

The teachers tend to use the same evaluative repertoire orientated on meritocratic approaches when they explain the necessity to repeat courses or to drop out of study preparation. Following the experience of this teacher, failing generally derives from individual decisions and responsibilities:

> We only provide intensive courses. That is five or six lessons daily, 25 or 30 lessons weekly. That is quite a great challenge. Yes. That has to be faced. As a participant, you have to know that. And you have to want it. Therefore, this will to successfully master this.

This quote additionally reflects the perception that sequences and structures of the courses cannot simply be adapted. They are rather interpreted as important and transparent information for course participants on how to successfully prepare for studying.

Overall, the teachers tend to legitimise the established course structures by arguing that they are solely aiming at an appropriate study preparation. At the same time, they seem to be aware of social and cultural prerequisites influencing successful study preparation. The following quote illustrates this position: "Therefore, we can provide an offer. But a professional offer. Yet, the person has to have this will and the competencies to accept this offer and further develop it." From this perspective, teachers are on the one hand dedicated to the goal to successfully prepare their students for studying. On the other hand, the analysis points to the significance of prerequisites to achieve the expected level of language and subject-specific proficiency.

7. Evaluative Repertoires of Teachers and Their Influence on Refugees' Study Preparation

As shown in the previous section, the categorisation criteria teachers apply in their everyday evaluations, without clearly distinguishing between refugees and other

international students, emphasise the significance of various prerequisites influencing successful study preparation. In the following, I illustrate how they relate to this evaluative repertoire when it comes to potential differences between students with and without flight experience. The teachers use a categorisation pattern that is orientated at meritocratic justifications of performance differences encompassing individual skills and social prerequisites, which seems contradictory only at first glance.

Overall, the teachers highlight the heterogeneity in terms of performance characterising both groups. However, the teachers' narrations reflect that they are aware of special barriers refugees face while transitioning into HE. From the perspective of the teachers, these barriers obviously influence refugees' chances to successfully prepare for studying: "And the pace is another substantial problem that I generally notice regarding refugees. That many who understood everything correctly, are simply slower, definitely slower than most of the other regular applicants."

In general, the teachers observe slower progress of refugees in study preparation and identify a higher risk to repeat the courses. They tend to interpret these performance differences as a consequence of flight-specific psychological problems, as this teacher points out:

> The psychological effects of this life change, the flight, this completely different environment, this entirely different culture. Language, religion and so on, above all do not fail to leave their mark on these young people. That needs to be stated.

Furthermore, the teachers highlight that refugees are exposed to social marginalisation and social risks deriving from restricted everyday living conditions and the complex obligations linked to the refugee status. This is viewed as an additional risk to fail in study preparation.

Also, as we have seen in the teachers' legitimations of the admission test, prior language learning is of fundamental importance to get a place in study preparation courses. This aspect is directly related to the issue of how asylum authorities are dealing with the academic aspirations of refugees. Refugees are obliged to participate in so-called integration courses that lack a particularly academic orientation, as this teacher criticises:

> For example, in these integration courses there is a wild mix of people, many different levels, the course books are bad and there is no academic standard. Then it is definitely hard to achieve this level that is necessary to be up to the task here.

Despite these differences, the teachers strongly emphasise that all students have to be treated equally. At the same time, they highlight their individual responsibility to provide the learning environment they deem appropriate for successful study preparation. This personal standard links the "evaluative repertoire" teachers apply in assessment practices to their actions and decisions in courses:

> And I strive to tend to everybody as best I can to lead them to their studies. I mean, I fight for the students so that they are able to walk this path on their own. I can only guide them. Everything else is up to them. And I make no difference in this regard.

But still, even if teachers show a wide range of responses to the special needs of refugees, they refuse to question the organisational norms and rules in which the courses are embedded:

> As a teacher, one always wishes to bring everybody on board; on the other hand you have to ensure professional study preparation. This is to say, I cannot lower the pace at random because I'll risk not being able to cover all the necessary subject matters.

The teachers' narrations reveal the dilemma that "fair" assessment is sometimes not fair enough (if ever possible). This dilemma seems to be exacerbated in the case of evaluating the performance of prospective refugee students. While most of the teachers are aware that the performance of refugees necessitates specific prerequisites but feel they have no options to provide responsive supports, some seem to have developed stereotypical expectations concerning legitimate performance standards that all learners have to meet, regardless of a potential refugee background. Overall, the analysis points to the significance of a meritocratic legitimation of evaluative practices, a position that is likely to individualise and essentialise social inequalities.

8. Conclusions

The analysis reveals that the organisational norms and rules of selecting and preparing applicants in terms of access to HEIs are indeed present in the teachers' everyday actions and decisions and tend to guide their evaluation of learners. The formal rules of the organisation determine what is to be assessed as appropriate "ability to study" and teachers give practical effect to these rules by mediating "teaching standards" and their perceptions of student performance in their evaluative practices. What is more, the analysis shows that teachers rely on social categorisation criteria in making distinctions in terms of performance evaluations. This finding points to the notion of "evaluative repertoires" (Lamont, 2019; Pernkopf-Konhäusner & Brandl, 2011) and the role of fundamental categorisation patterns in the social (re-)construction of educational inequalities (Horvath, 2019). However, following Maier (2016), it has to be noted that teachers have the professional obligation to make distinctions and therefore it is not surprising that they tend to justify performance differences in line with

prevailing pedagogic standards that are orientated on a meritocratic legitimation strategy.

Concerning the evaluation of refugees' performance in study preparation, the analysis of the "evaluative repertoire" highlights the significance of this dominant categorisation pattern: The teachers' claim that all students have to be treated equally points to the importance of social standards like "fairness" in their everyday professional practices. Yet, while the teachers recognise performance differences between students based on a refugee background, they struggle to take into account special needs and educational barriers linked to refugees' experiences of flight and social positioning in their "evaluative repertoire." Eventually, the teachers tend to expect them to meet the same standards as their fellow course participants without a refugee background, thus legitimising the overarching organisational norms and rules represented in the "assessment chain" (Saner, 2019) of study preparation and admission to HEIs in Germany—an understanding that obviously does not irritate existing reproduction patterns of educational or social inequalities.

The present analysis shows that teachers in German study preparation face limitations while striving to respond to social inequalities related to refugee status. Diminishing the competitive character of the multiple selection process to HE is most likely to widen teachers' opportunities to provide responsive support for refugees. Possible measures to overcome such structural restrictions might therefore include expanding the capacities of *Studienkollegs* and language course providers at HEIs as well as sustainable funding for refugees and asylum policy-change allowing for delays and detours during study preparation. Also, professional training strategies for teachers might provide frameworks for systematic reflection on established "evaluative repertoires" and initiate local engagements to further develop pre-study programmes responding to the specific learning conditions of refugees. Unfortunately, the working conditions of teachers in pre-study programmes were not the focus of this analysis. However, based on the talks accompanying the expert interviews, it can be problematised that many teachers are precariously employed and comparatively poorly paid. Temporary and honorary contracts are widespread. Such employment conditions only render the motivation and voluntary engagement of teachers to a limited extent, especially when it comes to participating in additional professional training. What is more, the search for innovative equity strategies should not only focus on teaching staff or the support structures and offers of study preparation organisations anyway. Successful post-migration trajectories rather rely on political engagement encompassing institutions throughout the relevant policy areas that are shaping refugees' educational trajectories and life chances.

I will now take the liberty of making one last comment for the current occasion of the Covid-19 pandemic: Prospective refugee students particularly benefit from experiences of social integration, which goes hand in hand with social recognition and appreciation in study preparation programmes (Grüttner, 2019). Existing educational inequalities are likely to be exacerbated in the course of the pandemic. This once again emphasises the urgent need to enhance responsive supports for refugees in German HE and study preparation.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Students' Differences, Societal Expectations, and the Discursive Construction of (De)Legitimate Students in Germany

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Abstract
At higher education institutions (HEI), which for centuries served only to educate the elite, the composition of the student body is increasingly changing towards greater social and cultural diversity. Students' differences are also the focus of this article, but not with a specific emphasis on preselected categories. Instead, the article asks how students in teaching in higher education (HE) are represented in the print media and professional discourse in Germany, i.e., which categories of difference are constructed as relevant in HE teaching contexts, which are normalized and (de)legitimized, and what is expected of HEI concerning these differences. Second, to what extent does this change over time, particularly concerning the new circumstances of Corona-based digital teaching in 2020? The contribution is based on a combination of discourse theory and neo-institutional organizational sociology. Discourses are a place where social expectations towards organizations are negotiated and constructed. Simultaneously, the discourses construct a specific understanding of HE, making visible openings and closures concerning different groups of students. Which students are constructed as legitimate, desirable, at risk of dropping out, or a risk for HE quality? Based on qualitative content analysis, the article shows that it is less the traditional socio-structural categories such as gender, social or ethnic origin, or impairments, that are discussed to be relevant in HE teaching contexts. The reproduction of inequality and the associated discrimination is hardly discussed. The focus is instead on the students' differences concerning individualizable characteristics, competencies, or study practices. Even though many of these individualized differences are conveyed via socio-structural categories, this connection is often not considered in the discourses.

Keywords
discourse analysis; diversity; doing difference; higher education; higher education teaching; inclusion; societal expectations; social inequality

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, various developments have led to an increasing diversification of the student body in many countries: The transformation process towards a knowledge society was accompanied by educational expansion and the so-called massification of universities (Altbach et al., 2017). For example, the rate of first-year students of an age cohort in Germany increased from 37% in 2002 to 56% in 2019 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019). Higher education institutions (HEI) are becoming increasingly important in the context of lifelong learning so that different age cohorts with different educational biographies are seeking access to higher education (HE; see, e.g., Altbach et al., 2017). An increased permeability from vocational to HE reinforces this development (e.g., Bernhard, 2017). At the same time, the student body increasingly internationalizes (e.g., Streitwieser, 2014).

Finally, the signing of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has rekindled calls for inclusion at universities (e.g., Powell, 2016).

Assumingly, these developments pose new challenges for HE systems, in particular like the one in Germany. Germany is known for its highly segregated and socially inequitable education system with early selection into an academic or a vocational track within the school system (Powell & Solga, 2011). As a consequence, Germany traditionally has had a preselected and relatively socially homogeneous student body. The academic upper secondary school track leads to the Abitur, which is the general HE entrance qualification and authorizes students to enter into all types of HEI. This is the traditional and main road to HE in Germany. Other routes are via vocation-oriented schools where students often gain the HE entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulreife*). Besides opportunities to reach the Abitur in evening classes or other forms of adult education, recent regulative changes also allow vocationally qualified students to enter HEI (Bernhard, 2017). Due to these developments and those mentioned above (e.g., internationalization), the diversification of the student body can also be witnessed in the German HE system. At the same time, Germany does not have a long tradition of lifelong learning at HEI and started using the HE system for further academic education comparatively late (Schuetze & Slowey, 2012; Wolter & Schäfer, 2020). In Germany, HE teaching is traditionally less critical for a career in academia than in other countries, especially those where tuition fees are high and student satisfaction is of great importance. In this respect, further training in HE didactics where teachers could become more sensitive to students' differences is not obligatory in most German HEI, in contrast to other national systems such as in England. Germany thus represents an exciting case where increasing diversification meets a traditionally highly segregated system in which university teaching and its professionalization still play a rather subordinate role.

Against this background, by analyzing print media and the professional discourses, this article looks at how students in HE teaching have been represented in Germany in recent years and what is expected of HEI concerning these differences. However, rather than concentrating only on previously defined and considered as important categories of diversity, I examine which categories of difference are constructed as relevant in HE teaching contexts in media and professional discourses. I focus on teaching because HE teaching is the principal place where students and the HEI, represented by its teachers, interact, and it is thus the main place where teachers act as gatekeepers for future life chances.

This article extends existing research on several points: It examines which students' differences have been discursively created and compares the results of a print media and professional discourse of HE teachers between 2010 and 2020 in Germany. Therefore, it can extrapolate which differences are constructed as relevant for HE teaching contexts and give also a first hint of how pandemic-induced online teaching during the Corona crisis in 2020 interrelates with the found structures. Moreover, the societal and professional expectations towards HE organizations and teachers are analyzed and compared in the discourses.

In public and professional discourses, societal and professional expectations towards organizations like universities are negotiated and constructed. According to organizational sociological assumptions (Hasse & Krücken, 2005), these expectations are a point of orientation for the actions of organizations like universities and their teachers to remain legitimate. At the same time, discourses not only represent expectations but also construct a social reality (Keller, 2006, 2011). The construction of students' differences and their evaluation in the context of HE teaching in discourse are then closely linked to questions of social recognition: Which students are constructed as (de)legitimate, desirable, at risk of dropping out, or even a risk for HE quality? In this way, examining the construction of difference and the reported practices of teachers in the discourses enables an analysis of (discursive) social opening and closing processes in the HE system.

To answer these research questions, I first discuss the state of research and the theoretical concepts. Then, the research design is explained. In the results, I compare the constructed differences of students, their intersections, their evaluation, and the accompanying (de)legitimation and normalization of students in the media and professional discourse. Finally, the reported and required practices in dealing with students and thus the environmental expectations at universities are also presented.

2. State of Research and Theoretical Conceptualization

In this section, I will provide an initial overview of the state of research. Research on student differences is extremely diverse and, therefore, the overview here can only be cursory. Following the state of research, the theoretical concepts that underlie this work will be presented.

2.1. State of Research

When looking at differences of students, research often focuses on aspects like selectivity of access to HE (e.g., Duru-Bellat et al., 2008; Goastellec & Välimaa, 2019). Other research addresses issues of student diversity during their studies. Areas being investigated include the role of support structures for students (e.g., Smith, 2007; Unangst & Streitwieser, 2018), the governance of diversity at universities (e.g., Linde & Auferkorte-Michaelis, 2018), students' experiences of discrimination (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Stern et al., 2018), and students' success, progression, and practices. (e.g., Lange-Vester & Sander, 2016; Lörz, 2017; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). While internationally research

on HE teaching and its dealing with diversity has a much longer tradition (e.g., Gay, 2014), this field is increasingly researched in the German context, focusing primarily on selected socio-structural categories of difference (e.g., gender, social origin, ethnicity). Keywords then include gender- or habitus-sensitive teaching (e.g., Burger & Glathe, 2016; Rheinländer, 2015).

This article focuses on the discursive construction of students' differences in teaching in professional and media discourses. While research on the discursive construction of students in media or policy discourses exists (Brooks, 2018, 2020), it also mainly focuses on specific categories like the construction of international students (e.g., Paltridge et al., 2014). Lainio and Brooks (2021), for example, analyze the media discourse of several European countries regarding student family relations. However, neither the role of students' characteristics and practices in teaching nor the discursive expectations towards HE teachers and organizations are explicitly carved out.

2.2. Difference, Discourses, and Environmental Expectations in Higher Education

Following a constructivist understanding, differences are defined as socially constructed in historically and geographically situated contexts (Hirschauer, 2014). West and Fenstermaker (1995) refer to the process of the social practice of generating difference as "doing difference." Any "doing difference" is a meaningful selection from a set of competing categorizations that only creates a difference that can then make a difference (Hirschauer, 2014, p. 183). Constructions of difference are thus contingent and have to be seen according to Giddens' (1984) understanding of the duality of structures as a precondition and result of social practices. In the context of this article, the construction of difference can be examined concerning the observed or reported practice of "doing difference" in HEI and, at the same time, in the practice of "doing difference" of writers and speakers in print media discourses when describing students.

Discourses are to be understood as regulated practices of interpretive production and construction of reality through which social knowledge stocks emerge (Keller, 2006, p. 125). In this respect, print media are doubly involved in discourse production, as a stage for actors and as actors themselves. According to Yildiz (2006, p. 40), media discourses are means of transport through which social interpretations are reproduced and through which social perceptions are influenced, thereby also contributing to normalizations. In other words, the print media is crucially involved in what reproduces social reality as hegemonic discourse and what other interpretations, e.g., everyday experiences, are marginalized (Yildiz, 2006). While the print media mirrors a wider societal stance on a topic, the professional discourse especially (re)produces norms and taken-for-granted interpretations of the professional world of HE teachers.

An analysis of how students are portrayed in print media and professional discourse can indicate who is seen as a legitimate student or a "normal" student. The construction of difference and its evaluation in HE discourse are thus linked to issues of recognition. Depending on how the students or specific subgroups are constructed, particularly in the media discourse, they are seen as more or less legitimate with possible consequences for the perception of potential students and their future educational decisions and HE teachers' teaching decisions. Hence, media discourses about students shape society's perception of this group and the group itself. The professional discourse naturally has a more significant impact on the perceptions of the members of the profession.

Moreover, media discourses are places where societal demands on organizations, such as HEI, are primarily mediated (Donges, 2006). However, the professional discourse also (re)produces expectations and norms towards HEI. According to assumptions of neo-institutionalist organization theory, organizations are embedded in institutional environments from which demands are made (Hasse & Krücken, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). According to Scott's (2008) understanding of institutions, institutionalized expectations of organizations are present in the form of laws and regulations (regulative pillar), norms and standards (normative pillar), and ideas or shared conceptions of reality (cultural-cognitive pillar). Organizations need to meet these expectations to be recognized as legitimate.

In summary, through discourse analysis, the article combines perspectives based on discourse and practice theory with sociological organization theory. Discourses can serve as a mirror of societal environmental expectations towards HEI and, at the same time, as a place where social reality is constructed through discursive practices (of "doing difference") and normalizations, (de)legitimations, inclusion, and exclusion are produced.

3. Research Design

This article is based on qualitative content analysis (Gläser & Laudel, 2009) of the German weekly newspaper *Die ZEIT* for the print media discourse and the professional journal *Forschung und Lehre* (F&L) for the professional discourse. *Die ZEIT* was chosen because, as part of the national quality press and as a leading national medium, it focuses on educational topics, significantly on HE. F&L is a monthly journal published by the German Association of Universities, whose members are professors and researchers/HE teachers with a PhD in all disciplines. So, it focuses precisely on the professional group that is doing a significant amount of the HE teaching in Germany.

I analyzed 434 articles in *Die ZEIT* published between 2010 and 2020. Over one hundred articles covered the year 2020, showing that the attention to HE teaching increased with the pandemic situation. In the F&L,

I analyzed 256 articles; here, attention did not peak in 2020 but in the previous year, the anniversary of the Bologna Declaration.

I selected the *Die ZEIT* articles via the lexis nexus database with the help of a broad search query including (higher education OR university AND teaching OR lecturer* OR seminar OR stud*). In the analysis, I thus refer to articles covering the whole HE system in Germany including (public and private) universities, universities of applied sciences, and dual study programs. I examined over 2000 articles to determine whether the articles characterized, typified, or described students in the context of HE teaching, including instructional planning, curricula, courses, supervision and advising, organization, and examination. The same was done for the F&L without a database by screening all published articles for the years 2010–2020. I mainly used inductive category building to identify both the categories of difference and the practices of how to respond to diverse students. I then grouped the multitude of students' differences and HE practices into analytical categories and then into overarching categories in the next step. In a third step, the various categories were analyzed in detail by zooming in on the assigned discourse segments and analyzing the context and connections to other categories and evaluations.

4. Reconstructing Students' Differences and HEI Practices in the German Higher Education System

In the following, the students' differences, legitimization, and normalization tendencies are described. Finally, practices for responding to differences are presented to capture professional and societal expectations for action in HEI.

4.1. Major Contexts of Higher Education Teaching Discourses and the Construction of Difference

Students in HE are categorized in DIE ZEIT and F&L with the help of a variety of attributions of difference. Over time, no solid trends or changes can be determined in terms of which differences dominate. Still, various social debates can be identified in which different categories are invoked (see Table 1).

For example, the young age of students and a possible immaturity or lack of competencies were discussed in the debate on the shortening of upper secondary schooling and the abolition of compulsory military service, especially in 2010–2012. In the context of discussions about the Bologna Process and its consequences, students are portrayed as studying strategically, stressed, and less motivated. This debate has been significant in the professional discourse. Even 20 years after the Bologna reforms were introduced, they are still often used as a reason for negative developments in HE and students' characteristics. A digitization debate could also be traced. Here, the main issues discussed were the presence or absence of digital competencies on the part of students, making it possible for distance and part-time students to study, and reconcile this with work, child-rearing, and caregiving responsibilities.

Interestingly, these benefits are much less important in the digital semesters during the Corona crisis. Here, the practices and felt pressures and burdens of students are discussed. Comparing the media and professional discourses indicates that the focus of the professional debates is limited to what happens in HE, and broader societal developments like academization and school and military reforms are less critical.

Table 1. Major debates with corresponding discussed students' differences.

Topics of debate	Main difference categories	*Die ZEIT*	F&L
Abolition of compulsory military service and reduction of school-time	Age (younger students), less prepared, fewer skills	2010–2012	
Consequences of Bologna Process	Strategic studying, stress, opportunistic, less intrinsically motivated, absenteeism	2010–2011	2010–2020
Academization	VET qualification, without Abitur (HE entrance qualification), part-time studying	2013–2014	
Refugee migration into Germany	Refugees, traumatic experience, language skills	2015–2016	2016–2018
Digitalization in HE	Digital skills, usage of digital media, part-time studying, care work	2012–2020	2012–2020
Corona crisis in HE	Digital skills and practices, felt pressures, financial burdens, working alongside one's studies	2020	2020

4.2. Individualized Characteristics, Competencies, and Practices as Main Differences

What is striking is that in the overall view of the analysis in both *Die ZEIT* and F&L, the majority of the used differences have a strong reference to seemingly individualized characteristics, i.e., they are more strongly related to individually ascribable characteristics and practices of students in teaching and do not obviously reference social structure-relevant groups that are differentiated by, for instance, age, social origin, or gender. Even though it is known from research on habitus that it is precisely these perceived and ascribed supposedly individual competencies, characteristics, and practices that express the individuals' social origins (Bourdieu, 1979/1999) and lead to inequalities. This is not addressed or reflected in the analyzed articles. The "individualized" categories include, for example, attributed characteristics or descriptions such as different study interests, the degree of commitment to learning, enthusiasm for studying, self-confidence, determination, perseverance, political orientation, or need for support.

In addition to these characteristics, students are also differentiated in terms of their competencies and study practices. In terms of competencies, the main issues addressed are (the lack of) math and language skills, competencies in scientific work, digital competencies, and students' organizational skills. In short, the focus here is on what in the German discourse, particularly on HE access, is called *Studierfähigkeit* (study ability) (Bernhard, 2017). In terms of practices, learners are often characterized as strategic students who are less intrinsically motivated (than in the past) and who study driven by exams and ECTS. Dropping out is also an essential and common theme. Other practices include disrupting courses by being late, drinking and eating, contributing to the course, attendance, study preparation, and inappropriate communication via email. In addition, there are other "individualized" categories such as attributions of performance, students' needs and desires, their feelings and motives for studying, and their experiences. In both discourses, the three main categories (characteristics, competencies, and study practices) were the dominant differences used to describe students. In the media, the characteristics dominated; in the F&L, the study practices were discussed the most. Here, the articles focused more on direct didactical problems than in the media.

It is remarkable that students were less differentiated via the classic socio-structural categories. In particular, students with impairments are virtually nonexistent in the media discourse. Still, references to educational biography, transnational migration history, social origin, religion, gender, age, or life circumstances (care responsibilities, part-time work) are also rarely mentioned in contrast to the individualized categories. In the professional discourse, particularly social origin, gender, life circumstances, and transnational migration history—categories that are strongly associated with social inequality in education—are even less used to describe students. However, impairments, particularly psychological illnesses, were discussed as well as educational background. Concerning the latter, it is essential whether students have the general HE entrance qualification (Abitur) or not and can thus be expected to be prepared to go to HE.

In contrast to the media discourses, when socio-structural categories are discussed in the professional discourses, it is mostly by citing research and less based on professional experience. During the Corona crisis and only in the media discourse, the students' financial situation and social origin were discussed more often than before. In the F&L, the main focus in the context of the Corona crisis was on students' digital practices and their felt burdens, but not on the unequal distribution of these burdens. The interpretation of the overall low thematization of socio-structural categories may be twofold: First, these categories and related stereotypes might be less likely to be reproduced by not mentioning them. Second, however, structural inequalities that help determine success and failure in HE might also be systematically ignored. This is even truer if the link between "individualized" and social structural categories is not represented and reflected upon as is the case in the discourses.

4.3. Normalization and (De)Legitimization

Even though a certain type of heterogeneity is recognized as normal through the diverse representation of students, normalizations and (de)legitimations of certain groups and practices could be identified in the analysis. Here, the representation of students was quite similar in both discourses. By addressing specific categories of difference as deviant, not typical, or (almost) not worthy of mentioning, corresponding characteristics of "normal students" are simultaneously co-constructed.

A piece from *Die ZEIT* reads: "Our semester is quite heterogeneous. We also have students who graduated from a vocational-oriented secondary school and have already completed an apprenticeship. The age range is also quite wide, from 19 to 33. Some fellow students already have children" (Srikiow, 2014, p. 260, translation by the author). Thus, in this media quote from a student, specific groups are described as part of the university reality. However, by highlighting them, this quote simultaneously insinuates what is not yet typical. The normalization in the articles is done often through socio-structural categories and also through practices and characteristics. Normalized are the young full-time students without children, without vocational experience, but with a grammar school education (Gymnasium), without impairments, and from an academic parental home. Regarding practices and characteristics, students are described as both hard-working, reading, preparing, critical and not motivated, unreflective, unprepared, and

distracted by digital devices. Hence, it is presented as usual that students are diverse in their characteristics. In the professional discourse, however, the more negative images of less motivated students prevail. The different speakers in the media and professional discourses might explain this difference in the articles. While in the media, a wide range of speakers—HE teachers, professors, students, politicians, educational scientists, journalists, parents, employers—are present; in the professional discourse, the majority are professors and HE teachers, researchers, and journalists. This leads to the question: Is a more negative image of students and more ignorance towards social inequality more widespread in the HE teaching profession?

In both discourses, normalization is not simultaneously accompanied by a (de)legitimization of the other groups. (De)legitimization in the sense of a positive (or negative) emphasis or devaluation takes place in the examined articles primarily with practices, characteristics, and competencies. In particular, practices of strategic studying are devalued, albeit described as normal due to the influence of the Bologna HE reforms in Germany. Legitimate are those who are "capable of studying," willing to perform, intrinsically motivated, curious, and broadly interested. Highly gifted students who still attend school but already take some courses at university are portrayed this way (*Frühstudierende*). Those with the opposite characteristics are portrayed as illegitimate: "Other faculty members in other programs…may moan that students are conformist, lethargic, uninspired, disinterested, ignorant, and without profile" (Schüle, 2017, p. 59, translation by the author).

An analysis of how different categories intersect shows that certain groups are constructed more ambivalently than others, i.e., with positively and negatively attributed evaluative categories. This ambivalence applies in the discourses, for example, to the group of vocationally qualified people without a HE entrance qualification or international students. The word "intersect" refers to the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), which emphasizes the multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage that intersect and overlap and can lead to empowerment or oppression. Thus, on the one hand, international and vocationally qualified students are presented as new target groups and HEI enrichment due to their experiences and different competencies. On the other hand, negative evaluations are primarily based on the attributed lack of study skills (in language or general knowledge). These students are represented as a risk for the quality of HE:

> When another foreign student began his presentation in the seminar the other day, two students left the room because they knew that they were in for an incomprehensible lecture for the next half hour, which at no point would coalesce into a comprehensible argument. The obvious thought is to suggest to the international students that they give their presentations in English. However, many do not master this language either. (Oswalt & Adams, 2017, p. 65, translation by the author)

An analysis of the intersection also demonstrates that rarely only individualized categories form patterns. Patterns build on a combination of socio-structural categories and individualized ones, and in this way, a discursive inclusion or exclusion of social groups occurs.

For example, people who are identified as migrants in the discourses are often described as students who often did not attend a Gymnasium, are partially vocationally qualified, come from a non-academic home, do not have an adequate level of knowledge, are insecure in their studies, do not have the habitus of German academic children, and are more prone to dropping out. First-generation students are described in a very similar way:

> Or also the "person in need of support." More often than average, he is a migrant or comes from a difficult family background. He himself hardly believes that he will successfully complete his studies—although he would have the will and the ability to do so. (Wiarda, 2011, p. 77, translation by the author)

Moreover, even when the study success of these groups is reported, it is often presented as something special.

The intersectional analytical perspective can demonstrate that (partly stigmatizing) stereotypes are reproduced (e.g., lack of study ability of professionally qualified persons), but also, in part, the multiple (dis)advantages of student groups are presented, whereby the focus on and discussion or reflection of (dis)advantages remains marginal.

4.4. Expectations Towards Higher Education Institutions

How should HEI and its teachers respond to the heterogeneity presented? Which societal expectations towards HEI become visible? Expectations can be generated through clearly communicated norms about practices judged as positive or negative and displayed standards. At the same time, societal expectations also arise just through reported practices. When practices are continuously represented, they seem normal and self-evident. They become representations of reality that are taken for granted. In the first step, an overview of the reported practices will be given. In a second step, it will be discussed how the practices are represented.

A variety of practices of responding to students in HE is discussed in *Die ZEIT* and F&L. In general, HE (teaching) practices that answer to students' differences seems a relevant and already lived practice. The practices that were portrayed can be differentiated between the ones which are situated at the organizational level, like organizational support structures (counseling, information, preparatory courses, psychological aid centers) or teaching organization (e.g., part-time,

long-distance studying, attendance requirements) and direct teachers' practices. On the one hand, these teachers' practices include rather unspecified didactic teaching practices (target group orientation, individualized, and competence-oriented teaching). However, on the other hand, more specific practices like the adaptation of the teaching language or content of the course, examination practices, specific didactical models and standards, and digitized teaching offerings are presented. In both discourses, there was hardly any discussion of compensational practices for students' disadvantages or of the training or coaching of teachers as a measure to raise awareness of differences.

By comparing the discourses, several major differences become apparent. Teachers' practices are much more important in the F&L, whereas the media articles tend to focus more on the students and less on HE teaching. This focus on teaching practices in F&L was particularly strong during the Corona crisis, sometimes even without reference to the actual target group of these practices, the students.

In the media discourse, there was a shift during the Corona coverage. Here, specific (digital) teaching practices became much more pertinent than in previous years. From an organizational theory point of view, it seems that in situations of uncertainty and lack of common standards, media take on the task of representing the variance of practices. In this way, universities can solve the existing new challenges through imitation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). On the other hand, in the professional discourse, there has already been a strong focus on digital teaching practices before.

Besides digitized teaching, the individual didactic teaching practices are in the foreground in the professional discourse. Here, the topic is addressed, also much more precisely than in *DIE ZEIT*, by discussing how to react, for example, to disruptions, different motivational situations, distractions, differences in performance, but also intercultural differences. While in the media coverage, most of the practices displayed are not evaluated positively or negatively, teaching norms and standards are established in the F&L, corresponding to the professional mandate of such a journal. With the help of checklists, for instance, clear normative recommendations for actions are given:

> For this, the following checklist can be helpful: Speak slowly and well-articulated; make sure you are understood regularly; give written overviews/definitions; use visualizations. (Queis, 2010, p. 669, translation by the author)

Looking at the extent to which practices are thematized in connection with categories of difference, few recurring patterns can be identified. These connections exist primarily with socio-structural categories and less with individualized characteristics, competencies, and traits in the media discourse. In the professional discourse, the latter happens more often. For example, individual pedagogical practices such as topic selection, good presentation techniques, and innovative media use are seen as ways to motivate students to attend and participate.

While in the professional discourse, socio-structural categories are less discussed and related to practices, in the media, this is the case, particularly concerning the earlier described intersectional groups. For example, support structures are strongly thematized concerning student groups with increased dropout risk or support needs (international, "first-generation," professionally qualified students). The organization of teaching is often related to vocationally qualified students and especially students with children who need more flexibility in their studies due to their obligations. An adaptation of the teaching language is discussed as a reaction to international students and their language skills. In the media discourse, it can be seen that dealing with socio-structural-categorical differences of students, which often constitute the dimensions of social inequality—i.e., of disadvantages—is mainly outsourced to organizational offerings and is presented less as a task of individual teaching practice. Even though only a few practices were evaluated as positive, these organizational offerings have been predominantly described this way. Hence, practices that require institutionalization at the organizational level are more constructed as a norm than individual practices of HE teachers. Thus, in the media discourse, HE teachers are not normatively expected to be very sensitive to differences and, in particular, to inequalities. In the professional discourse, where social inequality is even less discussed, the expectations are also not articulated.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of an increasingly diversified student body, this article has examined the print media and professional discourse on HE teaching to determine which categories of student difference are constructed as relevant in HE teaching, which categories of difference are normalized and (de)legitimized, and which societal expectations are placed on HEI for a differentiating approach to students.

In summary, the article was able to show that in the media and the professional discourses, a diverse student body is represented. However, the heterogeneity depicted in the discourses relates more to individualized attributions than to classical socio-structural categories. The focus is on individual study and performance. For the most part, however, this ignores the fact that many student characteristics, competencies, and practices and how teachers perceive them are mediated through categories such as social origin or gender. The reproduction of inequality and the accompanying discrimination is hardly discussed in the media discourse and even less in the professional one. Socio-cultural categories do not appear to be essential for professional teaching practices.

In addition, the diversification taking place in the HE system is only partially reflected in the media. For example, students with impairments are virtually not represented in the media as students. This is problematic, as it can have consequences on the perception of potential students (with impairments) and their future educational decisions. It shows that it is still not common that students with impairments are being considered in HE practices. Inclusion has not yet arrived as an essential topic in the media discourse on university teaching, quite in contrast to the one about inclusion in schools.

Even though socio-structural categories were not mentioned much, normalizations often built on them. Legitimations of students, in turn, relate more strongly to individualizing categories that are more reminiscent of the Humboldtian ideal of the intrinsically motivated, broadly interested, research-affine, independent student. In the analysis of the intersectional interplay of the difference categories, it is striking that (stigmatizing) stereotypes are reproduced. For example, those of the (migrant) vocationally qualified students who lack essential skills due to the missing upper secondary general education and are at risk of dropping out. So, even when no or few socio-cultural categories are used to describe the ideal or legitimate student, it is clear that it is not, for instance, this group of the vocationally qualified or first-generation students who are more often described as having study issues.

The blindness to socio-structural categories and the strongly individualizing, e.g., competence-oriented, representation of students in both discourses is striking and can be interpreted as an indication of prevailing societal discourses in which individuals seen as human capital are made responsible for their own educational success in the sense of an entrepreneurial self (Bröckling, 2013). At the same time, also in pedagogical discourses, the individual is often in the center when looking, for example, at trends of individualizing, learner-centered approaches. Brandmayr (2018) shows that, for the concept of individualized learning, learning is seen to be strongly dependent on the individual capacities and the goal of the concept is to exploit individual performance potentials. But since the focus is on individual learning, collective learning support measures that are based on social conditions are neglected. Forgetting the socio-structural categories is thus partly inherent to individualizing pedagogical concepts. Hence, overall societal and pedagogical discourses can work in the same direction, which can be one explanation of the results in this article.

When analyzing the societal expectations of how HEI should deal with, for example, perceived at-risk students, the organizational level is usually addressed and not the individual teacher. In general, these practices, which require institutionalization at the organizational level (e.g., mentoring, preparatory courses, or advising), are the ones most likely to be thematized in the context of socio-structural-categorical differences. Dealing with these often inequality-relevant differences is thus outsourced to organizational offerings. In this way, the responsibility, power, and options for action that teachers at HEI have regarding the future opportunities of students are being underestimated or even ignored.

Following this logic, social educational mobility can therefore not only be facilitated by institutional (permeability) structures in the education system (Bernhard, 2019) but can also be influenced by the teachers' individual scope of action. Sensitizing HE teachers to these tasks and responsibilities, however, would then again have to be anchored structurally in the education system, for example through further obligatory training on diversity-sensitive teaching and discourses more sensitive to these topics.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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