ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN THE HIGHLY SELECTIVE GERMAN SCHOOL SYSTEM:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE EDUCATION

IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

Germany has historically been a country where peoples from various countries have worked and settled, and diverse cultures have existed. Yet, German schools still adhere to what could be described as assimilative and deficit-oriented practices (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006; Schanz, 2006). In addition, the German education system has a high degree of social selection (Auernheimer, 2006a) that creates severe educational inequities between German and immigrant students. After four years of primary school, students are streamed into one of the three major secondary school types Gymnasium, Realschule, and Hauptschule, based on achievement. Since these schools provide education of varying quality, students are denied equal opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to explore and critically analyze possible ways to alleviate the existing inequities in the German school system, which are reflected in the achievement gap between immigrant and German mainstream students (Hormel & Scherr, 2004; Schofield, 2006). Using a case study approach, I analyze the educational work of the award-winning German primary school “Kleine Kielstraße” located in Dortmund with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population, situated in a socially disadvantaged district. My purpose was to gain insight into the school’s practices and strategies for recognizing diverse students and for striving to provide equitable education for all students.

Despite the strategic steps taken by this school based on the competence and the enthusiasm of the principal and staff, it is quite evident that structural changes in the highly selective, three-tiered German secondary school system are required before educators can effectively challenge the built-in inequities. Though the German school
system is designed and programmed to discriminate and deny equal opportunity, the participating school demonstrates a pedagogical approach that provides more equitable education for all students regardless of their cultural background and ethnicity. This thesis explores these strategies of the school to create an understanding that a progressive “Intercultural Pedagogy” can go a long way in providing a better education despite structural inequities.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Germany and being educated in the highly selective three-tiered German school system it seemed almost “natural” to me to divide students according to their educational accomplishments. It was only when I started studying Primary School Education in Germany to become a teacher that I became concerned about the disadvantages that immigrant students, and others who are marginalized, face in the German education system. Especially, the highly selective structure of the secondary school system which starts streaming students at a very early age into one of the three major school types Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium, thereby sealing their educational and economic status, is an aspect that I have been extremely opposed to ever since I became interested in Education and teaching. Special thanks to my friends, “the Grad Lounge Gang”. Working, chatting, and laughing together was the best part of the process of writing my thesis. They helped me through the ups and downs in the process.

However, this major problem in German schools has not been a topic in any of the courses I took in Germany. Only in very few elective courses was Education in Germany discussed from a more critical perspective. It was only when I studied in Canada that I realized the opportunity to critically analyze the discriminating structures in the Education system of my native country and learn about ways to offer more equitable solutions and practices.

From my experience as a student in the German school system and my life in the changing German society, I am deeply concerned about the way in which difference and diversity are currently handled in Germany, in political, societal, and educational respects.
Although awareness arises that the achievement gap between German students and students with an immigration background is a severe problem, which is intensified by the school system itself, there is yet a great deal to be accomplished in order to alleviate inequities in German schools. In the context of a “global” world of trans-migration and communication, it is imperative that we focus on the underlying reasons as to why certain students are privileged and others are not.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore and critically analyze practices and strategies for more equitable education in order to investigate possible ways to alleviate the existing inequities in the highly selective German school system. These built-in inequities are reflected in the achievement gap between immigrant and German mainstream students. To this end, I shed light on the educational work of the German primary school “Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße” with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. This school was given the German School Award for their educational work in 2006. This award is granted annually to the best school in Germany. In a multistage process, jurors assessed the participating schools according to the following six criteria: (a) academic achievement, (b) approach to diversity, (c) quality of instruction, (d) responsibility, (e) school culture, and (f) school as a learning institution (Robert-Bosch-Foundation, 2008). In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the school’s practices in recognizing diverse students and in striving to provide equitable education, the objectives of this study are:

1. to learn about the school’s pedagogical framework
2. to describe how this pedagogical framework is translated into everyday practice

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1 “Grundschule” translates to primary school in English.
3. to explore areas for improvement in the participating school, and
4. to critically analyze the school’s practices, strategies, and perspectives that may or may not alleviate inequities in the German school system.

I apply a theoretical framework of Intercultural Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy, especially focusing on aspects of power relations, empowerment and social change, for the critical analysis in order to understand the work of the school and to learn about their understanding particularly of cultural differences. I analyze and critique their practices and strategies in consideration of the historical, social, and political context in Germany.

I chose a combination of these two pedagogies as theoretical framework for this thesis because both approaches see it as crucial to recognize differences and acknowledge the importance of culture for teaching and learning as well as for identity development. Especially the more critical approaches to Intercultural Pedagogy are similar to approaches of Anglophone Critical Pedagogy. However, Intercultural Pedagogy is a German approach that attempts to create an educational environment that is more accepting and responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of students in German schools. Most of the German literature on Intercultural Pedagogy has only been published in German. Therefore, I have translated direct quotations and paraphrases into English.

Rationale

Germany has a long tradition of immigration (Panayi, 2004). People from different countries moved to Germany for hundreds of years (Meinhardt, 2006). Even though countries and regions of origin of immigrants as well as size of the immigrant

\[2\] When explaining the historical development of immigration in Germany, I focus on West Germany. Since the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had very restrictive immigration laws, the development in this part of Germany proceeded very differently from the one in West Germany. In addition, the participating school is located in the western part of Germany.
population have changed over time, there has always been a constant influx of immigrants (Meinhardt). Therefore, multiculturalism, multietnicity and multilingualism are not new in Germany; rather, they have been “constant moments of the [German] history” (translated by author, Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006, p. 14).

Even though Germany has been an immigrant country for some time (Auernheimer, 2006a, for example specifies that Germany developed to an immigrant country with the employment recruitment treaties in 1955) attitudes towards immigrants are often negative, and the notion of an immigrant country is still not fully publicly acknowledged. This attitude is also prevalent in the German school system which “faced considerable problems of adaptation” due to “the scale and speed of immigration” (Daun, 2004, p. 336). A consequence of this lack of adaptation is that the “German education system with its high degree of social selection” (Auernheimer, 2006a, p. 75) creates severe educational inequities between German and immigrant students and along socio-economic lines, as Bender-Szymanski (2003) points out in her summary of the results of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In this highly selective school system children are streamed into one of the three major secondary school types Gymnasium, Realschule and Hauptschule as early as in grade five.

A major problem in the German education system is the achievement gap between German students and immigrant students (e.g., Gomolla, 2003; Schofield, 2006). This inequitable situation is obvious in a comparison of the student populations in these school

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3 “The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardised assessment that was jointly developed by participating countries and administered to 15-year-olds in schools.” (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment)

4 Gymnasium, Realschule and Hauptschule are ordered hierarchically according to their level of challenge, and they are geared toward different careers. Gymnasium prepares students for higher education, whereas Realschule and Hauptschule are oriented toward careers in sales and trades. Diplomas from Realschule and Hauptschule do not allow for admission to university.
types: The proportion of children with parents born outside Germany in *Hauptschule* (the academically lowest school type) is more than twice as high when compared to children with parents born in Germany (GEW⁵, 2006).⁶ Since the streaming is based on the students’ academic accomplishment in primary school, these numbers suggest that the needs of immigrant children are not sufficiently accommodated during these first four school years.⁷ Suggestions for possible reasons for the achievement gap are manifold, for example institutional discrimination (Gomolla, 2003), teacher expectation, stereotype threat and ability grouping (Schofield), the generally monocultural and monolingual habitus of the schools (Gogolin, 1994), and the structure of the highly selective streaming system (Bender-Szymanski, 2003; Hormel & Scherr, 2004; Krüger-Potratz, 2006).

Even though there have been state recommendations for intercultural education that is more responsive to the cultural and linguistical diversity of the students in schools (Kultusministerkonferenz, 1996)⁸, Schanz (2006) is of the opinion that mere recommendations do not support the intercultural development of schools in their daily practice. Schools themselves have to be the motor of development; they have to define where they are standing, to whom they feel accountable, and where they want to go in their future development (Rolff et al., 1999, quoted in Schanz). Schanz sees the need for “critical and active engagement of teachers and principals in social and political discourses as well as in the reflection on the interplay of these processes with pedagogical developments” (translated by author, p. 111). This is similar to Giroux’s understanding “that any attempt to change the schools from within has to deal with the interrelated and

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⁵ GEW (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft) is the union for education and scholarship in Germany.  
⁶ It is important to notice that the group of students with an immigration background is not homogeneous. It consists of diverse students from different cultures and nationalities, which are disadvantaged dissimilarly. For a comprehensive description of this situation see Kristen (2002).  
⁷ Primary school in Germany encompasses grade one to four.  
⁸ Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) is the conference of the ministers of education of the states in Germany.
diverse ways in which oppression is shaped and reproduced under the weight of wider institutional contexts” (2003, p. 9).

Schools have been regarded as institutions of social reproduction and of perpetuation of social inequities (for example Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Broadfoot, 1979). While I think that these notions are valid, I agree more with McLaren’s (2003) critical theory which “enables the educational researcher to see the school not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or a site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes students’ empowerment and self-transformation” (p. 70). In this more dynamic understanding there is the hope and possibility of social change, whereas in the static reproduction theories students and teachers are not seen as agents of their own actions, but rather as passive marionettes (Giroux, 1981).

However, changes will not come without struggle. McLaren’s dialectic understanding that “schools [are regarded] as sites of both domination and liberation” (2003, p. 70) is similar to Giroux’s “notion that schools are neither the exclusive locus of domination nor of resistance but a combination of both” (1981, p. 15). These theories permit not only to identify structural and institutional inequities, but also encourage teachers and students to take action and bring along social change. This form of “empowerment means not only helping students to understand and engage the world around them, but also enabling them to exercise the kind of courage needed to change the social order where necessary” (McLaren, 2003, p. 85).

I believe that schools play a vital role in initiating critical awareness for the social conflicts and inequities. Therefore, social change has to be initiated and actively lived in schools. Giroux (2003) points out that “it is more important than ever that educators and all those concerned about democratic public life provide an alternative vision of schooling
that supports democratic forms of political agency and a substantive democratic social order” (p. 8). His understanding of a theory of radical pedagogy is also worth quoting at length:

This means that a viable theory of radical pedagogy must not only be concerned with issues of curriculum and classroom practice, but must also emphasize the institutional constraints and larger social forms that bear down on forms of resistance waged by educators, teachers, students, and others attempting to challenge dominant teaching practices as well as systemic forms of oppression such as tracking. (Giroux, 2003, p. 8)

In this study, I explore whether it is possible to create relevant and responsive curricula and to offer equitable education even though the system itself does not seem to leave much room for this. I aspire to learn about their work in their particular, highly diverse context in a school system that attempts to normalize and assimilate.

In an inquiry that explores and analyzes inequities between different cultural groups in schools, it is vital to take the political and historical situation as well as the wider social context into consideration (Giroux, 1979, 1981; McLaren, 2003). To include these contextual perspectives in this research is also important because “the school has to see itself as a micro-system of the society” (translated by author, Gültekin, 2006, p. 381). I believe that understanding the school’s work requires an understanding of the societal context. Therefore, I include vital information about the political and social situation in Germany regarding immigration and about the most important aspects of the German school system.

In my opinion, it is crucial that German schools create more equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of the cultural or socio-economic background. Only then can schools become truly democratic institutions, beyond the notion of equal treatment, and the initiators of social change.
Definitions

In the day-to-day discussion about immigration, immigrants are often still referred to as *foreigners* in Germany (Meinhardt, 2006). Even in schools it is often talked about as *the foreign children* (Krüger-Potratz, 2006). This imprecise term implies several problematic notions. Firstly, the distinction between *German* and *foreign* implies that there are two easily differentiable and homogenous groups. This is not at all the case, not for the group of foreigners, which consists of a complex variety of cultures, religions, histories, identities, and backgrounds, but also not for the group of Germans. Secondly, hearing teachers and other people involved in schools talk about “the foreign children” keeps renewing the notion that those children are outsiders who do not belong there (Krüger-Potratz). In this context, it is important to understand that social reality is constructed through the choice of terms and categories, which in return influence how people are perceived by others (Auernheimer, 2005; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Because the nationality of the students does not allow for conclusions about pedagogical decisions and situations, Krüger-Potratz concludes that the terms *German* and *foreigner* are inappropriate.

For this research, it is vital to understand the different terms that are used to describe *Germans, (im)migrants, and foreigners*. The term *foreigner* refers only to the legal status, and it does not give any information about the immigration background, the living situation or the level of integration (Meinhardt, 2006). Because a growing number of people are living increasingly longer in Germany without a German passport, Meinhardt suggests a new term that is more appropriate for describing the social reality:
Inlanders without German citizenship (translation by author, p. 25). This term acknowledges this group as part of the German society even without a German passport.

The group of Germans consists of the following: (a) the Danish and Sorbian minority, (b) children and youths with a migration background from Aussiedler (ethnic German emigrants) families, (c) children and youths of binational families, (d) children and youths from immigrated families that hold the German citizenship, and (e) children that receive German citizenship through birth in Germany (Krüger-Potratz, 2006).

According to the new immigration law of 2000, children of parents without German citizenship who are born in Germany can receive German citizenship, in addition to their parents’ citizenship. Between the ages of 16-23 they have to decide between the two nationalities. The last group (e) is of particular importance for schools because children of this group will enter German primary schools in growing numbers in the next years.

The broad term migrant is used in Germany for the following very different groups: foreign workers, foreign refugees, Aussiedler, and Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union (Meinhardt, 2006). A description of these terms demonstrates how complex and ambiguous the situation is. In addition, these differentiations still do not contain much information about the people’s living situation, their histories and experiences. By this categorization the cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity is disguised.

For this research, I refer to two groups, the group of Germans and the group of immigrants. In my understanding and use of the term immigrants, I refer to people who moved to Germany from other countries, for example the Gastarbeiter (guestworkers) in

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9 The term Aussiedler refers to immigrants who can prove their ethnic affiliation to the German people. They come mostly from eastern European countries, and the peak of their immigration to Germany was between 1988 and 1991 (Meinhardt, 2006).
the 1960s, Aussiedler in the 1990s and refugees and immigrants from all over the world. I am using the term immigrants because I refer to everyone who has been or plans to stay in Germany for a longer time, regardless of their citizenship or level of integration. It is important to acknowledge this group as part of the German society. This group includes children whose parents or grandparents came to Germany as immigrants or who themselves came to Germany as immigrants. These children might have German citizenship, but often they still do experience severe disadvantages in the German school system. For their situation and opportunities in schools, the nationality is often less important than the family history and the current living situation.

I apply the term *German* only to describe people and students whose parents are born in Germany and who themselves are born there too and who possess German citizenship. I realize that this differentiation is very simplistic. However, for the purpose of this thesis, this more simplistic differentiation is appropriate in order to facilitate its reading. In addition, the majority of immigrant students do face similar disadvantages and discriminations in the German school system, even though they are extremely diverse in many other respects. Furthermore, although even this limited understanding of Germans encompasses a vastly diverse group, the majority of these students have similar advantages and privileges in the German school system in comparison to immigrant students.

**Overview of Thesis**

This research hopes to contribute to the need for understanding inequities in German schools and to the awareness of the importance of including critical intercultural perspectives as underlying principles of education in increasingly diverse German schools.
The second chapter describes the context in Germany that is relevant for this study. The third chapter introduces the theoretical framework and the educational approaches that respond to cultural plurality of students. The method of this study is described in chapter four. In chapter five, a comprehensive presentation of the school’s pedagogical framework and their strategies for increasing educational equity is given. In chapter six, this framework and the strategies are critically analyzed by deploying a theoretical framework of Intercultural Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy with a focus on the school’s approach to dealing with differences and diversity of the students. Implications, limitations, and possibilities of this study are discussed in the last chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

SITUATING THE SCHOOL IN THE GERMAN CONTEXT

In this chapter, the situation in Germany with regard to aspects that are important to better understand the case study of the award-winning school is described. These aspects include immigration to Germany, the German school system and the situation of immigrant students in the German school system.

Immigration to Germany

Meinhardt (2006) summarizes the development of Germany from an emigration to an immigration country over the last nine hundred years. He demonstrates that there was never a biological or cultural homogeneous German population. Because immigration processes are heavily influenced by national and international political events and decisions, immigration to Germany increased especially after World War II due to the influx of about 13 million refugees and expellees from eastern parts of Europe (Meinhardt). Another wave of immigration can be identified to have begun in the 1950s with the recruitment of foreign workers, the so called Gastarbeiter (guestworkers), mainly from the Mediterranean countries (Auernheimer, 2006a; Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006; Meinhardt). After the recruitment of Gastarbeiter was stopped in the 1970s, the government hoped for a decline of the population of foreign workers. However, this strategy led to an increased influx of immigrants since many of the mostly male Gastarbeiter stayed in Germany. In addition, they brought their families to Germany (Meinhardt). Even though the proportion of Gastarbeiter decreased over the following decades in comparison to other registered persons with foreign citizenship, this group is still the largest one (Hansen & Wenning, 2003).
Another increase in immigration took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Aussiedler from eastern European countries came to Germany. Refugees from the civil war in Yugoslavia moved to Germany as well.

Immigrants from all over the world are coming to Germany in today’s globalized and internationalized world. Between 1997 and 2002, about 850,000 immigrants were registered in Germany each year. In 2004, these numbers decreased to 780,000 immigrants (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2005). The global migration is one of the effects of globalization. Stromquist (2002) regards this phenomenon not as a causal pillar of globalization, but “rather as an outcome of the overall change process” (p. 3). Due to the compression of space and time, the increased permeability of borders and the loss of sovereignty of the institution *nation-state*, people experience more mobility and flexibility (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000).

The proportion of immigrants and refugees in Germany varies greatly according to region. The percentage of immigrants in the eastern part of Germany, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), is much lower than in the rest of Germany. In addition, the immigrant population is generally higher in urban areas than in rural ones (Herwartz-Emden, 2005; Karakaşoğlu-Aydin, 2001). Herwartz-Emden points out that immigrants tend to live in segregated areas of low living quality with a higher risk of poverty due to their oftentimes low socio-economic status.

According to Karakaşoğlu-Aydin (2001), a large part of the non-German population has their permanent residence in Germany. Therefore, increasing numbers of non-Germans were born in Germany. In 1998, about 23% of all non-Germans were born in Germany; among the 18-year-olds and younger, almost 70% were born in Germany (Herwartz-Emden, 2005; Karakaşoğlu-Aydin). Nevertheless, the group of ethnic
minorities with German nationality is relatively small, in comparison to other European countries, due to high requirement for naturalization in Germany (Herwartz-Emden). This situation might change in the next decades due to the immigration law of 2000, which facilitates gaining German citizenship when born in Germany.

A demographic difference between the German and the non-German population is that the latter group has a higher percentage of children and adolescents (Karakaşoğlu-Aydin, 2001). This is also an interesting fact for the education system because the birth rate of German children has been decreasing for years now. As a result, the percentage of immigrant students in German schools will increase over the following years even more.

The societal reality in Germany is one of an immigrant country. However, attitudes towards immigrants are often negative, and the notion of an immigrant country is still not fully acknowledged.

**Attitudes towards the Notion of an Immigrant Country**

The attitude towards Gastarbeiter during the years they came to Germany was rather indifferent. They often lived in segregated areas, alone without their families, and they were expected to move back to their home countries after they worked for a few years in Germany (Hansen & Wenning, 2003).

However, in the decades following the Gastarbeiter policies, the attitude of Germans towards the Gastarbeiter grew increasingly worse. The economic situation was not as good as it used to be in the previous decades. In addition, people started to realize that large numbers of guestworkers and their families did not intend to leave Germany. In 1983, for example, 80% of Germans, who were interviewed for a study investigating the attitude of Germans towards foreigners, agreed to the statement that guestworkers, or
foreigners in general, should return to their home countries; 43% felt threatened by the high number of foreigners (Meinhardt, 2006).

The strategy of the German government at this time was two-sided. On the one hand, more rigorous restrictions for immigration were implemented, but on the other hand, integration processes in German schools and society in general were facilitated (Meinhardt, 2006). Meinhardt summarizes that the controversial strategies and conceptions during this time led to the continuation of the neglect of the reality of factual immigration to Germany.

This political attitude of ignorance towards immigration continued in the 1980s and early 1990s. According to Auernheimer (2006a), “politics and everyday life would not even consider that the process [of immigration] might be irreversible” (p. 77). Immigration was ignored by the German government until 1998 (Meinhardt, 2006). It was only recently that the former German socio-democratic government acknowledged the cultural diversity of the German population. In 2001, the findings of the Süssmuth10 Commission “laid the groundwork for the acceptance of concepts of multiculturalism in Germany” (Panayi, 2004 p. 467). Nevertheless, acknowledgement and handling of diversity and differences is still controversially discussed and often rejected as being incompatible with the notion of a monocultural and monolingual nation state Germany.

In Panayi’s “Evaluation of Multiculturalism in Britain and in Germany: A Historical Survey” (2004) it has been demonstrated that Germany is less active and willing to improve the situation of immigrants and to eliminate racial discrimination than Britain for example. Auernheimer (2005) points out that the legal framework for anti-

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10 Rita Süssmuth is a former German federal minister of youth, family and health. She was also president of the German federal diet between 1988-1998. She was a member of the German federal diet until 2002.
discrimination in Germany is far behind in its development in comparison to other European countries.

Integration is generally still regarded as a one-way process: Immigrants have to make an effort and demonstrate their motivation to change their lives and cultures according to the dominant culture. This becomes obvious in Meinhardt’s (2006) description of the migration law of 2005. Immigrants have to enrol in integration classes where they learn the German language and are informed about the German justice and social system. Integration in the common use of the term is often understood as the request or even demand toward immigrants to “blend in,” to act unobtrusive and to abandon their cultural practices (Auernheimer, 2005). From this perspective, the majority culture does not have to change or accommodate the needs of the immigrants. When this integration does not generate the anticipated results, usually the immigrants themselves are blamed for their lack of effort to integrate properly.

This understanding justifies the unequal treatment of newcomers in comparison to the part of the population that has lived in Germany for a longer time. This notion is called *Etabliertenvorrechte* (Heitmeyer, 2005, p. 15): Whoever lives longer in a country should have more rights than newcomers. Heitmeyer demonstrates in this empirical study that the agreement with this notion is still high in Germany. Over 60% of the representative sample agreed to the statement that someone who is new to a place should be satisfied with less. Over 35% agree that people who have always lived in Germany should have more rights than newcomers. Even higher is the agreement to the statement that too many foreigners are living in Germany; the numbers actually increased from 2002/2003 to 2004 (almost 60% agreed to this last statement). Heitmeyer comes to the conclusion that the normalities in the political middle are changing towards a society that
shows less solidarity for minority groups. These recent findings show that the German population is still far away from acknowledging the reality of an immigrant society. The major part of the society does still not demonstrate the awareness of an immigrant society.

I believe that schools play a vital role in bringing along social change and in changing the general attitude in a society. Therefore, it is important that the negative notion of immigration to Germany and immigrants themselves has to be challenged. However, only regarding immigrants as a colourful and “exotic” supplement to the German society, as it is often the case in multiculturalism, still does not give them the recognition they deserve as being an integral part of the German society. The basis for a changed understanding towards the role and place of immigrants in the German society can be laid in schools, where children from different backgrounds and with diverse experiences learn and live together. In this atmosphere, they can acquire the skills they need for conflict resolution on the basis of mutual respect. In addition, schools can equip students with the necessary intellectual tools and knowledge that allow them to identify, understand, and overcome structural discriminations in societal organization as well as in the education system.

The German School System

In the following part of the discussion the most important aspects of the German school system, especially in regard to the increasing plurality of the student population, are described.
Structure and Responsibilities

Leschinski and Cortina (2005) describe the division of responsibilities for education in Germany as a combination of centralized and decentralized structure on different levels. The main responsibilities for public education lie with the Länder (federal states) governments. However, the single schools are being allocated increasingly more freedom in their educational decisions (Leschinski & Cortina). Since the education system is not centrally administered and education is the responsibility of the Länder in Germany, there are different school systems in the different Länder. This results in variations in the school systems from two-tiered to five-tiered systems (Baumert, Cortina & Leschinski, 2005). Every Land, however, has primary schools (mostly grade one to four, some until grade six) and Gymnasium. Gymnasium offers academically oriented education and leads to a diploma that qualifies for higher education. This diploma is called Abitur. Other major school types are Realschule (grade 5-10) and Hauptschule (grade 5-10). For students who graduate with good grades from Realschule, it is possible to continue grade eleven and twelve (or until grade thirteen in some Länder) at a Gymnasium. Lower school types like Hauptschule as well as schools for students with learning difficulties offer a merely reductionistic curriculum, which is academically less challenging (Graumann, 2003). Topics are simply reduced in their complexity, which perpetuates the inequity in educational opportunities. Education offered in Realschule and Hauptschule is geared more towards careers in sales and trades than towards an academic career.

There is another school type that exists in almost all federal states, in some however, only in very small numbers: the so-called integrated Gesamtschule. Aiming at
integration instead of selection, American high schools, English comprehensive schools, and the Swedish 9-year-elementary school were viewed as examples in the development of this school type (Köller, 2005). Not only the structure of the school was changes, but also the teaching and learning methods, as well as the contents and the aims of the lessons. The introduction of this school type in the 1970s has been controversially discussed. It is a school meant for all students, and it focuses less on homogenization of the student population. It leads to diplomas after grade 9 or 10 as well as to the degree usually only granted by Gymnasium, the Abitur. In addition, this school is generally a full-time school unlike the other secondary schools. According to Herwartz-Emden (2005) and Karakaşoğlu-Aydin (2001), this school type seems to improve the educational chances for children with an immigration background. The open structure of this school type allows more immigrant students to enter with the possibility of being granted the Abitur in the end.

When the Gesamtschule was introduced it was envisioned has an alternative to and ultimately as a replacement for the streamed secondary school system. Its introduction was promoted especially in the federal states that were governed by the socio-democratic party. This school type developed differently in the different federal states. On average, the integrated Gesamtschule is of only minor significance nowadays. Only in some federal states the proportions of students visiting this school type are higher, for example 14-16 percent in North Rhine-Westphalia (Köller, 2005). Instead of becoming a substitute for the selective secondary school system, the Gesamtschule entered a competition with the other secondary school types. Nowadays, teachers often see this school as an alternative to the other school types in particular for students with more unbalanced achievements, meaning lower achievements, but with promising
tendencies in a long-term perspective (Köller). Köller summarizes the results from national and international school achievement studies when he says “that students in integrated Gesamtschulen tend to have lower state of knowledge and lower learning gains in comparison to students in the three-tiered school system” (p. 484). However, other studies indicate that students in this school type benefit especially in their psychological and social development (Köller). Köller comes to the conclusion that innovative school programs that promise a positive cognitive and psycho-emotional development for the students are received well especially by teachers, parents and students at Gesamtschulen. Due to limited financial resources and a reduced student population, the future of this school type is uncertain.

In its structure, school in Germany is only a part-time institution. Generally, schools are open from 8am to 2pm. This structure is based on the assumption that only one parent is working fulltime or that other family members are at home, so that the children can be taken care of in the afternoon. Baumert, Cortina and Leschinsky (2005) call attention to the fact that the reality in most families does not correspond to this traditional family structure anymore. According to Auernheimer (2006a), the half-day schedules “often meant a neglect of children and youth from families of the lower strata,” (p. 81) whose parents are working and whose “place for learning is the street or television” (p. 81). In his opinion, this structural deficit of the school system “exacerbates social selection and distance” (p. 81). Therefore, increasingly more schools, especially primary schools, offer full-time day care for their students until 4pm. The activities offered in the afternoon include games and play, music and sport lessons, homework help and tutoring. According to Baumert, Cortina, and Leschinsky, daycare opportunities are
asked for especially by parents from lower social backgrounds. However, the need for daycare highly exceeds the offer.

**Characteristics of the German School System**

Leschinski and Cortina (2005) characterize the German school system as democratic, based on the principle of categorical equality (equal treatment for everyone, regardless of gender or social status) and on meritocratic reward mechanisms. Schools in Germany grant the students their statuses according to individual achievement in comparison to the class average. The criteria to judge this individual achievement are based on notions of “fair competition and therefore on the postulate of at least formal equality” (translated by author, Leschinski & Cortina, p. 32). Even though students are evaluated according to meritocratic principles in schools, the authors acknowledge that the German school system as a whole tends to reproduce social disparities in educational processes. They identify the social disparities to emerge not so much within one school type, but at the transition points from one school level to the next, especially from primary school to secondary schools.

In general, there is still “the trend to seek explanations for school failure in family background and inherent aptitude of the student” (Auernheimer, 2006a, p. 84). The “unspoken belief in inherent aptitude” (Auernheimer, 2006a, p. 86) is one of the main pillars, according to Auernheimer, on which the German education system based the rationale for its hierarchically organized secondary school system.

The highly selective secondary school system attempts to create groups of students which are as homogeneous as possible in their academic performance. The common argument for the streaming is that educational quality can only be maintained in
homogeneous learning groups. Even though this notion has been proven wrong by PISA, the argument of the importance of homogeneous learning groups still continues. PISA 2000 pointed out the deficits in student achievement in Germany, especially of students with an immigration background and from families with lower socio-economic status, in comparison to countries with less selective systems. Germany fell into the so called “PISA shock” after the deficits in German schools and student achievement were published because it had always been assumed that German schools occupy a leading position. Education reforms that vary between the different federal states have been introduced since 2000 to improve the educational situation of the students. Whereas deficits in the lessons were widely discussed and binding standards for the different school types have been introduced, the discriminating structure of the school system is oftentimes neglected in these discussions (Gogolin, 2006).

Children are streamed into the different secondary school types, which vary in level of challenge, according to their accomplishments in primary school. Even within these school types, class and course systems are created to “rehomogenize” (translated by author, Leschinski & Cortina, 2005, p. 33). This constant attempt to group together students with seemingly similar performances makes students aware of the differences between them even more (Leschinski & Cortina). Warzecha (2003a) states that the attempt to create homogeneous achievement groups of students in school is nowhere as consequent as it is in Germany. This homogenization is an impossible attempt, however, since “linguistic, social and cultural heterogeneity of the student population is the decisive characteristic of today’s school” (translated by author, Warzecha, 2003a, p. 15). Baumert, Cortina and Leschinski (2005) indicate that international comparisons have shown that Germany is far behind other countries in opening up more academically
oriented educational opportunities that lead to degrees that allow for entry into higher education.

Herwartz-Emden (2005) considers the prevalent notion of the average student and family in the German school system to be one reason for the disadvantaged educational situation of children with an immigrant background. This notion presumes a monocultural socialization and a monolingual language development, which does not represent the lived reality of many of the students in German schools (e.g., Gogolin, 1994; Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). Dietz (2007) explains how educational systems in Europe in general do not regard the increased internationalization as a challenge to their continuity, but they still see heterogenization “as a mere appendix, suitable for compensatory measures, and as an extra-ordinary situation” (p. 7).

The reason for this dominant understanding is seen in the school’s educational function to socialize students to become members and citizens of the German nation state. The primary tool for this socialization is the German language (Gogolin, 1994). Gogolin explains this “monolingual habitus” of the German school system historically as being closely linked to the development of Germany into a nation state. During the process of becoming one German nation in the 19th century, an understanding of one national culture and one national language as means of creating a community and of identifying with this new nation state was developed. The notion of possessing “imagined” commonalities of a shared linguistic history with their students is still dominant in many teachers’ ways of thinking (Gogolin). Even today, school is often regarded as the primary institution for the socialization of the following generation towards the “imagined ethnic community” of the nation state (translated by author, Gogolin, p. 12). Gogolin argues that this monocultural self-conception is becoming increasingly dysfunctional due to the pluralisation of the
student population. However, even when teachers’ acknowledge the multilingual reality of their student population, they seem to be “caught” in their own monolingual habitus.

Mother tongue education is offered in many Länder especially in primary schools, sometimes organized by the members of the language groups themselves. The courses are usually regarded as an add-on to the existing monolingual curricula, and not as an integrative part of the school life. Monolingualism is still regarded as the norm in many schools (Gogolin, 1994).

According to Auernheimer (2006a; 2005, p. 165), the three main deficits of the German education system are (a) the multi-streaming system of secondary schools after primary school; (b) the apparent homogeneity of the student population, which is created through this rigid external differentiation, because it leads teachers to not see the need to integrate heterogeneity in their teaching; and (c) the part-time school, which limits the opportunities for social learning and other supportive learning offers.

The external differentiation together with social selection and the short time students spend in primary school before they are selected into different types of secondary schools highly impede equal opportunities for all students in this system (Auernheimer, 2006a). The limited time in primary school does not allow for sufficient and successful compensation of possible shortcomings for students with disadvantaged starting positions (Auernheimer, 2006a). In Auernheimer’s (2006a) opinion, the German education system is therefore “unable to meet fully the pedagogical challenges posed by migration” (p. 75). The consequences of this situation are discussed in the following sections.
Immigrant Students in the German School System

The constant immigration to Germany is reflected in an increasingly diverse student population. More than one third of all children entering primary school in many German cities in the year 2002 were children with an immigration background (Herwartz-Emden, 2005). According to Hansen and Wenning (2003), at the beginning of this decade about 9% of the student population did not possess German citizenship. These percentage numbers vary greatly between different regions and cities in Germany. In eastern parts of Germany, sometimes only 0.5% of the students have a foreign citizenship, whereas almost 20% of the children belonged to this group in the city of Hamburg (Hansen & Wenning).

It has been strongly suggested by many educators and researchers as well as international comparative student assessments like PISA that the German school system creates severe educational inequities between German and immigrant students and along socio-economic lines (e.g., Auernheimer, 2006a; Bender-Szymanski, 2003). Herwartz-Emden (2005) identifies the problem of the overrepresentation of children with an immigrant background in Hauptschulen in all German Länder, even though the school structures are different in some Länder. Especially the proportions of immigrant children in Gymnasium are far below the proportions of German students. In her presentation of the proportions of “foreign students” (pp. 685-686) in the different school types in 2000 the disparities become obvious. Only 3.9% of foreign students visit a Gymnasium, whereas 24.1% of German students go there. The percentage numbers of foreign students in the other school types are as follows: Realschule 6.4%, Hauptschule 17.3%,
Gesamtschule 12%, and night schools 22.7%. The remaining foreign students attend other school types such as preschools, primary schools, and special education schools.

In these numbers, Aussiedler children are not included because they possess German citizenship. However, nowadays, one third of the children with an immigrant background are Aussiedler children. In the currently vivid discussion about the problems of immigrant students face in German schools, this large group of Aussiedler children is not taken into consideration because their legal status is German (Hansen & Wenning, 2003). In the official political understanding, these children are Germans and are therefore assumed to speak German and to not face any problems in schools. However, the situations of these children, who often have only very limited knowledge of the German language, are very similar to these of other immigrant children. Supervisory school authorities realized only with delay that the reality of these students does not correspond to the official understanding. With this changing understanding, strategies similar to the ones for immigrant children are set in place to support Aussiedler children in schools (Hansen & Wenning).

The most decisive selective step in the German school system is made from primary school to secondary school (Baumert, Cortina & Leschinski, 2005). Teachers give recommendations about the appropriate secondary school for the students based on their academic achievements in primary school. Until recently, the final decision about secondary schools was with the parents. Nowadays, the schools decide about the secondary school. However, it is possible for parents to contest the school’s decision. Baumert, Cortina and Leschinski refer to studies that show that students from lower social classes transfer less often to Gymnasium than students from more privileged families even with comparable academic accomplishments. They authors conclude that parents from
higher social strata are more successful in avoiding Hauptschule for their children even with only low academic achievement. Graumann (2003) criticizes that in the decision-making process about the “right” secondary school, teachers often ask themselves the question “in which school type does this student ‘fit’ best”, and not “where can the student be helped best” (translated by author, p. 128).

The PISA studies in the year 2000 demonstrated the achievement gap between German and immigrant students. Especially the results in reading competencies were alarming. According to the PISA studies in 2000, 50% of the 15-year-old students with an immigrant background possess only very basic competencies in their reading skills (Herwartz-Emden, 2005). In addition, these language problems seem to have negative consequences on these students’ competencies in other school subjects (Herwartz-Emden).

The low quality of the education at Hauptschule, which many immigrant students attend, is often alarming, as the PISA results demonstrated. Hauptschule has gained a reputation as being either a “school for leftovers” or the “school for foreigners or migrants” especially in urban regions (Auernheimer, 2006a, p. 80).

Gogolin (1994) explains how the presence of more immigrant children in the German school system improved the educational situation of German students because immigrant students take, or rather are given, the places in the lower qualifying schools first. This “creaming effect” (Auernheimer, 2006a, p. 80) leads to a selective and problematic composition of the student body. Kronig (2003) identifies a similar scenario, in which German students experience uplift in the educational pyramid due to the influx of immigrant students.

Karakaşoğlu-Aydin (2001) points out that students without German citizenship are asked to repeat grade classes far more often than German students. In Gymnasium,
the repetition rate of foreign students is twice as high as those of German students. In primary school, foreign students repeat classes four times more often than German students. Karakaşoğlu-Aydin interprets these numbers as a sign of the primary schools’ failure to accommodate and integrate foreign students appropriately in school. This is one of the reasons why increasingly more primary schools offer special support classes, for example in German as a second language both prior to school start and during school days (Karakaşoğlu-Aydin).

Teacher Attitudes towards Immigrant Students

In a qualitative longitudinal study, Bender-Szymanski (2000, 2003) investigated how German novice teachers were coping with cultural diversity during the two years of practical training. Prior to the practical training, the novice teachers unanimously believed to change their own thinking and emotions through the new experience of teaching in culturally diverse contexts. They also expected that through the challenges they might face as teachers, they would be able to “cope respectfully with cultural difference and to create conflict resolutions acceptable for all those involved” (2000, p. 246). Bender-Szymanski describes these anticipations as “synergy-oriented’ coping with cultural difference” (2000, p. 248). However, after these first two years as teachers, Bender-Szymanski found that the participants developed two types of teachers’ acculturation, which are expressed in the teachers’ choice of strategies for handling intercultural experiences. In this study, the participants (N=20) were represented in these two groups in equal parts.

The synergy-oriented type analyzes situations from their students’ perspective. Teachers in this group do not generalize the often unfamiliar and new orientations of their
students, but they analyze “the culture-specific meaning which situations of interaction at school have for the pupils, and which accounts for their behaviour” (Bender-Szymanski, 2000, p. 238). They realize the relativity of their own cultural orientation and are therefore self-reflective about their own contributions to conflict situations. Their aim is to solve problematic situations in a way that is acceptable for everyone involved. They recognize other cultural perspectives and respect their validity in intercultural interactions. These teachers change their own teaching and learning goals as well as their pedagogical methods in a way that links cultural orientations, so that they can coexists on the one hand, and so that room for new experiences for everyone is opened up on the other hand (Bender-Szymanski, 2000). They are looking for possible new, “third” solutions (Bender-Szymanski, 2000).

The ethno-oriented type does not analyze a situation adequately, mainly because they “ignore reflections about meanings underlying the behaviour of pupils with another cultural background which are potentially different from their own view” (Bender-Szymanski, 2000, p. 241). They try to find reasons for the problematic situation in the students’ lacking understanding of their own, that is the teacher’s, position. The reasons are seen in the students’ supposed deficits in their socialization in the German culture as well as in ascribed intellectual and mental deficits. These teachers tend to generalize characteristics they impute to their students without questioning their own cultural embeddedness. In their conflict resolution, they focus on ways to overcome the students’ “resistance to change” (Bender-Szymanski, 2000, p. 244). They seem convinced that the students need to understand “that living together effectively in school and society is only possible if they change their perceptions of reality, and if they respect and adopt the norms and rules of the dominant culture” (2000, p. 244).
Auernheimer (2006b) notices “blindness against differences” (translated by author, p. 129) of teachers that results from the attempt not to stereotype and discriminate students. The consequence is that other cultural perspectives are often neglected altogether (Auernheimer, 2006b). Many teachers seem insecure about how to discuss cultural differences in an affirmative and constructive way without leading to exoticization and alienation.

Summary

In this chapter it is shown that the presence of immigrant students is nothing new in German schools. Nevertheless, they are often still regarded as the special or problematic case. A comprehensive and fundamental approach to increase awareness about and competencies in recognizing plurality as a social reality in schools is often still missing. This social reality had also been ignored in educational research for a long time. Even though educational research and literature on these topics is increasing, the daily teaching practice and teacher attitudes towards differences and diversity are changing only slowly.
CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND DIVERSITY IN GERMAN SCHOOLS

The following chapter focuses on theoretical and practical approaches to cultural differences and diversity, especially in German schools. In the first part, theoretical explanations of different ways to conceptualize (cultural) differences are introduced. An overview about different pedagogical reactions to immigration and cultural diversity in the German school system is provided. The last part deals with Intercultural Pedagogy, the currently most influential pedagogical approach that attempts to be more responsive to the cultural plurality of the student population in Germany.

The Construction of Cultural Differences

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), we socially construct our reality. Therefore, cultural differences, just as cultures themselves, as part of our reality and knowledge, are socially constructed (Dietz, 2007; Prengel, 2006). This construction takes place within a certain cultural group to define its cultural identity, just as everyone constructs their own identities through interaction with their environment. From a different perspective, this construction does also take place within groups in order to construct their understanding of other cultures. The social construction of a certain group by an outsider group influences the construction of their own group identity and vice versa. A (cultural) group is both held together and demarcated from other groups by the construction of differences that often estrange other groups. This phenomenon is described by Edward Said (1978) as “Orientalism.” In this ground-breaking work Said
posits that “Orientalism” is a form of culture of imperialism which represents the Other in a discourse of power relations, domination, and hegemony. Although Said applies this concept in a different context, it can be deployed in all situations in which “the Other” is constructed in contrast to the “Self.” In these constructions, binary oppositions are usually applied to construct the hierarchy of differences (intelligent / unintelligent, diligent / lazy, educated / uneducated, etc.), which are often regarded as qualitative differences.

In order to understand constructs like the ones described above, Prengel’s (2006) development of semantics of sameness and difference is helpful. She explains how these two notions cannot exist without one another. They depend on each other because difference cannot be explained without an understanding of sameness and vice versa. Sameness is a relation in which different things stay with one another. It is always an abstraction of given dissimilarities because it always refers to a certain characteristic; it is only partial sameness in regard to certain aspects. In order to state differences we have to refer to the same characteristic. Without the same criterion which we refer to we cannot make statements about differences. Often, this difference is seen as a qualitative difference, which leads to hierarchies and binary oppositions. Applying this logic, differences are described through comparisons, and hierarchies are created.

According to Prengel (2006), this is connected to emotional processes of judgments about higher value on the one hand and discrimination on the other hand. The determination of the criterion for a comparison always depends on human judgement. It does not exist independently from the judging and comparing subject (Prengel, 2006). Perspectives on difference are not objective or valid at all times, but they depend on the judging person’s position and point of view. Here, it becomes clear that differences and
similarities do not exist without the human observer who judges them. They are socially constructed, dynamic, and debatable.

In the public discussion about cultural differences and diversity, however, differences often appear to be static and given. In addition, they seem to be objectively recognizable for everyone; they appear “natural,” as does the hierarchy into which the differences are placed by the judging human subject. Prengel (2006) describes how unequal distribution of resources, rights, and education is “ontologically justified with the ‘natural’ being of people” (translated by author, p. 34). She also describes how hierarchization of differences can lead to biological and cultural racism, which is deployed to justify social and economic inequities. Even though she mentions this understanding in a historical perspective, we can still observe explanations for people’s lower status or for unequal treatment that can be ascribed to this conservative tradition. When people refer to “mentality” or to intellectual skills of students being in deficit (for example in the study of Bender-Szymanski, 2000, about German teachers’ strategies to cope with cultural diversity), this train of thought is displayed. The apparent static and obvious nature of the cultural differences allows to define more easily who “they” are and therefore also who “we” are in contrast (Said, 1978).

If the notion of socially constructed differences is rejected, differences are used to explain and justify existing inequities between different cultural groups (Prengel, 2006). This logic works because the systems in which we live, for example the school system, the society, are assumed to be democratic, objective, neutral, and fair. The image is created that they offer equal chances for everyone, as Leschinski and Cortina (2005) characterize the German school system. In a hegemonic system like this, failure of a student becomes the responsibility of the individual or of the group to which someone
belongs. This apparent personal failure is used to justify existing categorizations and the hierarchization of differences.

**Construction of “the Other” Student in the German School System**

Schools in Germany still adhere more to an assimilative and normalizing practice than towards the acknowledgement of differences even though the student population is becoming increasingly diverse (Schanz, 2006). Gomolla (2003) concludes that “the pedagogical common sense is heavily determined by deficit oriented approaches of foreigner pedagogy and by static…concepts of cultural identity” (translated by author, p. 107). According to Hansen and Wenning (2003), it is very difficult to establish educational policies that recognize diversity if the state itself fails to acknowledge the existing immigration situation, as has happened in Germany for decades. They characterize educational policies in Germany as being generally caught between the notions that immigrants will return to their home countries and an understanding of “integration in the sense of unquestioning assimilation” (translated by author, Hansen & Wenning, p. 129).

In the pedagogical and educational discourse, immigrants are often not included. They are objectified as the addressees of educational measures, of foreigner pedagogy or teaching strategies. It is talked about them, but not with them (Schanz, 2006). Their understanding of their own culture, which is in general different from the one constructed externally by the majority culture, is not considered in most of the discourses. Often it seems that the majority culture is not even interested in learning more about immigrants’ cultures, about their lived experiences, their everyday lives and their lived realities. A
reason for this might be that the simplistic construction of their culture is easier to understand and to perpetuate; it better fits into the existing hierarchical system.

Consequently, the experiences and needs of students with an immigration background are often ignored, which leads to the loss of intercultural learning opportunities (Schanz, 2006). Though Schanz made this observation more than ten years ago, she claims that not much has changed. Gogolin (1994) refers to the situation in schools as the “monolingual habitus of the multilingual school,” which can rightfully be expanded to the concept of the “monocultural habitus of the multicultural school” (translated by author, Schanz, 2006, p. 110). The societal plurality is ignored in these conceptualizations.

In this system, assimilation processes are still in place to integrate the diverse student population into existing structures. On the other hand, cultural differences are tolerated, even constructed because they fulfil the function of perpetuating and explaining social as well as economical inequities. They justify selection and help to reproduce existing structures and hierarchies.

Kronig’s analysis (2003) of educational statistics in Germany and of earlier studies on the unequal representation of immigrant students in the different school types shows how the notion of the low-achieving immigrant child is constructed based on questionable criteria for categorization. His main focus is on the overrepresentation of immigrant students in special education schools, especially in schools for learning disabilities. Kronig cites Gogolin (2002) who criticizes that most theories that try to explain the unequal overrepresentation of children with an immigration background in special education schools and their lower achievement still refer to deficits in the immigrants themselves. Kronig notices a revival of theories attempting to explain school
problems that focus on the individual student and not on the complex contextual situation in which a student lives and learns or on the school system itself. He refers to Höhne, Kunz and Radtke (1999) who notice a shift to explanations that stress “integration problems” (translated by author, p. 130) that are seen as a consequence of cultural differences. Kronig mentions the theory of “culture shock” (translation by author, p. 130), which is assumed to lead to a diffusion of identity and therefore to problems in school.

This construct, which is often applied to explain the difficulties and problems that immigrant students face in German schools, is the so called *cultural difference hypothesis* or also *cultural differences approach* (Karakaşoğlu-Aydin, 2001). A problem with this thesis is that it tends to apply essentialized constructs of cultures (Höhne, 2001). Inappropriate constructs of cultures can contribute to cementing boundaries between different cultural groups (Auernheimer, 2005). However, Auernheimer (2005) sees also an advantage of this approach as long as it is not based on essentialism. It can be applied to better understand and analyze differences in orientation of values and world views. In addition, asymmetrical power relations between groups can be revealed with this approach.

The problem with an essentializing theory of problematic cultural differences is that its application would predetermine school problems and low-achievement of immigrant students due to the problems they usually experience when their home culture and the different monoculture of the school come together. In this concept, culture, differences, and identity are again regarded as rather fixed and static entities. These predetermined expectations of problems in school and of low achievement lead many teachers to hold lower demands for immigrant students (Kronig, 2003). However, the idea of changing the structures of the schools in order to “narrow the gap” between the cultural
differences by being responsive to the cultures of the students usually does not arise. A Dutch study showed how teacher expectation, estimations of intelligence and of future school achievement are coined by social stereotypes those teachers believe in (Jungbluth, 1994, quoted in Kronig). A Swiss study came to similar findings of teacher expectations that were different according to the students’ nationality (Kronig, Haeberlin & Eckhart, 2000, quoted in Kronig). German studies investigating this problematic are scarce. Schofield (2006) concludes in a meta-analysis of teacher expectation and expectancy effect that “teachers’ beliefs about the capabilities of their students can, under some circumstances, significantly affect the quality of students’ current and future academic work” (p. 61).

Gomolla (2003, 2006) explains how negative learning careers of children with an immigration background often start already before they enter primary school. Children are enrolled in special support classes or they are transferred back to kindergarten. Often the assumed necessity of special classes prior to primary school is explained with a lack of practical skills, an underdeveloped attitude towards school work or a lack of adaptation in the students’ social behaviour (Gomolla, 2003, 2006). These reasons are led back to assumed characteristics of the child’s family and home culture (Gomolla, 2006). In their study, Gomolla and Radtke (2002, summarized in Gomolla, 2003) found that culturalizing assumptions about the family’s ability to support their children academically can become an important criterion for teachers’ recommendations for secondary schools. Terkessidis (2004, quoted in Schofield, 2006) investigated reports of interviews about perceived negative academic stereotyping of and discrimination toward immigrant students in Germany. These discriminating utterances were directed toward high achieving immigrant students, particularly at the end of their time in primary school in
regard to the decision about the appropriate type of secondary school. These students were told that the vocationally oriented Hauptschule would be more suitable for them and that they would not fit into the academically oriented Gymnasium. A similar tendency is described by Auernheimer (2006a) who states that primary schools, in the belief of helping the child, recommend students from lower socio-economic strata and with an immigration background to lower level school with the explanation that the families cannot support these children adequately. Gomolla and Radke (2002, quoted in Kiper, 2006) find that assumptions about culture contribute to the de-individualization of the problem and lead to “ethnicization of social problems” (translated by author, p. 291). This helps to legitimize the purpose of selection in schools.

All these notions demonstrate that it is insufficient to give simplistic and one-dimensional explanations for school problems. Not only the individual students and their specific experiences have to be considered, but institutional limitations and teachers’ attitudes need to be reflected on as well. Kronig (2003) explains that it is vitally important for the credibility of the German school system, which constantly generates differences through selection processes, that the decisions and justification for the selection can be ascribed to individual characteristics of the concerned students. If the failure is ascribed to the students and their social or cultural groups, the system can still maintain its appearance of objectivity and fairness. The organization and structures of the system do not need to be criticized or questioned. This hegemony makes it very difficult for parents and students from stigmatized and disadvantaged groups to gain equal access to educational opportunities. The individualization of reasons for school failure is also a consequence of the prevalent understanding that students from other cultural or social backgrounds are expected to fully assimilate to the German majority culture and German
school system (Hansen & Wenning, 2003). School failure is then understood as the personal failure to assimilate into the existing structures, but it is not understood that the school system is failing these students.

Because the voice of the Other is underrepresented in public discussions about culture and diversity the socially constructed misrepresentations are not falsified and corrected. In this concept, the highly selective school system plays again a very significant role: It helps to maintain existing power relations, in which voices opposed to the mainstream are silenced by streaming the majority of students from a cultural background different from the German majority culture into lower school types. In these school types, they are not given the opportunity to achieve high quality degrees that would allow for a career in leading position or in academia, often not even in average middle class jobs. This “school failure” is construed by the main culture as a proof for the legitimacy of their hierarchical construction of qualitative cultural differences.

**Homogenization, Normalization, and Blindness towards Differences**

The German school system is known for its highly differentiated selection of students. Not only are students usually taught in same-age classes, but also are they selected and categorized according to their school achievement into different types of secondary schools. Even within these schools, there are often additional categorizations of students into courses of different academic challenge. In addition, students with special needs are categorized and selected into different schools according to their impairment (for example schools for students with learning disabilities, mental disabilities, visual and auditory impairment). These divisions of age and ability grouping as well as repetition of
grade classes are described by Leiprecht and Lutz (2006) as attempts of the German school system and the German schools to constantly create homogeneity.

Prengel (2006) regards homogeneity of grade classes as a contributor to cultural hierarchization. Differences are usually not appreciated; they are tried to be eliminated. In this process of homogenization the school system has an individualizing effect. It measures differences and gaps between individuals, and it specifies and fixes particularities (Leiprecht & Lutz, 2006), which are often regarded as abnormalities in a system that attempts to normalize. Students who do not fit the norm are given the impression that they are responsible for their failing due to their own low aptitude or their low achievement (Leiprecht & Lutz).

Krüger-Potratz (2006) very succinctly analyzes how educational policies work in this situation in order to normalize. By defining “the foreign”, or as Said (1978) calls this construct, the Other, and by introducing special rules and policies for these groups, the “normal case” is defined at the same time, often in a hierarchical binary opposition to this other group. This normal case, however, is applied to evaluate all children. Likewise, Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006) observe continuity in the “assimilative logic” of schools. Immigrant and foreign students are still regarded as a “special case,” often as a problematic one, which does not belong to the “normal clientele” (translated by author, Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, p. 100) in German schools. The normal case remains the monocultural, monolingual, national school.

Amos (2001) explains the importance of a national language for the socialization of individuals in schools. The national language is regarded as a means of expression of a “fictitious collective identity” (translated by author, p. 73). It is hoped to assimilate everyone in a nation into this language community, and schools play a vital role in this
process. This is also the reason why schools in Germany are usually still monolingual institutions with only one official language. Even in schools that offer mother tongue education for students with an immigrant background, these courses are usually organized as an add-on to the general monolingual lessons. Bi- and multilingualism are generally not regarded as an integral part of schools. Whenever bilingualism is advocated for all students, it is in western languages like French and English.

The “normality construct” (translation by author, Hansen & Wenning, 2003, p. 127) that dominates in German schools is regarded as one reason for integration difficulties of immigrant students (Hansen & Wenning). The school system presumes particular prerequisites of the students. This normality construct is also applied in the process of marking and streaming in schools; a certain construct of the standard student is applied to evaluate all students (Hansen & Wenning). Hansen and Wenning describe some characteristics of this student: male, healthy, from a middle class family, German citizen, Christian, and monolingual in standard German. This process is called normalization; “the enforcement of socially relevant implicit and explicit definition of standards” (translation by author, Hansen & Wenning, p. 187). All students who do not correspond to this norm are disadvantaged in the selection process in their school career (Hansen & Wenning). Hansen and Wenning call this phenomenon insightfully, a “creeping expansion of minority education to majority education” (p. 189).

This attempt to assimilate students with diverse experiences and backgrounds into the existing structures of the German school system and of the imagined “normal” student is destined to fail because the particularities of the diverse student population are not taken into consideration (Hansen & Wenning). Students come to school with very different prerequisites. In school, however, they are declared to be officially equal and are
treated as such (Lutz & Wenning, 2001). This blindness against relevant differences is justified by the apparent democratic principle to treat every student equally, regardless of their backgrounds. These normalization processes in combination with equal treatment, which is legitimized by the democratic principle the school system is based on, leads to a systematic discrimination of minority groups (Hansen & Wenning). Thus, students are discriminated in the name of “democratic education”.

The problematic blindness against relevant differences is sometimes generated by the attempt to avoid stereotyping and culturalization of certain students by a general neglect of cultural perspectives. This problem was observed in studies of German schools in the 1990s (Auernheimer et al., 1996, in Auernheimer, 2006b). Blindness or indifference against differences can result in indirect institutional discrimination, an issue identified by Gomolla (2003, 2006) as being prevalent in German schools. It means that the same rules are applied for different groups of people, which leads to unequal chances of being able to pursue the opportunities given to them.

**Positive Perspective on Diversity: Egalitarian Difference and Multi-perspective on Differences**

Categorizations of any kind are problematic. In particular, categorizations on the collective level often lead to determinism, essentialization, and culturalization of problems, so that multi-dimensional analysis of a problematic situation is thwarted.

A promising way to understand situations is the concept of *egalitarian difference* (translation by author, Prengel, 2001, p. 93), as introduced by Prengel. This concept advocates diversity *and* equality of all people. This combination is important because “equality without difference would create undemocratic enforced conformity and
difference without equality undemocratic hierarchy” (translated by author, p. 93). In this understanding, Prengel sees the request to live in diverse and different ways. She points out how the concept of egalitarian difference is incompatible with the selectivity of educational institutions. These institutions generate hierarchies based on achievement in the course of democratic development (Prengel, 2001). She emphasizes how this conflict is present in all educational processes even when they are child-centred and open for diversity. The principle of achievement as an educational paradigm of modernity is reinforced even more through attempts to increase equal opportunities for all children, especially for academically disadvantaged, by compensatory educational strategies (Prengel, 2001). In this understanding, school structures still remain the same; only the students are increasingly prepped to be more successful in these structures. The diverse backgrounds of the students are only taken into account as a starting point for compensatory measures, as an explanation for the students’ deficits, not as enrichment for the curriculum.

Egalitarian difference can only be achieved in complex ways of looking at the situation. Prengel (2001) stresses that there are infinite perspectives for analyzing a certain situation. Analyzing a situation always has to be connected with multi-perspective processes. The levels she mentions are the universal perspective, collective perspective and individual perspective. According to Prengel (2001), it is important to “constantly reflect which section of the world of a social life context it is talked about and for which time period the statement should be valid” (translated by author, p. 99). However, these perspectives only allow making incomplete and limited statements about the issue. She believes that we are only capable of understanding a certain section of the world never the whole situation, due to our limited perspective (Prengel, 2003).
The universal perspective allows for questions concerning the existence of all people, for example democratic human rights. Prengel (2001) reminds to be constantly critically reflective about statements on this level since there is a great danger of false universalism. In the context of German educational institutions, Dietz (2007) advocates an underlying “grammar of diversities” (p. 26) as a possible universal principle. In this understanding, heterogeneity of the society and of the student population is regarded as the norm.

The collective perspective is concerned with the level of certain groups of people. On this level, questions regarding the relation between normality and marginality as well as the importance of the Other are discussed. It is important to note that a person always belongs to many different groups at the same time as well as successively. In addition, these groups are social constructs. Statements about the type of differences between groups are problematic since they easily contribute to essentialization of attributions (Prengel, 2001). This leads to a complexity and ambiguity of situations since group membership can be controversial. However, in order to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups, this level is important for example to implement affirmative actions (Fraser, 2007).

The individual perspective is concerned with questions about the uniqueness of the living situation of the individual. Identity is not a completed entity. The identity of a person can be constructed and imagined differently depending on the context. Prengel (2001) states that “identity can only be thought of as identity in motion and in fragments” (translated by author, p. 101).

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11 It is important to understand, however, that human rights are also always in a development process; they are also debatable to a certain extent.
According to Prengel (2003), in educational discourses the importance of the universal as well as of the individual perspective is widely non-controversial. She identifies most conflict to be taken place on the collective level. This happens for example when school failure is not explained in multi-perspective way, but only on the group level, due to certain characteristics that are assigned to the particular (cultural, social, religious, etc.) group of origin of the students (Krüger-Potratz, 1989, in Leiprecht & Lutz, 2006). This failure reflects, in the opinion of many teachers, a deficit “that they often tend to identify with ethnic membership or the children’s immigration or ‘immigration background’ situation” (Dietz, 2007, p. 17). Other possible influences like “social background, labour and residential contexts, or the composition of the family unit” (Dietz, p. 17), or the structure and organization of the schools themselves are often not taken into account.

The distinction that Fraser (2007) makes in categorizing recognition claims is based on a similar understanding of differences. The consideration of the context and the importance of understanding a situation on different levels, which can be observed in Prengel’s view on diversity, can also be found in Fraser. Fraser explains that there are “universalist claims, aimed at securing equal respect for common humanity; affirmative claims, aimed at valorizing presumptive group specificity; and deconstructive claims, aimed at destabilizing symbolic oppositions that underlie existing group differentiations” (p. 308). These claims can be deployed to recognize differences in a more equitable and differentiated way.

Universalist claims for recognizing differences are in order when socially constructed, for a group relevant, cultural differences are not valued equally. Affirmative claims are important when relevant differences are neglected from institutions and
therefore cause harm to a particular group and its members. This happens in the case of indirect institutional discrimination, when different groups are assessed by or hold to the same rules and standards. This situation is common in the German school system which still does not consider cultural plurality to be the norm. Deconstructive claims are vital “when an injustice results from the imposition of simple systems of binary classification on complex experiences and lived realities” (Fraser, 2007, p. 309). This last claim is also important for the context of German schools since the simple construct of “the immigrant child” with its generally disadvantageous and negative connotations has to be unmasked as a social construct that perpetuates, often unintended, existing hierarchies.

**Hybridity and Intersectionality – the Third Way**

Egalitarian differences and the multi-perspective on differences are one possibility to better understand and analyze the complex social reality more appropriately. Other concepts that attempt to avoid the problematic of applying static and clear-cut definitions of differences in favour for a more multifaceted social reality are the concepts of *hybridity* and *intersectionality*.

According to Auernheimer (2005), the German understanding of hybridity does not have the political meaning that it has in the Anglophone debate. He defines the meaning as “combining cultural elements in the identity constructs” (translated by author, p. 71). In the Anglophone discussion hybridity is concerned with “negotiating identity” (translated by author, Auernheimer, 2005, p. 70), which mainly takes place in the public sphere. In this discussion, hybridity is also constructed through the politics of representation, in which ambiguities of representations emphasize their openness for new interpretations (Auernheimer, 2005).
To better understand the development and complexities of identities the concept of hybridity is very helpful. Identities are regarded as dynamic complexities including “race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Bhabha stresses that the “concepts of homogeneous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities—as the grounds of cultural comparativism—are in a profound process of redefinition” (Bhabha, p. 3). Differences according to the concept of hybridity must not be seen as “pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed table of tradition” (Bhabha, p. 2). They are constantly negotiated in the process of development.

This understanding of the possibility of multiple identities and the temporality of identities challenges the essentialization of differences. Torres (1998) warns against essentialization of cultural struggle and differences, and promotes the necessity of recognizing “the complexities posed by the process of hybridization and the notion of multiple identities in the social and psychological construction of the pedagogical subject” (p. 254).

Dietz (2007) points out how a multiculturalist movement fighting for recognition of difference paradoxically adopts a more deeply static and essentialist notion of culture. He states that “the necessity of identifying yourself along a set of officially recognized diversity categories has indirectly, but often intentionally promoted an essentialist identity discourse, which homogenizes group members and this contradicts the very basic assumptions of diversity” (p. 13). In the course of his paper, he explains the “redefinition of diversity in terms of hybridity and intersectionality” (Dietz, p. 8) in order to emphasize the dangers and difficulties of clearly distinguishing between certain cultural markers: “The identities that are generated in the post-colonial period do not correspond to
territorial limits or cultural boundaries” (Dietz, p. 20). This understanding however, bears
the danger of leading to the notion that identities become “liminal and partial” (Dietz, p. 20) because the classification and location of the actors, who live in “a ‘third space’
between hegemonic culture and subordinate culture” (p. 20), becomes impossible. Dietz
points out the “risk of de-mobilizing the social and pedagogical movement and/or of de-
legitimizing the diversified educational institution through affirmative action policies” (p. 20), which comes with an understanding of completely individualized and fragmented
identities. He refers to Stuart Hall and Gayatri Spivak, who advocate “a kind of ‘strategic
essentialism’ that temporarily and transitorily allows the new culturally hybrid
communities to ‘incubate’ their multiple identity facets” (Dietz, p. 21). In this way,
affirmative action strategies can be applied to empower disadvantaged groups. Even
though affirmative action will lead to “essentialization of identity” (Dietz, p. 21) in some
aspects, it “will simultaneously create the conditions that will enable the members of
these communities to have access to the educational institutions of majority society”
(Dietz, p. 21). This understanding corresponds to Fraser’s affirmative claims and
Prengel’s collective perspective.

For the pedagogical practice, the adoption of the concepts of hybridity and
intersectionality imply that schools and teachers overcome their monocultural habitus. To
this end, Dietz (2007) promotes the integration of “‘subordinate’ modes of interaction that
are omnipresent in out-of-school, neighbourhood lifeworld of the yougth [sic] into school
life itself” (Dietz, p. 25). This pedagogy values the diverse life experiences of the students
and rejects a classical and often monocultural school canon. Schools in Germany,
however, are still far away from this hybrid understanding of social reality and its
significance for the school curriculum.
In discourse about difference and diversity, it is pivotal to understand the
temporality and territoriality of these constructs. The definitions and the origin of the
notions of difference and diversity have to be analyzed in order to reveal hierarchies and
inequities that are constructed by dominant groups. Whenever cultural differences are
applied as an explanation for certain problems, there is always the danger that other
dimensions of a particular situation are not taken into consideration anymore, for example
economic or social aspects. This culturalization of social problems, for example of school
failure or unemployment, disregards the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the
situation. A reason for this simplification is that the cause for the problems or difficulties
can be ascribed to the Other and the own position does not need to be reflected on, as
seen above.

Hansen and Wenning (2003) point out that it is impossible to find one single
solution for all problems that deals with diversity and differences because of the
complexity of the situations. An advantage in one area often leads to disadvantages in
another area. In their example, autonomy for a minority group can easily lead to
restrictions in participation of this group in decision-making processes in the majority
society. In addition, a particular education for minorities might lead to increased
exclusion of this group because this type of education might not be valued by the majority
society. Furthermore, assigning a person to one particular group always leads to processes
of demarcation and exclusion between different groups. These are all risks that have to be
taken into account when we deal with differences, diversity and identity.
Pedagogical Reactions to Diversity

The heterogeneous and changing societal situation with constant immigration is also reflected in an increasingly diverse student population (Leiprecht & Kerber, 2006). This development, however, has not been adequately considered in the German school system. According to Leiprecht and Kerber, the notion of a school that is closely related to the nation state and the related normalizing patterns, is under increasing pressure due to the progressing globalization and internationalization.

In the next part, I summarize the pedagogical reactions to the increasing diversity in German schools. Although this overview can be seen in a chronological order, it is vital to note that all mentioned reactions can still be identified in the daily teaching practice as well as on administrative levels.

Ausländerpädagogik

Children from Gastarbeiter were basically ignored by German educational policy makers until 1964, when compulsory education was extended to this group (Hansen & Wenning, 2003). However, the attitude towards these children did not change much even after the introduction of compulsory education. For a long time, immigration to Germany was ignored in the debate on educational reform, and it was believed that the presence of immigrants in Germany and in German schools was just temporarily (Auernheimer, 2005). Therefore, educational research as well as schools themselves did not actively deal with the changed situation until the 1970s.

A new pedagogy, the so called Ausländerpädagogik (foreigner pedagogy) was introduced in the 1970s. It was intended to help children of newly arriving foreigners, especially of Gastarbeiter, to integrate into German schools. A main focus was on
supporting the students to learn German. It was believed that reducing the students’
“deficits” in the German language would establish equal educational chances
(Auernheimer, 2005). However, another aim of this education was to ensure the
children’s ability to return to their home country, mainly by providing mother tongue
education (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006; Schmidtke, 2006). Although this new
pedagogy was also expected to increase the understanding of how the school structure
could be improved in order to facilitate the children’s integration, the administrative
bodies did not have the intention to change the static school structures according to the
challenges of this new situation (Schmidtke).

Ausländerpädagogik was a group specific, compensatory approach. It was focused
on the group of foreign children. These children and their families were declared the
problem that needed to be investigated. Immigrants and foreigners were regarded as
bearers of the national culture of their country of origin. The immigrant families were
ascribed external and internal characteristics, for example regarding their “relationship
between genders or generations” (translated by author, Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006,
p. 117). In this perspective, the lived reality of the children did not seem important
anymore, but the declared cultural origin was the reason for problems and needed to be
studied and analyzed (Schmidtke, 2006). Ausländerpädagogik did not analyze the deficits
of the education system, but attempted to find the deficits that were believed to cause the
educational disadvantages for immigrant students in those students themselves
(Auernheimer, 2005).

This unreflective understanding of culture as being static and determining led to
“culturalization”. This means that differences between individuals and between groups
are essentialized; they are constructed and generalized as characteristics of all people of
one particular country, nation or culture (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). In this perspective, differences were seen as deviating from the norm and therefore in need of assimilation. Deficits were often seen in the lack of proficiency in the German language and in the immigrants’ educational understanding, which was characterized as backward in comparison to German standards (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz).

**From Deficit over Difference to Diversity**

The hypothesis of deficit came under pressure and was rejected in favour of the notion that differences have to be respected and integrated into pedagogical considerations. The aim was to maintain the children’s cultural identity (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). While this new understanding showed more respect for the children and their cultural background, Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz criticize this hypothesis of difference, in my eyes correctly, because culture still appears to be a static commodity. Students “get locked in” (translated by author, Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, p. 105) to what people of the majority culture believe to be their culture. The students’ lived experiences are not taken into consideration. In this static understanding of culture and cultural differences, immigrants are denied the possibility of change and development (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz). In addition, a pedagogy that stresses (cultural) differences of immigrant students is still a pedagogy aimed at only a certain group of students, which are still regarded as “special”, as different, as “the Other” (Said, 1978). It is not a pedagogy for all students, in which difference and plurality are understood as the normal case (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz). In this context, Schanz (2006) raises the insightful question if the focus on assumed cultural characteristics (like food, traditions, holidays), which are often constructed by the majority society and therefore by outsiders to this
particular culture, does not contribute to estranging immigrants even more. Similarly, Höhne (2001) sees the risk of excluding immigrant students from the mainstream by focusing on cultural characteristics.

Höhne (2001) explains that in the development towards a discourse about multiculturalism in combination with a more positive attitude towards cultural differences in Germany, the semantic on difference changed. The focus changed towards cultural difficulties and identity problems that students with an immigrant background face. In lessons and school books immigrant students became the subject themselves. Textbooks promoted understanding for the difficult living situation of these “other” students who were described to be living between two worlds (Höhne). In this situation, immigrant student are being pushed into the role of the expert of their own culture. The focus is mainly on everything that is different from the “German culture,” for example food, festivities, tradition, and religion. In addition, Höhne describes how the students are forced to take over the role of the victim of their assumed problematic living situation. The German students are asked to think of how they can deal with this difficult situation (Höhne). This kind of lesson cements notions of “us” and “them”. Even though cultural differences are not directly devalued or regarded as deficits, they still contribute to the alienation of German and immigrant students. This is especially problematic since many the students with an immigrant background are born in Germany (Höhne). Their home country is Germany, not the country of their family, which they might only visit for vacations. In this approach, Prengel (2003) identifies the problematic tendency to overemphasize cultural differences, even though the intention to value cultural differences is a positive one.
Over the last decade, a change in perspective on differences and diversity can be observed in educational research. There is an increased conscience of plurality, which corresponds with a modified understanding of tolerance and democracy (Lutz & Wenning, 2001). Recognition of the Other instead of mere tolerance and “democracy as a right of equality and as a right of dissent” (Lutz & Wenning, p. 12) are the notions that are promoted by Intercultural Pedagogy for example. Also, a development has taken place from focusing on deficit to focusing on difference (Lutz & Wenning). However, as Lutz and Wenning stress, both perspectives still exist simultaneously. In addition, the normality construct used as a standard in education, is started to be questioned as a result of the debate about differences and diversity in schools (Lutz & Wenning).

Dietz (2007) advocates a development from “the concept of difference, which suggests the possibility of neatly distinguishing between its respective traits and markers” (p. 8) to the concept of diversity. In his understanding diversity “emphasizes the multiplicity, overlapping and crossing between sources of human variation” (p. 8). According to Dietz, there is an additional dimension next to the descriptive one to the notion of diversity, and that is the prescriptive dimension. This normative aspect “states how cultures, groups and societies should interact within themselves and among each other” (Dietz, p. 9). He indicates appropriately that “diversity has evolved from being perceived as a problem and later as a challenge to being seen as a resource and afterwards as a right” (pp. 9-10).

A pedagogical approach that deals with difference and diversity in the German context is Intercultural Pedagogy.
**Intercultural Pedagogy**

The most influential pedagogical concept in Germany over the last decades which aims at recognition of cultural diversity has been called *Intercultural Pedagogy*. This concept rejects the notion of immigrants as being in deficit as well as the unilateral influence of the societal majority on the minority (Schmidtke, 2006). In this approach the relationship between cultural minorities and majorities is made a subject of the discussion (Prengel, 2006). Intercultural development of schools is not regarded as an add-on to existing curricula, but is supposed to be part of the school culture and of the everyday school life that embraces democratic, intercultural principles at all times (Schanz, 2006). Plurality is viewed as the norm because it reflects the societal reality.

Intercultural Pedagogy brought along a change in perspective towards “pedagogy for all” and “pedagogy of recognition” (translated by author, Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006, p. 105). This pedagogy is addressed towards everyone who lives and learns in an immigrant society, and it considers the political and societal conditions, not just the attributed, and often falsely so, living situations of immigrants. Aspects of multilingualism, historical aspects of the understanding of the norm, of normalities in schools as well as excluding and discriminating effects of the structure of the school system are discussed in this approach (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz).

Intercultural approaches, which are ascribed to social theory, attempt to uncover mechanisms that prevent different cultures from expressing themselves equally (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). They explore ways in which pedagogical intervention can contribute to remove the mechanism that created inequity. In addition, they analyze how
educational institutions contribute to perpetuating and cementing existing inequities in a system that claims to offer equal opportunities for everyone.

Auernheimer (2005) characterizes the two basic principles of Intercultural Pedagogy as the *principle of equality* and the *principle of recognition*. In his understanding of Intercultural Pedagogy, aims are to qualify all students with certain attitudes as well as with knowledge and skills; for example the knowledge about structural discrimination and the ability to change one’s perspectives. According to Auernheimer (translated by author, 2005, p. 21), the leitmotifs of Intercultural Pedagogy are:

1. The support of the equality of everyone regardless of their origin.
2. An attitude of respect for difference.
3. The ability for intercultural understanding.
4. The ability for intercultural dialogue.

Auernheimer (2005) promotes the integration of Intercultural Pedagogy and of anti-racism pedagogy in order to avoid culturalizing simplifications. In addition, he advocates a self-reflective and critical analysis of the accusation of culturalization in Intercultural Pedagogy.

*Culture and Identity in Intercultural Pedagogy*

Even though the term “intercultural” still assumes cultures as a given reality, Auernheimer (2005) understands it as stressing the notion of exchange and encounter; even more, it allows and advocates the notion of a third way, the “culture-in-between”, as it is imagined in post-colonial studies (Auernheimer, 2005).
In this conception, the term *culture* is used and understood in a more differentiated way. It is viewed as dynamic, not static; as heterogeneous, not homogeneous. In addition, it is not restricted to certain artistic products, which are valued as “high culture”, but it also includes “products and meaning of everyday lives” (translated by author, Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006, p. 119). Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz apply Geertz’s understanding of culture in the context of Intercultural Pedagogy: It functions as a “network of meanings, in which people interpret their experiences and to which they align their actions” (translated by author, p. 119). Furthermore, a change in perspective has taken place in Intercultural Pedagogy from focusing on the culture of the country of origin to the immigration culture that has been developing in Germany (Auernheimer, 2005).

Prengel (2006) is of the opinion that an important task of Intercultural Pedagogy is the support for one’s own cultural identity. This includes the ability to recognize and perceive other cultures with mutual respect, and not as an isolated juxtaposition of cultures (Prengel, 2006). To be taken seriously, Intercultural Pedagogy has to include “fighting against underprivileging” (translated by author, Prengel, 2006, p. 86). In order to live interculturalism, “diverse and especially silenced voices have to be heard” (translated by author, Prengel, 2006, p. 93) without supporting separatism through the acknowledgement of hierarchical relations (Prengel, 2006). Here, the connection to pedagogies of empowerment as discussed in the Anglophone context, for example by Giroux and McLaren, can be observed. However, in the educational discussion on intercultural issues the focus is on the apparent inability of the majority culture to deal appropriately with the challenges of the increasingly diverse student population (Dietz, 2007). Social change is therefore hoped to be brought along both by empowerment of minorities and by a change in attitude and action of the majority society. This emphasis is
different from the one in the Anglo-Saxon discussion in cultural diversity, in which empowerment of minority groups as well as the identity necessities of minorities are stressed (Dietz).

As a fundamental principle of a school’s work, Intercultural Pedagogy influences not only curricula but also the school culture and interactions of teachers with students and parents. It has to accompany a change in attitudes towards recognizing cultural diversity as the norm in the classroom and in society in general and towards an understanding of the importance of culture for the identity development of students. Motivation to acknowledge and support every student in her or his identity development is necessary. Furthermore, teachers must reflect on their own culture and its influences on their curriculum, their teaching and their personal and professional attitudes (Gültekin, 2006; Schanz, 2006).

Even though Intercultural Pedagogy is meant to be a pedagogy for all students and for everyone involved in schools, it can often be observed that intercultural approaches are applied mainly in schools with a high percentage of immigrant students (Ledoux, Leeman, & Leiprecht, 2001). In addition, when intercultural approaches are applied in schools, they often have the character of a project, as an add-on to the regular curriculum and often the content can be characterized as folklore (Ledoux, Leeman & Leiprecht).

Another problem, according to Dietz (2007), is that Intercultural Pedagogy often tends to “reproduce the…tendency to implicitly ‘problematis[e]’ the existence of cultural diversity in the classroom by uncritically ‘importing’ basic concepts from anthropology such as ‘culture’, ‘ethnic group’, and ‘ethnicity’ in their outdated, 19th century definitions” (Dietz, 2007, p. 18). He continues that “[w]hen the politics of difference are transferred to the classroom, ‘otherness’ becomes a problem, and its solution is
‘culturalized’ by reinterpreting the socio-economic, legal, and/or political inequalities as supposed cultural differences” (Dietz, p. 19). Auernheimer (2005) also refers to the problematic of “racism without races” (p. 97): Racism that is justified and explained on culturalizing assumptions. “Culture” replaces “race” in this deterministic, static and oftentimes hierarchical understanding of culture, which is used to explain and thereby also often justify social inequities.

To avoid stereotypical and deterministic notions of culture, it is important to apply procedural strategies such as “reflexivity, self-awareness and translatability between different habitualized cultural practices and identity discourses” (Dietz, 2006, p. 24). These are processes that lead to the important competencies of self-perception and questioning (Dietz), which help to overcome culturalization. In addition, the cultural embeddedness of one’s own perspectives can be realized and analyzed when reflexivity and self-awareness are enhanced. These processes that may lead to a changed attitude and understanding of culture are especially important for teachers to practice. For applying Intercultural Pedagogy, teachers need to understand the cultural influence on teaching and learning and on their own and their students’ identity development.

**Intercultural Approaches**

Intercultural Pedagogy is difficult to categorize as it has different streams which are based on complex understandings of theory and practice of intercultural teaching and learning. The discussion about the role and meaning of culture in Intercultural Pedagogy is complex. In the following part, I point out some aspects that distinguish intercultural approaches. Lutz and Wenning (paraphrased translation by author, 2001, p. 15) identify
four streams of handling equality and differences in Intercultural Pedagogy on a more theoretical level:

1. An equity discourse that deals with collective discrimination, abolishment of institutional discrimination and the social exclusion of the concerning people. It advocates equality of immigrants and their children.

2. The ontologization of difference as ethnicization for the self and for others. The focus is on cultural differences. This thesis is deployed by advocates of a deficit-oriented thesis (as it was common in Ausländerpädagogik) as well as by advocates of culturally specified identity concepts.

3. A discourse that focuses on the necessity of rescindment of cultural and ethnic differences in favour for an emphasis on commonalities. They recognize the increasing pluralisation and individualization of the society and emphasize the commonalities of resulting issues for all children and for all people.

4. The poststructuralist discourse, which refers to a re-definition of subject and identity.

So far, the poststructuralist discourse has only been introduced in a very limited extent to educational research in Germany.

On a practical level, in a quantitative survey about Intercultural Pedagogy among Dutch teachers, Ledoux, Leeman and Leiprecht (paraphrased translation by author, 2001, pp. 184-185) identified four different concepts and approaches to Intercultural Pedagogy of the participating teachers:

1. General pluralism: The general diversity is stressed in the lessons without referring to specific ethnic relations. Attention is paid to all forms of differences among humans, not just cultural or ethnic differences.
2. A combination of specific pluralism and culturalism: Ethnical relations and differences are in the centre of this approach. Differences are often interpreted as cultural differences and might be regarded as characteristic for a group. However, exclusion and conflicts resulting from imputed characteristics are also made a topic.

3. Social relations: This intercultural approach focuses on the relations between the students in the classroom.

4. Elimination of disadvantages and discriminations.

In this study, the approach that focuses on social relations was supported the most and elimination of discrimination was supported the least by the participating teachers. The other two approaches correlated with each other. Ledoux, Leeman and Leiprecht (2001) come to the conclusion that the teachers who focused on ethnical differences in their intercultural approach, seemed to have the conception that the elimination of discrimination of the allochthone students should be part of intercultural learning.

Auernheimer (2005) also distinguishes different positions in Intercultural Pedagogy. He reminds us that many contributions to Intercultural Pedagogy contain a political aspect and understand themselves in a broader social context. In addition, some approaches focus more on cognitive aspects, on information about intercultural situations, whereas other approaches are more holistic.

This description is not a complete list of intercultural approaches. These examples are meant to demonstrate on which diverse levels approaches to Intercultural Pedagogy are differentiated and what kinds of different theoretical understandings the approaches can be based on.
Competencies of Teachers for Intercultural Learning

In teaching and learning not only the applied pedagogy itself is important, but also the competencies and characteristics of the teacher. Intercultural competencies are more than merely learning about other cultures and the “‘deciphering ‘of ‘foreign’ rules and symbols” as Gültekin (translated by author, 2006, p. 368) describes it.

In a study about the preconditions for successful intercultural learning, Ledoux, Leeman and Leiprecht (2001) identify several competencies of teachers as crucial. These competencies were identified by Dutch teachers in discussions on intercultural issues with the researcher. Selected competencies are:

1. Creating an atmosphere in the classroom in which all students feel safe, e.g. by demonstrating that one values and respects other people, by showing interest in the students’ personal experiences without forcing them to share these personal experiences.

2. Certain attitudes like openness, respect, and interest in the students and their backgrounds, willingness to talk about own habits, teachers are becoming subjects of discussion, be open for criticism without becoming defensive.

3. Conversational competencies, like discussing dilemmas in the classroom, showing optimism in regard to the students’ progress, being a good listener, not putting one’s own opinion in the centre.

(paraphrased translation by author, comprehensive list, Ledoux, G., Leeman, Y., & Leiprecht, R., p. 192)
Bender-Szymanski (paraphrased translation by author, 2000, p. 231) identifies several conditions that are important for coping constructively with intercultural differences and thereby enhancing one’s own development as a teacher:

1. Overcoming affective responses under conditions in which imbalance occurs, e.g., avoiding defence mechanism triggered by the feeling of threat to oneself, which can stand in the way of a situation appropriate analysis of the problem.

2. Understanding the “possible area-specific, culture-bound meaning of special situations for persons with a [different] cultural background” (p. 231) and comparing those to one’s own culture-bound meaning.

3. Recognizing area-specific incompatibility of one’s own behaviour and that of someone with a different cultural background as “a conflict-creating consequence of different meanings” (p. 231).

In order to solve problematic situations in a way that is acceptable to everyone involved, it is vital, according to Bender-Szymanski (2000), to recognize “other cultural perspectives as functioning, valid constructions of reality” (p. 231). The validity of these constructions cannot be questioned in the concrete situation. Only then is it possible to overcome conflicts constructively. The author derived these conditions based on a qualitative longitudinal study, in which she identified German novice teachers’ types of dealing with cultural differences.

These are all competencies and theoretical understandings of the role of teachers that are often neglected in teacher education programs (Auernheimer, 2005). The teacher is one of the most important and influential factors in schools with whom educational success stands and falls. Increasing the importance and the professionalism of teachers by
allotting them more responsibility for their own teaching, but also by offering support systems and professional development is essential for improving educational quality.

**Implications of Intercultural Pedagogy for Schools**

Schanz (2006) arrogates a critical cultural perspective on differences instead of attributing fixed characteristics to students from minority groups. This entails that everyone, immigrant students as well as their parents, has to be included in discussions and decisions about intercultural issues (Schanz). They have to become equal partners in schools, with equal rights and opportunities to participate. They can no longer be excluded from discussions about intercultural issues. This perspective on Intercultural Pedagogy is prevalent in Auernheimer’s definition of the aims of intercultural education: recognition of the otherness, the engagement for equality and anti-racist structures and therefore, aiming for understanding, and the ability for dialogue (Auernheimer, 2005).

Prengel (2006) summarizes important aspects of an Intercultural Pedagogy for teaching. In her opinion, “homogeneous grade classes classified by age have to be opened up because Intercultural Pedagogy is not possible without differentiation” (translated by author, p. 86). Because of the diversity of the students a flexible use of inner differentiation, outer differentiation and *Plenarunterricht* (teacher-oriented teaching) is necessary. She advocates cooperative differentiation in small groups that allow for self-responsible and self-reliant learning of individuals.

Auernheimer (2005) stresses the importance of a positive social climate in schools for Intercultural Pedagogy. He mentions “symmetrical and trusting teacher-student relationships, a culture of open doors, transparency in decisions, possibilities for participation in decision-making processes for the students” (translated by author, p. 166)
as vital aspects for creating a positive school climate. In addition, “positive models of conflict resolution” (translated by author, Auernheimer, 2005), and the morning sitting circle as “an institutionalized form for dealing with aspects of relationships” (translated by author, p. 166) help improve the social climate.

Summary

I believe that Intercultural Pedagogy, which regards plurality as the norm in the classroom and in society and which tries actively to engage everyone involved in schools in the intercultural discourse, is a promising approach for a democratic and more equitable development of German schools. In addition, I see advantages in the Intercultural Pedagogy approach because it promotes awareness about the dangers of essentialization and culturalization, and about the discriminating structure of the school system itself. It is a holistic approach that analyzes schools in the wider societal and political contexts.

Even though the intercultural approach has been developed over a long time now and is incorporated in curricula and guidelines, educational practice in their daily activities is still far behind this theoretical development (Auernheimer, 2005). It is important that Intercultural Pedagogy becomes a fundamental principle of the work in schools, in teacher education and professional development if it is to be influential on a wider level.
CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

The Study of the School: A Qualitative Research Approach

This study of a German primary school is of qualitative nature, conducted in a combination of an emic and an etic approach. It offers the insider perspective to the situation, but it is also guided by the conceptual frameworks of Critical Pedagogy and Intercultural Pedagogy. Only a qualitative study, which “describes and analyzes people’s individual and collective social action, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2002, p. 315) can answer the descriptive and exploratory research questions in an elaborate way (Yin, 2006). A case study approach is deployed to gain an in-depth understanding of the work of the selected school in a “holistic and context sensitive” (Patton, 2002, p. 447) fashion. According to Yin (2006), “the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a ‘case’ within its ‘real-life’ context” (p. 111).

My study includes document analysis, formal interviews, and classroom observation in order to gain a deep understanding of the situation in and the work of the participating school. The multi-method design, which uses a variety of data sources, allows data triangulation in order to increase trustworthiness of the findings through cross-referencing the data by looking at the phenomenon from different perspectives (Corbin & Holt, 2005; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005). By applying different methods, weaknesses of each one are balanced by strengths of others. My choice of methods was influenced by the multiple case study by Powell, Zehm and Garcia (1996), which successfully explored diversity in three American schools deploying similar methods.
Participant Selection

The selected school won the competition for the German School Award in 2006. It is important to note that my attention was drawn to this school due to their success in this competition. However, I selected this school mainly because of their culturally and linguistically diverse student population, not because of the award. Furthermore, the description of the school and their pedagogical work indicated that they seem to apply uncommon and interesting pedagogical approaches. Their success in the award competition is not a crucial point for this analysis.

I initiated contact with the school through a letter of information sent to the school by email. In this letter, I explained my proposed research and the purpose of my study. A member of the leading group of this school replied to me and agreed to participate in this study on behalf of the school. The school offered me a time span of one week in September to conduct my research there. In the summer prior to my research, I sent Letters of Information for the parents of the students in the classroom I would be observing to the school, as well as the Letter of Information for the principal and the teachers I planned to interview. I planned to select the teachers for the interview by recommendation of the principal according to certain qualities that characterize effective teachers in a culturally diverse context, according to Powell, Zehm, and Garcia (1996, p. 149). However, the school did not inform me about who would be participating in my study until my arrival. As it turned out, the participating teachers (I will refer to them as T1 and T2 in the following) volunteered to host me in their classroom, in which they were team teaching. T1 also agreed to participate in an interview. In addition, I approached another teacher (T3) I had met during my stay and she agreed to the interview. I informed
her about my study with a Letter of Information. I chose this teacher due to her immigration background (she was born in Turkey) in hope for a different perspective on the school’s work.

The principal of the school was difficult to approach. I did not see her until the second last day of my visit. Instead of a one hour, in-depth interview, I only conducted a 15-minute interview, in which I tried to discuss the most important questions. The Letter of Information and the Consent Form was given to the principal prior to this interview.

**Data Sources**

*Documents*

I began my research with an informal analysis of the school program to obtain a preliminary idea of its objectives and educational concepts in its official presentation. Official documents for external communication can be useful, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), “in understanding official perspectives on programs, the administrative structure, and other aspects of the organization” (p. 137). Information provided in official documents may differ from the spoken form because documents and the spoken word are often intended for different audiences, and can therefore add insight to the case (Hodder, 2000).

Gathering informal demographic and background data about the selected school, the students, the teachers, and the context in which the school is situated occurred throughout my visit, for example during the interviews, but also through information from the school’s program. These data include aspects like cultural, linguistic, religious background, socio-economic status, and pre-schooling experiences. This information is
vital for understanding the school’s work in “a holistic perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 262) with sensitivity to the context.

The document analysis of the recent version of the school’s program, published in August 2007, continued after the data collection in the school. I particularly deployed the school program as well as official documents from the school’s website (e.g., a report about the school’s experiences in cooperating with parents) to compare the data I received from the interviews and the classroom observations with the school’s official representation of their pedagogical work.

**Interviews**

I planned one semi-structured in-depth interview with the principal as well as interviews with two teachers with the aim of learning about their understanding of their school’s and their own work. I selected this approach, which is “relatively conversational and situational” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 351) because it allows adaptation to the specific course of the emerging interview. Most of the questions were open-ended because “open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondent” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). I conducted the interviews in an interview guide approach to ensure that all vital questions were asked. The questions varied depending on the role of the participant. Some of the questions were designed to be broader, in order to allow the interviewees to inform me about their school and their work without focusing on predetermined categories. Other questions were more specific, for example referring to the participant’s particular role at this school. When I felt that certain important areas were not covered (e.g., the role of Intercultural Pedagogy), I asked more concrete
questions. These questions were informed by the theoretical framework and the relevant literature.

I scheduled the first interview with the first teacher (T1) on the second day of my visit. Having the interview prior to the observation, as planned before, was not possible. The second interview was scheduled with the Turkish and Islam teacher (T3) of the school. By interviewing the principal, a German teacher, and a teacher who has an immigration background herself, I was granted insight into the school’s work from very different perspectives. These perspectives enriched my data by adding complexity to the case.

All interviews were audio-taped in order to enhance the trustworthiness of my data. The setting for all interviews was the school. The interview with the principal took place in her office; the other two interviews in a classroom and in a meeting room.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim, with only slight tidying up in order to facilitate the translation. I returned the interview transcript to the participants for review as advocated by Patton (2002). The participants made only minimal changes to the transcripts such as revisions to language to improve the flow of the interview without changing the content. Only one participant slightly changed one passage to clarify the meaning. After editing the transcripts according to the participants’ suggestions, I translated the interviews to English since all interviews were held in German. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of my translations, I had key passages back translated by a professional translator.
Observation

During my first contact with the school setting, I explored the school and its surroundings to achieve “a sense of the place, the people, the passage of time,” as explained by Stake (1995, p. 67). Since I was living in a hotel close to the school during my field work, I got a well-grounded impression of this setting.

I chose to include classroom observations in the study because “to understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). In addition, observations allowed me “to move beyond the selective perceptions of others” (Patton, 2002, p. 264) toward a more etic approach. I was aiming at “finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 63).

I was an observer in the classroom, sitting at the side, trying not to interfere with the lesson or to distract the students’ attention since I aimed at naturalistic observation in the sense that “the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). I was not only interested in teaching or instructional strategies, but rather in strategies implemented by the school in a more systemic way. Since these systemic strategies are not as easily manipulated for the duration of my observation, I believe I acquired a fairly typical picture of the school’s work.

The teachers tried to integrate me into the classroom activities on a few occasions, but I explained to them my role as an observer. The only time when I could not maintain this more distant role was during the field trip, during which I assisted in looking after the children.
I planned to hand out the Letter of Information and the Consent Forms for explicit consent to the students on the first day of my visit because the school had not done this prior to my arrival with the letters I electronically mailed them. I had also offered to send them hard copies of the letters, but I never received an answer to these suggestions. However, T1 suggested not handing out the letters on this first Friday because the students seemed too fidgety. For several other reasons, it was only possible to hand out the letters on my second last day. On my last day, I only received 7 signed consent forms from parents. However, implicit consent is sufficient for my study since I am focusing on the school and the teachers, and not on any particular students.

Throughout my visit at the school, I wrote field notes, containing the descriptive notes of the classroom observations as well as of the school setting and the classrooms as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). I also kept brief reflective notes on my thoughts and impressions during my visit clearly separated from the descriptive notes. These field notes are “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collection and reflecting on the data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 118-119). I described the classroom activities and the overall classroom atmosphere, paying particular attention to the teachers’ behaviour. On the whole I spent about 18 hours observing classroom interaction. In addition, I participated in a field trip to the zoo. During this trip, I did not take field notes. However, I wrote my impressions of this experience in the reflective field notes after the trip.

The field notes were written in English in order to minimize the number of documents that required translation.
Data Analysis

In order to remain close to the data, I transcribed the interviews and field notes myself, and I also translated the German transcripts into English. This facilitated the coding process because it gave me preliminary ideas about the data segments as well as about the case as a whole (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Patton, 2002).

The data analysis started during field work (Miles & Huberman, 1994), for example, when I reflected on my experiences in the field notes. By this interim analysis of the case, data collection decisions could be made in the process of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Thus, the study was more flexible and more adaptive to new ideas (Yin, 2006) within the limits of predetermined ethical clearance. This was important because the observations were partly guided by topics and themes discussed in the interviews and by information from the official documents.

The analysis corresponds to what Patton (2002) identifies as content analysis in a general understanding: “[Q]ualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). I regard these “core meanings” not as essential to the data or texts. Rather, it is a meaning constructed by the participants as well as by the researcher.

The interviews were coded successively with categorical and descriptive codes such as characteristic of teacher, role of teacher, notion of integration, applied strategy, and cooperation. These codes described the content of the particular passages of the interviews. After new codes emerged in the interviews, I returned to already coded data in order to ensure that I did not miss important parts. In the second step of this inductive analysis, I organized all codes of the individual interviews with the respective content
description from the particular interview and summarized the major points of each interview. After all codes were organized in this way for each interview, I compared these codes across the interviews. Broader codes, for example applied strategy, were divided into more detailed ones such as strategies for language support, for increasing independence, or for increasing cooperation. During this comparison and the memo writing, which I conducted during the coding process and during this part of the analysis, wider themes emerged from the codes. These themes describe characteristics of the school and the participants, and of the pedagogical framework and strategies of the school.

In the coding of the observation notes, I used a similar approach. Descriptive and categorical codes that focused mainly on the pedagogical framework and teaching strategies were applied to better understand the classroom activities and interactions.

Themes that emerged from the data sources are: Reflection, cooperation, structures and rituals, rules and discipline, responsibility and independence, student-centred approach, education for integration. Themes guided by the framework are: Intercultural influence on the curriculum, perspective on culture and diversity, power/knowledge relation, critical reflection about the self.

After finishing the coding of the observation notes, I started writing the findings chapter. The purpose if this chapter is to give a comprehensive description of the school’s pedagogical work as well as of the atmosphere in the school. I aspire for the reader to be in a position to form her or his own opinion about the school’s pedagogy. Therefore, I used excerpts from the three primary data sources interviews, school program, and observation notes extensively. Especially in the process of writing and structuring this chapter, the main aspects of the pedagogical framework as well as of the school’s teaching strategies became clearer. The process of writing is definitely an important part
of the analyzing process. According to Richardson (1994), “[w]riting is also a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic.” (p. 516)

I applied strategies of critique based on the framework of Intercultural Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy with a focus on notions of power relations, empowerment, and social change in order to understand the work of the school, to learn about the meaning that the teachers and principal make of their work in this situation, and to analyze and critique their strategies and practices in consideration of the wider historical, social and political context (Giroux, 1979, 1981; McLaren, 2003; Said, 1978). In addition, I pay particular attention to the ways in which the school deals with cultural differences of their students.

This research study was conducted after receiving ethical clearance from the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board.
CHAPTER FIVE

CASE STUDY AND FINDINGS

This following chapter answers the first two objectives of my study, which are:

1. to learn about the school’s pedagogical framework, and

2. to describe how this pedagogical framework is translated into everyday practice.

I deploy thick description (Patton, 2002) substantiated with excerpts from the school documents, the interviews, and the classroom observations in order to describe the work of the school in a holistic and comprehensive fashion.

Although I attempted to be an observer and not a participant of the classroom activities, this was not always possible (e.g., Day 1, p. 6; Day 2, p. 2). Holding a constructivist perspective, I recognize that the description of the school’s work is influenced by my personal point of view. However, in order to allow readers to come to their own understanding of the situation in this school, I use many quotations from the interviews as well as passages from my observation notes and the school documents.

After describing more general aspects and characteristics of the school’s pedagogical framework in consideration of the particular situation many of their students live in, I describe comprehensively the school’s strategies to improve educational equity for all students.

Description of the School

The school was founded in 1994. At the moment, 420 children from more than 20 nationalities are enrolled in this primary school. As well, 83% of the students come from an immigration background and 25 students are in need of special education. The faculty

12 Quotations from the field notes are referenced by the day of the observation and the page number of the field notes.
consists of 26 teachers, two special education teachers, one social pedagogue, and two teachers for mother tongue education in Greek and Turkish. In addition, seven pedagogical employees are responsible for the full-time day care for students.

The school is located in the city of Dortmund in North Rhine-Westphalia, which is with a population of about 18 million the largest federal state in Germany. Dortmund has a population of over 580,000 with 74,480 inhabitants classified as “foreigners” (numbers from the website of the city of Dortmund). The largest immigrant population in Dortmund is from Turkey (26,035 in 2007). The larger region around Dortmund is called the “Ruhrgebiet” (Ruhr area). It is an area in which many cities have grown together and encompass now a population of about 5.3 million. This area is known for the structural change in its industry. It used to be an area dominated by mining and steel industry. During the structural changes in the 1980s and 1990s, more than half of the job in these industries got lost. Nowadays, the industry is oriented more toward the service sector.

The district in which the school is situated is characterized as “a city district with particular need for renewal” (translated by author, Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 5). This means that this area has high unemployment rates, high need for integration for immigrants, a high rate of (teenage) single mothers, low quality of living, high impairments for health, and many more disadvantageous factors (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

The school building is surrounded by large apartment buildings, which are partly social housing. The school building is fairly large with special classrooms for Turkish, Greek, special education classes, with rooms for meetings, learning workshops, rooms for full-time day care, and with a library.
Every classroom contains the same basic elements. Every classroom has a reading corner with cushions, a sitting circle with wooden benches, a desk for the teacher, boxes for the exercise sheets for the week plan, and boxes and drawers for the work of the students with their name tags. Also in every classroom is a table with the initial sounds, a wooden board displaying the date, one or two blackboards and the board with the study plan for the day.

Two tables are always grouped together, so that the students are sitting in groups of four. The seating arrangements are fixed, also in the sitting circle. They are intentionally mixed by grade and usually also by gender. Only on one table four boys are sitting.

Every classroom has an extensive collection of learning materials for example picture-word memory and materials for math (arithmetical problems of various forms, memory).

**The Class**

My classroom observations took place in a so-called *introduction / entrance level classroom*, a split class which consists of Grade one and Grade two students. There are 24 students in this class. The class has two teachers. Sometimes, both teachers are together in the classroom, sometimes only one teacher is present. However, even when both teachers are present usually only one of them is in charge of the lesson. The other teacher is either doing own work at the desk for example, or is helping students during the individual work
phases. Sometimes, the class is split up into big ones and little ones\(^\text{13}\) either within the classroom or one teacher leaves the room with one group.

The students in this class all live in the immediate neighbourhood of the school. About one fourth lives in the social housing apartment building, which is next to the school. The student body in this class, as the student body of the whole school, is culturally, linguistically, and ethnically very diverse. The largest ethnic group in this class is students from a Turkish family background (7), with two students from families where only one parent is Turkish. There are only two students with German parents, and one student with German-Yugoslavian parents. Three students that come from multiethnic families speak German at home as a language of communication. Three students come from a Sri Lankan family background. Other students have family backgrounds from Morocco, Macedonia, Poland and Yugoslavia. Furthermore, one of the students is diagnosed with a learning disability and receives additional special education. Another student receives speech therapy.

I never heard the students talk in a language other than German to each other in the regular classroom I observed. Only while I was talking to Turkish and Islam teacher at the beginning of one of her lessons, she spoke Turkish to her student and he answered in Turkish.

I did not notice any group formation in this class along ethnical lines. The only group formation was along gender lines. I noticed this for example during the open beginning, when students can play or catch up on their work. Here, boys and girls usually

\(^{13}\) The teachers refer to the students that have already been in school for a year as "the big ones" and to the new students as "the little ones." Each student knows to which group she or he belongs. I use these terms in this study as well to describe the different groups.
worked and played separately. Furthermore, during the breakfast breaks, most of the boys from the mixed-gender tables usually joined the boys at the boys-only table.

My impression of this class as a whole was very positive. Keeping in mind that this was only the seventh week of school for half of the students, I found them already very organized and well-behaved in the way that they listened closely to the teachers, responded to instructions, and knew and followed the rules and routines. Also, the noise level in the classroom was usually very low, even during less organized times like the open beginning.

The atmosphere in the classroom was very friendly and positive. I hardly ever observed tensions or arguments between the students. Usually, they treated each other in a respectful manner. I noticed that they would often thank, welcome, and say good bye to each other. I think the teachers, especially T1, already had had a great influence on the students, acting as their role models.

**The Principal**

The principal of this school has a rather uncommon role for a primary school principal. She does not teach, so that she can focus on “leading” the school. However, she has worked as a teacher for over thirty years and most of the time in social “hot spots” with children with immigration backgrounds. This professional experience seems vital for her work at this school.

She offers innovative ideas on how to improve the situation in the school for the children, which are always discussed in a team with teachers before they are implemented. Many of her tasks deal with organizational matters of the school. She attempts to create the framework and the conditions that contribute to the successful educational work of
this school. Both interviewed teachers talked very positively about her and valued the work she does for the school. This is partly due to the uncommon position of being solely the principal, not a teacher, which gives her the time and the possibilities for constant school development.

Teacher One

T1\textsuperscript{14} is working as a teacher for less than two year at the time of my visit. He has a degree in pedagogy in addition to his teaching degree. Currently, he is working on his doctoral thesis. In addition to the work in the school, he is also working for the school supervisory institution for three hours a week.

I had the impression that he is very well aware of his function as a role model. He seems to be paying attention to how he is behaving and talking in front of the students, though this never felt artificial or forced. He seems to be aspiring to display the humanistic values and principles that guide the school.

Teacher Two

T2 is the second classroom teacher in the classroom I observed. She is a participant only in the classroom observations.

Teacher Three

I met this teacher while T1 was giving me a tour through the school building. We met her in the Turkish classroom. She was very friendly and warm, showing me the

\textsuperscript{14} I use the abbreviations T1 for the male and T2 for the female classroom teacher. T3 is the abbreviation for the teacher for Turkish and Islam education and P for the principal. These abbreviations are used both within the text and to reference quotations.
classroom, for example the seating area, which was decorated with Turkish rugs and shawls.

She was born in Turkey, but she spent several years during her teenage years in Germany. She visited a Hauptschule. She told me about the negative experiences she made with teachers in this school, who were not responsive and sensitive to her cultural background. After she returned to Turkey, she visited a high school there. However, she had to take additional, private lessons, for example in mathematics, because the education she received in the German Hauptschule did not prepare her well enough for the Turkish school she attended. She studied German literacy in Istanbul and did her Master degree there. Later, she went to Austria for her doctoral degree. She taught at different universities in Germany (Essen, Dortmund, and Münster) in Intercultural Pedagogy and worked in teacher education as well. In this primary school, she teaches Islam education and Turkish mother tongue classes. In addition, she is strongly involved in parental information sessions in this school.

**General Aspects of the School’s Pedagogical Framework**

In the following part I represent general aspects of the pedagogical framework of the school. These aspects are important for a comprehensive understanding of the school’s work as well as of the general atmosphere in the school. Even though the following aspects are described separately, they are all linked in the pedagogical framework which guides the daily teaching and learning practice in this school.
Friendly, Safe and Respectful Atmosphere

From the impressions of my visit in the school and from the collected data I noticed the open and friendly atmosphere in the observed classroom and the school as a whole. The students of the class I observed generally treat each other in a friendly and respectful way. This may be a result of the role modeling of the classroom teachers, especially of T1, who constantly creates a safe and open environment for the students to learn and live in. This atmosphere is also expressed in the students’ openness to ask questions both to teachers and to fellow students. I observed this behaviour, in which students are not ashamed to ask for help, throughout my visit in this school (e.g., Day 2, p. 4; Day 6, p. 1).

The teachers usually make an effort to treat the students respectfully and to consider their wishes and needs. In these first weeks, for example, none of the new students are expected to tell about their weekend experiences in the morning circle on Mondays yet; however, they are welcome to do so voluntarily (Day 2, p. 2).

The teachers, especially T1, model respectful and friendly behaviour and interaction with other people, students as well as colleagues and parents, at all times (e.g., Day 6, p. 4: T1 asks for the students’ permission to sit at their table during breakfast). Another example of this respectful interaction is that T1 starts the day by welcoming every student with a handshake and by saying the students’ names (e.g., Day 1, p. 1; Day 5, p. 1; Day 6, p. 1). In addition, he clearly explains to students in given situations how to interact respectfully with each other (e.g., Day 6, p. 3).

Even though the teachers emphasize rules and structures and are very consequent when the students do not follow them, they also praise the students every time they do
good work (e.g., Day 1, p. 5). Often, this happens by pointing out a student’s good work to the whole class. However, this does not happen in a way that fosters competition and jealousy among students, but simply by demonstrating acknowledgement, recognition, and high regards for the accomplishments (e.g., Day 1, p. 7). In these situations, the class often starts applauding, which demonstrates the positive and friendly atmosphere amongst the students that has been created in this classroom (e.g. Day 2, p. 4).

This thoughtfulness of the teachers, however, does not mean that the students are not challenged academically. The teachers hold high expectations for the work of their students (e.g., Day 2, p. 2). Almost as often as they praise students and their work, they also challenge students to improve their work when they notice that the students did not try hard enough (e.g., Day 2, p. 2; Day 5, p. 1).

**Rituals and Structures**

Continuity of matters is a concept that is prevalent in many different areas of the school’s work. This concept means that many aspect of the pedagogical work of the school are aligned. Continuity is intended to provide the students with clear structures and guidelines in order to give them a sense of security and consistency in their school life. As mentioned before every classroom is equipped with the same basic elements, which is meant to give the students a feeling of familiarity. In addition, the curriculum is the same in every grade class, and teaching methods are the same in the whole school.

Rituals and structures are important contributing factors to this continuity of matters in this school. During the classroom observations I noticed that most interactions in the classroom are structured or ritualized in some way. During the preschool support groups, students are already introduced to the school’s rituals, rules, and work styles. In
addition, every day is structured in similar ways. T1 explains the importance of this concept as follows:

In the math support group in the preschool field GIRL1 already got to know the classroom. Knows when the music is turned on, we go into the sitting circle. Coming into the circle then it has to be quiet. She knows the quiet sign. So she already knows the rituals and feels safe here as well. (T1, p. 15)

These characteristics are also prerequisites for efficient time management and classroom organization. As T1 explains in the interview, the structures and rituals help to save valuable time in class, so that more time can be used to further the students learning of subject matter (p. 20).

In the school program (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007), it is mentioned that the school week as well as the school day are clearly structured through certain elements, such as the sitting circle in the morning and class council on Fridays. Structures and rituals help students to know what to expect, which leads to a feeling of security. In addition, it helps them to take charge of their own learning processes because they know what they are expected to do.

The next excerpt from the observation notes demonstrates how familiar rituals and structures act as guidelines that allow the teacher to hand over responsibility for teaching and learning as well as classroom organization to the students.

He [T1] asks the students what they think they are going to do next. The answer comes immediately: “learning diary.” T1 asks who could explain what they have to do when working on the learning diary. Several students raise their hands. He calls on a girl. She starts explaining. After a few sentences, T1 tells her to sit on his chair, the “teacher chair,” while she explains to the class. T1 sits down on her seat in the circle. After she finished her explanation, she is also asked to organize who can get up first to fetch their diaries from their individual drawers. She seems to know the procedure. She calls names of children sitting on one corner to the next of the sitting circle (which is actually a rectangle), so that only 4-5 students at

15 The references for quotations from interview transcripts include the short form for the interviewee (T1, T3, P) and the page number of the interview transcript.
a time get up and fetch their diaries…. Students get their diaries and sit down at their tables. (Day 1, p. 7)

After only a few weeks in school, plus the preschool support groups for some of the students, most of them are familiar with the daily rituals and routines. During the observations, T1 explains to me: “I say it simplistically, many students in this class come from rather chaotic backgrounds. That’s why they need structures in school.’ He mentions that some students have to get up on their own in the morning.” (Day 1, p. 4) Because many students have disorganized lives without many common rules and structures, the school attempts to counteract by emphasizing the common school rules, rituals, and structures.

**Strict Rules and Consequent Action**

Strict rules followed by consequent actions are regarded as essential in this school to maintain respectful interactions as well as a feeling of security and continuity. Often, they support classroom organization and management as well. From the observation data, it becomes obvious that the teachers often interfere in disruptive behaviour of the students, for example when it gets too loud (e.g., Day 3, p. 2; Day 5, p. 5). As a result, the noise level is rather low at most times.

Rules in this school are simple and clear and, according to T1, known by almost every child. He emphasizes the importance of strict rules and consequent actions especially for a diverse student population in the interview.

And therefore, here we try through clear rules, which apply in the whole school, yes, to pull together. And this is especially for children with a migration background, with so many different migrations backgrounds, very important. That they have security here. Here, the rules apply; here they are abided by. And when someone, when someone infringes upon them there are consequences. Only then living together with so many different cultures is possible. Maybe that has also to do with strictness. I’d rather call it “consequent actions.” (T1, pp. 20-21)
On several occasions I observed that T1 follows through with consequences after violation of rules or disruptive behaviour. In general, the students get one or two warnings, for example to stop talking loudly. If they continue the disruptive behaviour, consequences are that they have to leave the sitting circle to sit at their tables (Day 1, p. 5) or that they have to leave their table to sit at the teacher’s desk (Day 6, p. 2).

Having clear school rules has also the effect that the students learn how to interact respectfully with each other. The following vignette shows how the teacher uses a specific situation to explain the importance of rules to the students, but also how there is a generally friendly and respectful atmosphere in the classroom.

A girl sits down next to her chair because a boy had moved the chairs around; not on purpose to make her fall though. She starts crying loudly. Boy looks bewildered, goes back to his seat and apologizes immediately. T1 goes to him and tells him in a quiet voice that this is exactly why they shouldn’t move the chairs around. But he is not angry at him. The boy nods. T2 takes care of girl. (Day 1, p. 6)

Important to the creating of this atmosphere are rules that guide the interaction of students and teachers. I observed on several occasions that the teachers tell the students in a specific situation how to behave. Often these are situations and interactions that could be described as rules of common courtesy in Germany. T1 tells a student for example to look at him during the handshake and another student to use the right hand for the handshake (Day 5, p. 1). He also insists that students call each other by their names and not just by saying “you” (Day 1, p. 2) and that they listen to each other when someone explains something (e.g., Day 1, p. 8). In addition, students are often reminded to treat each other with more respect, for example to apologize (e.g., Day 6, p. 3).
School rules are often introduced in a concrete situation, so that the students are not overwhelmed with a variety of different rules. T1 explains this understanding in the interview as well:

If we were going on and on talking about rules and every day, the children wouldn’t be able to take this in, also merely linguistically. But also intervene very concretely. When something doesn’t work out, intervene. And I do have this time because I give a lot of responsibility for their own learning to the children. But I do have to give them clear structures, where they can, on which this responsibility can be based on/drawn upon. (T1, p. 39)

I also observed that students are included in the setting of rules, which facilitates their understanding of them:

T1 tells class that they are going to talk about rules for their visit to the zoo tomorrow. He asks the class if they already know what might be an important rule for the visit to the zoo. Some hands go up. He wants children to call on each other. T1 gives hints for rules and he repeats more clearly the rules that the students name. T1 has prepared sheets with the rules written on them. He pins them on the board behind him. He calls on students who raise their hands to read the rules out loud. …. T1 tells them that he thinks that they will be a well behaved class. But in case someone doesn’t obey the rules, they will send this student home, he tells them very clearly. He also explains to the class that they are going to take the underground train to get to the zoo. T1 tells students that all adults who come to the zoo with them (T1, T2, two mothers, and me), will be really strict about the rules…. He asks students why it is dangerous when they run away on the street or in the underground. Students answer about the dangers of streets and the underground. (Day 3, p. 1)

**Supportive of Cooperative, Independent and Responsible Learning**

A characteristic of school, teachers and lessons is that they are very supportive of the students’ independence and that they encourage the students to take over responsibility both for school matters as well as for their personal and social lives. Often, the teachers apply strategies for supporting independence and responsibility at the same time, which shows that the development of these two characteristics is closely linked. In addition, cooperation amongst students is encouraged by the teacher, which also
contributes to independent and responsible learning and interaction. Throughout my classroom observation, I noticed several situations in which especially T1 facilitates the development of these characteristics.

In several situations the teacher redirected a student’s question back to the class (e.g., Day 1, p. 2). Especially T1 does not want to be seen as the bearer of all knowledge (T1, p. 37), but he encourages the students to assist each other and pool their knowledge and skills (Day 2, p. 4; Day 3, p. 1; Day 3, p. 4). He regards the class as a “learning community” (T1, p. 37). In addition, T1 encouraged students to look up information in books instead of simply giving them the answer (e.g., Day 5, p. 1). By this, the teacher encourages the students to work independently and to develop their own learning skills.

The child-centeredness of the pedagogical approach becomes visible when the students take over the role of the teacher or when they present their work (e.g., Day 1, p. 7). The teacher brings the students and their interests back as the focus of the lesson. This strategy is also highly supportive of the students’ independence and responsibility as learners. A situation that demonstrated the child-centeredness of the schools approach by including topics that the students are interested in is captured in the following excerpt from the field notes.

T1 rings bell and calls on GIRL3. He gets up from his chair and sits down in the sitting circle. GIRL3 is sitting down on the teacher chair. She has brought a little booklet about animal babies to school. She shows it to the other students and tells them all the animal names. In the cases where she doesn’t know the names other students help her. Some students want to get up to have a closer look at the booklet, but T1 insists that they remain seated. T1 asks if someone is an expert for koala bears. Some students raise their hands. T1 gives the book with a picture of a koala bear to two of the students who had raised a hand. The students sit down on the teacher chair. They can tell everything they know about the koala now. (Day 5, p. 5)
In this scene, the teacher hands over responsibility for informing the class about animals to a student who volunteered for this task. The teacher encourages other students to assist with naming the animals.

These processes do not occur independently; the teacher is needed to guide the development of independence and cooperation. Students are directed by the teachers in learning how to help each other. The following excerpt shows an example of this guidance.

T2 tells one student to explain to another student how this syllables exercise works. The two girls sit down at a table and the first student starts explaining. T2 asks the student if she has explained it to the other student a few minutes later. She also tells her not to just tell her the answers. (Day 3, p. 4)

Throughout the lessons, the teachers encourage their students to help and assist each other. Often, the teachers direct one of the “little ones”, who could not read at the time of my visit, to one of the older students for help and assistance (Day 2, p. 2, Day 4, p. 1; Day 5, p. 3). This concept seems to be working out. On several occasions I observed how students helped out each other with their individual work even without the teacher directly instructing them to do so (Day 2, p. 4; Day 5, p. 4).

In general, I did not observe much group work or work in pairs in this class. However, I observed only the seventh week of school in the entrance level class. The students are exposed to many new experiences in their first weeks in school, so that the teachers introduce new methods and strategies successively, as T1 explained to me before (T1, p. 36).

Nevertheless, I observed students working in groups and pairs on one topic. They worked together on an informative book about zoo animals. Every pair/group was
responsible for one particular animal. The pairs/groups consisted of a combination of “big ones” and “little ones.” After this particular lesson,

T1 tells me later that these are their first attempts to have the students work in groups and/or partner work. He says that he wants the students to find information on their own, for example in dictionary or in a book about animals. (Day 5, p. 3)

The school demonstrates that independence and cooperation are achieved through the existence of clear rules and structures. Without these structures, the students would not have the means to act responsibly. Rules and structures are the prerequisite for independence, responsibility, and cooperation in this school.

**Child-centred Approach: The Child is at the Centre of Every Decision**

Most of the children who attend this primary school grow up under disadvantageous conditions. In its program the school recognizes that “in a location like this school becomes an important place of life for children” (translated by author, Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 5). This acknowledgement led the principal and the founding teachers of this school to the question which still guides the work and development of the school: “What is a good school for the children who grow up here?” (P, p. 1). For the principal “school in such a location is not an island” (p.1). The living situations of the children have to be considered in order to assist them in succeeding in school and in life in general. T1 answered the question about exceptional characteristics of this school as follows: “That the child is in the centre, the student. The learning of the students is most important. And all, all ideas, all plans, all thoughts really refer to this, to the support of the learning of the student.” (T1, p. 2)

The aims of the school are not very different from those of other schools, namely to equip the students with important social, personal, and cognitive competencies and to
assist them in developing important knowledge they need to be successful in their future learning careers and lives. These are aims of school and education similar to those described for example by Graumann (2003). However, learning more about this school demonstrates that their work goes well beyond the immediate pedagogical work with children. In order to achieve the aims mentioned above, the school tries to reach out to and to engage everyone involved in the lives and the educational processes of the students. It seems that one overarching strategy of the school is to improve the living and family situation of the children in order to activate all possible resources to assist and support the children.

**Self-critical Reflection and Cooperation for School Development**

The teachers and the principal of this school attempt to offer the children an education that is considerate of and appropriate for their particular living and learning situation. This understanding entails that school development and improvement can never stop. It has to be constantly adaptive to the needs and experiences of the students. Therefore, the principal describes this school as “a constant construction site” (p. 3). In order to ensure adequate and high quality education, the school constantly evaluates whether its concepts and strategies are still appropriate and effective for their current students. All participants seem to be very reflective and self-critical about their own work. T1, for example, demonstrates self-critical awareness about his own teaching. In the interview he admits that he is sometimes too impatient with the children in certain situations. He acknowledges that he needs to improve this aspect of his teaching (p. 37).

T1 characterizes the school as follows: “We are a learning school, I think I indicated this already before. Because we always reflect, is this still right like this” (p. 2).
This reflection happens through yearly evaluations of the different areas of the school’s work. Thereby, the principal explains, the school can find out in which areas they need improvement (p. 3). When they notice that certain concepts are no longer appropriate, they change their strategies or introduce new ones. T1 describes the teachers’ thinking process:

“All these still the right ideas, are these still the right concepts for these students we have here?” (mimicking) Thus the school tries to find answers to the context/environment, to the students who want to learn here. And not the other way around, what kind of students do we need for our concept. (p. 2)

Another example in which the school changed its own structures to better support the children is also described by T1:

T1: We can’t march lock-step here and assume that they can already read and write when they come to school.
A: UH-HUM.16
T1: But that’s when the concept of the split classes emerged. It’s so heterogeneous, this student population, that we can’t accomplish this anymore in conform grade classes. Uhm, that there’re also disappointments by retentions, “Unfortunately, you have to repeat the first grade. You’re not yet allowed to the next grade.” (mimicking)
A: YES.
T1: “You get a different teacher then. You have to start all over again. That’s how it is here.” (mimicking) That used to be normal. And there we noticed, with this we aren’t doing the child a favour. (p. 8)

Another example is that the school introduced motor movement classes for their future students after the teachers recognized a statistical increase of diagnosed needs in this area (T1, p. 13). In addition, the school program states that the language support strategies and concepts are evaluated four times per year. The results from these evaluations are deployed to constantly assess the effectiveness of the programs and the materials used, so that they can be improved (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, pp. 60-61).

16 “A” in the interview transcript refers to the author/interviewer.
This thinking process leads to another important self-conception of the school: professional cooperation. T1 explains how the staff of this school works together:

We always debate in the team. We aren’t lone fighters here but the basic consensus is not “Me and my class,” but “We and our grade level.” Or even bigger “We and our school.” That’s also why the doors are always open here. (T1, pp. 2-3)

This kind of cooperation in which teachers, principal, and other administrators, even the students, understand themselves as a team, is important for school development. Teachers regularly observe lessons of their colleagues and give feedback about their teaching. When problems occur with students, teachers try to solve them cooperatively as well.

This cooperation between teachers is mentioned by T3 in a very positive tone.

And what I find really great here, that for example, now I’ve just been on the corridor, there I saw a colleague, then we talked immediately about a child. That one not just simply, especially, uhm yes, that this is simply a part of the conversation. That is basically also a private conversation, but also about the child, and that one will continue to observe this child. (p. 9)

The teachers deploy cooperation to constantly develop their own teaching and to gauge the situation their students are in. “That was for me then like ‘I see, she’s observed that as well, I’ve observed that as well’ (mimicking). That is immediate support for the both of us.” (T3, p. 9) The emphasis on professional cooperation is a beneficial strategy for students because by incorporating other opinions and perspectives in their own teaching or evaluation of students, the teachers’ work becomes more comprehensive and holistic.

T1 mentions cooperation between teachers of this school as well as between teachers and the principal. For him, this professional cooperation is one of the main “drivers for school development” (p. 35). He emphasizes that almost everything that happens in the school, the development of the school program, of curricula, of assessment strategies, emerges in team work. However, whatever concept or strategy is agreed upon
is binding for all teachers. Therefore, at the same grade level, curricula and lessons are followed simultaneously. Tests and assessments are also identical for the same grade classes.

I think we’re really self-conscious here. We’re very conscious about what we’re doing here ourselves. That’s how I define self-conscious…. This results from the constant exchange. Weekly through the grade level team\textsuperscript{17}, but also we see each other a lot here and talk with each other. (T1, pp. 35-36)

T1 describes the cooperative practice of the school as follows:

When one starts working here, one has to know that there are a lot of agreements here. That’s something, however, that gives great security and development for our own professionalism as well. One doesn’t stop with [the knowledge] one has got in the knowledge backpack after university studies, so to say, methods and didactics and little finesses, but every week it is reflected/reconsidered. (p. 3)

I observed this professional cooperation for example when other teachers came into the classroom to either assist or to observe. In addition, the two classroom teachers usually discussed briefly what they had covered in their part of the lesson or if anything important had happened before one of them took over the class from the other teacher (e.g., Day 1, p. 7; Day 2, p. 2; Day 3, p. 3)

Cooperation together with self-critical reflection are the strategies that allow the school and the teachers to offer pedagogical concepts that are most suitable for their students. Furthermore, these are important strategies to constantly develop the applied concepts and programs according to the particular students who are attending the school.

**Facilitating the School Start: Offering Students a more Equitable Start**

The school staff believes that the disadvantageous living situations of many students are the main obstacles for the children’s equitable educational opportunities.

\textsuperscript{17} Teams consisting of all teachers of the classes of one grade.
That is why the school tries to compensate for deficits in the development of the children before they enter to school.

T1 talks comprehensively about the importance of preschool diagnosis and the following support classes. This shows that he believes that the “achievement gap” between different students already exists before the students come to school, partly due to the disadvantageous upbringing situation of students with missing skills and competencies. This interpretation of the thought process of this teacher and the school in general is supported by the fact that the school deploys various strategies to engage the parents more in their children’s education and to give them advice about their upbringing.

**Impressions of the Students’ Parents and their Living Situation**

The disadvantageous living and educational situation of many students prior to and during primary school seems to be one of the major reasons for inequitable educational opportunities. On the whole, it can be said that the school is of the opinion that a large part of their students are not equipped with the expected skills, knowledge, and competencies for successful learning prior to the school start.

All three participants talked about their impressions, opinions, and experiences with parents. They seem to believe that many parents are not fully able to appropriately raise their children and to prepare them for school. These low expectations of the parents’ ability to support their children concerns both general parental and upbringing issues (e.g. consumption of television, right nutrition, setting reliable rules) as well as particular support regarding educational matters such as reading to the children or communicating in German. This opinion about the parents is also displayed in the information letter the school sends to the parents after their child has been diagnosed with certain needs for
additional support. These letters inform the parents about very basic parental issues (e.g.,
limit consumption of television and computer), but also about playful activities to support
their children educationally at home (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 38).

T3 explains that the changed living situation of many Turkish immigrant families
becomes problematic:

And now, the parents are overstrained. They don’t know how to bring up their
children. The grandparents used to take this [responsibility] on. And that is
something where I saw great deficits. And therefore, I think that the parents have
an incredible demand. And it’s good that I’m, well I think, available for one hour
too. And in addition, there’s also a social pedagogue. And we have different offers.
And the parents know that they can make use of these. And I think that works out
wonderfully. (p. 10)

Parents play an important role in the children’s lives. Therefore, the principal
believes that it is vital to include parents in the education process of the children and to
make them understand what their possibilities and responsibilities are in supporting their
children:

One can’t expect from all parents, and especially not from parents with a
migration background, that they understand the German school system. Uhm, the
penetrability, the limitations, uhm, that what the parents have to contribute
ultimately as well, to foster their children at home. And school has to make this
clear to the parents. Here, we have a preschool discussion forum for the parents,
where we tell the parents very clearly, what they can do at home with their
possibilities, not as an assistant teacher, but with their playful possibilities, to
foster their children at home. (p. 2)

This excerpt demonstrates how the school is taking charge of informing parents about
parental issues, something that traditionally has not been the task of the school.

Furthermore, the school makes the parents aware of their own responsibilities in order to
provide the children with more equitable educational opportunities.

Another issue that the school attempts to improve is the parents’ opinion about
and relationship with the school. Many parents seem uncomfortable with interacting with
the school at first because they do not know what to expect. T1 explains: “Many parents of our children have a rather difficult educational biography or school biography. [They] definitely also have fears of the school. Through this preschool field we bolster this as well” (p. 15). In these preschool discussion groups, the parents learn about the work of the school and about their own roles in their children’s education process.

*Parental Information: Preschool Discussion Forum*

Parental information about educational matters is a large part of the work of the school. Cooperation and communication between school and the children’s parents are intended to be in the best interest and for the benefit of the children. The preschool discussion forum, which is led by a teacher of the school, meets about seven times prior to school start. It is intended to inform the parents about the work of the school as well as to assist them in supporting their children at home.

In an experience report of the school about developments in the preschool parental work, the focus of this cooperation between parents and school is explained. The topics discussed in the sessions are agreed upon in the group. Common topics are: How can I prepare my child for school? How do children learn in school today? How long are children supposed to watch TV? Other topics include healthy nutrition, children’s diseases, establishing consequent rules, dealing with children’s fears and frustrations (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße). The sessions are meant to develop cooperation in the parents and to qualify them, so that they can better support their children at home, parallel to the preschool support classes in which children with diagnosed needs participate. Other goals of these sessions listed in this report are (a) making the school’s work more
transparent, (b) offering support to parents, and (c) activating the parents to collaborate in school matters.

The preschool discussion forum was established because the experience of the teachers had shown that many parents were overstrained with simple parental issues and felt alone. They would like to support their children and offer good learning opportunities, but often they do not know how to do this (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße). Because existing counselling services offered by other external organization are generally not widely used by parents the school decided to develop these offers. Based on a relationship of mutual trust and on the common goal to act in the best interest of the child, the school hopes to achieve positive change where other support systems fail (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße).

In order to achieve this relationship the school takes the parents seriously in their competence as parents. They are seen as partners in the educational development of their children. The school calls this concept “Empower parents – Take educational partnerships seriously” (translated by author, Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, p. 2).

These discussion groups are generally received well by the parents, as all three participants mentioned in the interviews. Furthermore, the principal plans to develop this area even more, in order to assist the parents throughout the primary school years of their children:

Well, we, uhm, the deeper we infuse the matter, the more important it is for us to really qualify the parents. Something like an accompanying parental information throughout the school days. Not only regarding the preschool, uhm, preschool information, which we already do now for a really long time. But I’d like to invite the parents accompanying throughout again and again to certain topics of the school in the next years from 1 to 4, because I think that there’s a very huge need. (p. 3)
Involving the parents in educational matters is certainly a major strategy of the school to improve the children’s educational opportunities. Another related strategy is assessing all students in order to evaluate their areas of strength and possible areas in which they need further support prior to school start.

**Early Diagnosis of Possible Needs and Support Classes**

Early diagnosis of possible needs of future students, which takes place already nine months before school starts, is a strategy that is clearly emphasized in this school. Since many children lack expected basic social and educational competencies the school conducts these assessments prior to school, so that possible disadvantages can be mitigated through support classes. The principal clarifies that the achievement gap already exists before the children start primary school. She regards factors in the children’s history prior to school start as being responsible for their lack of certain skills and competencies:

> We move a mountain forward. Children who are hardly supported at home in the first three years, umh, children who came to kindergarten only in their fifth year, have a huge backlog concerning their support or the development of their basic skills. And we step in with all strength. We step in already nine months prior. We offer preschool support courses in mathematic, in motor movement, in language. (P, p. 3)

The children who attend these classes become familiar with the school building, with some of the teachers as well as with rules and rituals they will also encounter in their classroom later. By this familiarization with the environment and the culture of the school, the transition from kindergarten to primary school is facilitated. T1 describes the importance of these support classes prior to school start as follows:

> And we notice, that’s something we’re putting in a lot of energy, but it’s worth it. You might notice that as well that there’s not total chaos over there in the class, but that…. Yes, that GIRL1 knows about rituals…. If GIRL1 had never seen the
school before and stands here on the first day of school…and sees the teacher for the first time, sees the school, sees the rooms, then it would have become difficult…. Through the math support group here in the school, they get to know the building, the get to know the classrooms. (T1, p. 14)

Children enrolled in this school come from extremely diverse backgrounds with very different experiences. The diagnosis and the support classes prior to school start are a strategy to align the diverse skill and competence levels of the students to some extent. T1 describes this situation as follows: “And in this way, we try to, yes, bolster this heterogeneity somewhat in advance. So that after the summer holidays, teaching and learning are possible at all” (T1, p. 14).

Everyone involved in the educational process of the children at this point is invited to take responsibility for their particular role in the educational process, for the best of the child. The school cooperates and communicates with parents and kindergarten in order to support every child as early and as well as possible. There is close contact between this primary school and the kindergarten teachers which the future students attend (T1, p. 12). The kindergartens are informed about the diagnosed needs of the children, so that they can better support the children during their remaining time in kindergarten.

**Maintaining Cooperation and Support**

During the school days, the school tries to engage parents in the learning process of the children. The school attempts to make parents aware of their important role and of their responsibilities in the learning career of their children. Parents are constantly informed about their child’s development and about any special classes their child
participates in. Furthermore, the school takes on responsibilities of the parents when they cannot fulfill them (for example providing students with breakfast or lunch).

**Education Contract between Parents and School**

In the second week of school, parents are invited to a *parent-teacher conference*. During this meeting, parents are given the opportunity to inform the classroom teacher about their child and to express their expectations of the school. On the other hand, the teachers explain to the parents what they expect from them with regard to supporting the educational development of their children at home. This first meeting ends with signing a so-called *education contract* between parents and school. In this contract, the educational development of the children is regarded as a mutual responsibility of both parents and teachers.

The contract includes specific educational responsibilities that both parties commit to. Responsibilities of the parents are, for example, (a) to guarantee a quiet place at home for the child to do homework, (b) to send the child to school on time, (c) to praise the child for their work, and (d) to educate the child to honesty, courtesy, thoughtfulness, and helpfulness (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007). The school commits to welcome parents, for example (a) to observe the lessons, (b) to participate in school activities, and (c) to cooperatively create school life. In addition, the school obligates itself to support parents in their educational responsibilities and to inform them about the educational development of their child as well as about events at school. (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

This contract is a way to involve parents in educational matters in school as well as in their child’s educational development at home. With this contract, both school and
parents are reminded of their respective responsibilities throughout the school days of the children.

**Parents-Café and T3’s Particular Role**

The parents-café is an important intercultural concept at this school. It is situated in the school building, and it is open on every weekday for parents to meet and exchange their experiences, worries, and problems. It is meant as a forum for parents to communicate and support each other, to learn more about the school and about their children’s educational processes. It is led by a social pedagogue, and often T3 attends as well. The parents-café also offers language classes for the parents as well as information sessions to further discuss topics similar to those discussed in the preschool discussion forum (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

Due to her own immigration background, T3 plays an integral part in the preschool discussion sessions, the parents-café as well as in daily communication especially with Turkish immigrant parents. She explains comprehensively her particular communication and cooperation with the immigrant parents. This is a very important aspect of her job and her particular role in this school. She knows about the situation, the worries, and problems of immigrant families because she also came to Germany as an immigrant. Turkish parents, but also immigrant parents with other backgrounds, see her as a confidante. Therefore, she often plays the role of a mediator between the parents and the school and tries to mediate between sometimes different interests.

Some [Turkish parents], for example, disapprove of their children participating in sex education. Then I tell them that this is not any different in Turkey. This is being taught there as well. There, I also think, for example, well, I’ve often observed that they[^18] don’t go to the German teachers, but they come to me to talk

[^18]: The parents with an immigrant background.
about this topic. So, I should basically be, uhm, function as a mediator that I mediate there now. (T3, p. 5)

She summarizes her role in the parents-café as follows: “Well actually, uhm, I convey the teaching matters, plus, how do I better educate my child. That for example watching TV is unhealthy” (T3, p. 10). She also assists in parenting issues when parents approach her with their worries:

And I’ll try to also work with this mother on this matter, of course. Now, for example, she can’t educate her children. How can one bring them up better? What do you do? What else can you do? What else she wants to learn. I’ve always discovered the parents to be very receptive because they really confide in the school. (T3, p. 9)

Furthermore, she tries to inform immigrant parents about the German school system, the school law, and the different types of secondary schools because many parents lack information in these areas. She also tries to encourage immigrant parents to participate in school matters, for example, in the school council. She says that some parents do not want to participate because they are afraid that they do not understand everything. In these situations, the teacher uses the opportunity to convince the parents of the importance to improve proficiency in German.

Her contact with especially Turkish immigrant parents goes far beyond educational matters regarding their children. Voluntarily, she takes on additional work to support immigrant parents, especially women, to succeed in their lives in Germany. She explains that the family situations of some immigrant women are often problematic because they do not know about their rights in Germany, for example, their residential rights:

I also try to encourage them. For I noticed a lot with the mothers, sometimes, that they are also in this, well, uhm, they aren’t well off, they have residential
problems. That there are solutions for some matters. And I also try, uhm, that I, how to say, that they get more courage to face life. (T3, p. 11)

Furthermore, she also helps Turkish parents with important correspondence, translates letters or helps writing job applications (p. 12).

T3 explains her special role in these situations as being different from German mainstream teachers, “because they aren’t familiar with these areas at all, because they haven’t had these residential problems and such things” (p. 12). However, she gives credit to the principal for achieving an atmosphere of mutual trust between the school and many families, when she mentions that “this is something, I think, the principal has established here in all the years. That didn’t happen over night” (T3, p. 9). Offering informal assistance and a forum for discussion in the parents-cafè has been an important step to improve the relationship especially between immigrant parents and the school.

In these examples it becomes clear that the school does not focus only on the children and their academic careers, but that they take into consideration the whole families. With this holistic approach of improving the living situation of the whole family, the children’s situations are improved as well, which is hoped to be beneficial to the educational process of the children as well.

These strategies seem to be effective in including parents actively in their children’s development. The participants point out that many parents welcome the school’s support in parental and educational matters and follow the school’s advice. These positive results and reactions are mentioned by the principal:

19 Regarding their legal status in Germany; many immigrants are only temporarily allowed to stay in Germany or their status has not yet been decided. They might just be tolerated in Germany and live in constant fear of being deported.
And we experience all the time that at this point the parents begin to see how important they are as education, uhm, experts for their children. And this is something, I think, that should have to be urgently focused on. (P, p. 2)

**Constant Diagnosis and Assessment of Students**

Even though preschool diagnosis is emphasized by the school, student assessment and diagnosis continue throughout their school days. All information about a student, starting with the preschool diagnosis and ending with the recommendation to secondary school at the end of grade four, is included in the student’s observation portfolio. After four weeks in school, new students are assessed in the areas of phonological awareness, experiences with math, visual perception, motor movement, body coordination, and ability in rhythmic differentiation. These are the areas that are tested nine months prior to school start as well. This second assessment is meant to inform about the students’ development and the effectiveness of the preschool support classes (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

Throughout the four years at this primary school, every student gets assessed in different areas, which are oriented on the decisive curricula in language and math thrice a school year. In addition, these portfolios also include every support measure that the children receive. This portfolio is not merely a record of the students’ academic achievement, but it is also used to assist every child more individualistically according to his or her particular needs. The principal describes the use of the portfolio as follows:

Well, then, all the measures that this child lives through (laughs) in these four years go in there. What we recommend, what we’ve told the parents. How was this particular state. So that one can understand the way of learning. And this portfolio ends with the letter of referral to the secondary school. And this is where teacher work becomes visible. And that’s where it becomes visible, what huge leaps these children have made from the beginning to the end of the forth grade. (P, p. 4)
In addition, this portfolio is deployed by teachers to reflect on their own pedagogical work. T1 explains this aspect of the observation portfolio:

> But once more, we’re actually more interested in the individual learning success of BOY1 or GIRL2. How did the child come here? How did we manage in four, when I add the preparation it’s four and a half years, how did we manage? Did we manage to advance him? (T1, p. 26)

These quotations demonstrate how the school prioritizes their students’ education to be a holistic process and a constant development rather than a selective performance at a particular state. They also reflect on their own work based on the educational success of their students and change the support for the children as well as their strategies accordingly (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

**Teaching Strategies for Developing Independence and Responsibility**

Most of the teaching methods and strategies that are applied by the teachers of this school are child-centred and to some extent individualistic. This fits the main concern of the school, to see the child at the centre of all their work. In addition, the school applies these strategies to allow the children to take charge of their own learning process because many students often lack the parental support. Furthermore, the school equips students with strategies to develop their social and personal competencies in order for them to become responsible and independent personalities.

**Week Plan Work**

For a large part of the day the students work on their week plans. Every child has individualistic week plans with exercises particularly chosen by the teacher to support the children in areas where they have needs or where they do particularly well. The children are given these exercises, and they have to finish them within one or sometimes two
weeks. They are allotted week plan time every day, in which they work independently and in their own pace. The week plan consists of exercises in math, language, and science, exercises in visual and auditory cognition and in motor movement (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, pp. 51-52). New exercise sheets are often explained with all children in the sitting circle before the students work on them individually.

When students have questions or need help the teachers assist them. Students either raise their hands or go to the teacher’s desk for help (e.g., Day 6, p. 2). Sometimes, the teacher directs the students to another student for assistance (e.g., Day 6, p. 1). After they finish a particular exercise they usually show their work to the teacher (e.g., Day 5, p. 1).

In order to finish the week plan work successfully the students have to learn to ration their work and the time they have. They have to organize their own learning process and be able to gauge if they are on track with their work.

**Child-teacher Conference**

Child–teacher conferences are conducted twice a school year. It is worth citing at length how T1 describes this event and how the school came to introduce it:

There, we invite the children. Give an appointment to the children. That can also happen during a break. These are about 20-minute-talks, talks about target agreements, like they are conducted in the economy too. Where do you…, according to a very particular pattern, which was developed in a thematic team again. There was the idea that we have to talk with the children about the learning ways. Then it was reflected, child-teacher-conference day, isn’t that an idea? Then a form was developed…It’s made up like: Where do you have your strengths?

A: UH-HUM.

T1: Where do you, where do you see weaknesses? There, we’re always surprised how well the children can assess themselves. They do know very precisely where they have to do some catching up. Well, where do you want to improve yourself?

A: UH-HUM.

T1: Uhm, what do you need for improving yourself? When will we review this result? Thus, a target assessment. Until when do you want to have worked on this?
And then there’s another talk. And then it’s looked, has the child succeeded. Some write their goal here at the top of their table. With a little note. “I want to get better in mental arithmetic.” “I want to get better with articles.” (mimicking) ….

A: AND THAT IS DONE IN A PRIVATE CONVERSATION, ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATION?

T1: In the one-on-one situation. Yes, and this child-teacher-conference day happens once in a semester. Children learn there as well to take over responsibility for their learning. “Not the mom, not the teacher, but I have to consider what can I do well, where do I still have some weaknesses. What do I have to do in order to transform these weaknesses into strengths? Until when do I try the first step now?” (mimicking) Then it is checked, did she succeed. So the old form is taken out again, looked at, what did you resolve to do. Yes, this is how we try to get children to independence and to take over responsibility for their own learning. Thus, we don’t try to dissolve heterogeneity, but to do justice to it. (T1, pp. 31-32)

This strategy demonstrates how the school gives the children the tools and the framework to be able to take charge of their learning process. This is an important asset for their future learning and personal development. These skills are regarded as particularly important for children who lack the educational support from their families.

The principal also talks about this situation:

We lay all our strength into showing the children how they can learn independently. Because we know that they have only little support at home. They have, when they leave this school, a very high personal and social competence. That means, they might not know certain expressions, but they are in the position to inform themselves about these from one day to another. And they actually do this. And I believe this to be a very important qualification. (P, p. 3)

This example shows that the school stresses not only the acquisition of factual knowledge but also skills and competencies that are important for the learning process itself and for the holistic development of the student.

**Conflict Resolution**

The school attempts to provide the students with the appropriate tools for taking charge of not only their learning, but also of solving conflicts amongst each other in constructive ways. Students are expected to cooperatively solve their own conflicts,
which is a form of empowerment. This is a challenging area, yet the school has taken steps to meet it by applying the following strategies.

**Stop rule.** One of the most important rules in this school is the stop-rule, which is meant to deescalate conflict situations. T1 explains this rule as follows:

> When there’s a conflict, in the school yard, for example, BOY1 hits GIRL2, then GIRL2 is supposed to say immediately “Stop, quit hitting me!” First step. When BOY1 doesn’t stop, “Stop, quit hitting me, otherwise I go to the supervisor.” To Mrs. R., to whoever. She is always present in the school yard. When it still doesn’t stop, “Stop, quit hitting me otherwise I’ll record/enter you into the class council book.” Every class has a class council book, in which GIRL2 can go to after the break and record/enter BOY1. “17.9.2007: GIRL2 because of BOY1” (mimicking). (T1, p. 22)

First, this rule is meant to deescalate a problematic situation. Second, attacked students are not forced into the role of a victim, but they have guidelines to take charge of the situation. They learn to stand up for themselves. Third, the attackers know the consequences when they continue their actions. They have the chance to reflect on the situation and to realize that they are bothering someone else. Then, they can decide to change their behaviour. However, if they continue to bother other students, they have to take full responsibility for the consequences since they are aware that they have been disrespectful to the other student’s request to stop.

When the conflict is more severe, the teacher interferes immediately (T1, p. 22). However, in minor cases, the children are supposed to learn how to deal with these situations in a peaceful and fair way.

**Class council.** The class council is an event that takes place in every class on Fridays. During this time, the classroom doors, which are usually open to demonstrate that teaching and learning are not private matters, are closed.

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20 The teacher who supervises the students during break.
As mentioned in the explanation for the stop-rule, conflicts that did not end through the stop rule are recorded in the class council book. On Fridays, the whole class comes together in the sitting circle, and the teacher reads aloud all entries in the class council book. He asks the concerning students if they have already solved their conflict by themselves. If the conflict has not been solved yet, the whole class discusses the problem. The follow part is an excerpt from my field notes taken during the class council:

T1 reads the first entry and asks the students in question if the problem has been solved. They tell them that they have solved it already. T1 tells them he thinks it is great that they could solve it on their own.

He reads the next entry. This one is not solved yet. T1 asks the first of the students in question to explain what happened. BOY2 starts explaining. T1 tells him to be more precise and to talk more clearly and more loudly. After he’s finished, T1 asks him if there is anything else he wants to add about this event or if this was everything. Now BOY4 is telling his side of the story. T1 tells BOY4 to speak up. After BOY4 finished, T1 asks the other students how they think BOY2 and BOY4 felt in this situation. He also wants them to explain why they must have felt the way they did. Some students say their opinion about this situation. BOY3 tells that he was present in the situation, and he explains what he has seen. T1 asks BOY4 and BOY2 if BOY3 has explained the situation correctly. They affirm. T1 asks BOY2 to think how he can make up for what he’s done (he ripped BOY4’s shirt in a fight). T1 asks BOY4 the same question. He also asks the class what they think should be done about the ripped shirt. Some students make suggestions. BOY2 says that his mom can fix it or that they can take the shirt to a tailor. T1 asks BOY4 if he thinks that this is a good idea. He agrees. Both BOY4 and BOY2 are asked by T1 to stand up to shake hands and to say sorry. T1 writes down in the class council book what they have agreed on. (Day 6, pp. 4-5)

This excerpt demonstrates how clearly structured these procedures are. This gives the students guidelines for acting and reacting in certain situations. They also learn that there are consequences to their actions. Without these structures and guidelines, most students would not know how to constructively deal with conflict situations. As T1 explains, some students tend to solve their problems violently “because they often don’t experience it any differently at home and in the environment here” (T1, p. 22). The school steps in and offers the students alternative ways of acting responsibly and constructively.
These structures and guidelines are important tools for the students to take charge not only of their educational but also of their social life. With these rules, the teacher can transfer the role of the “judge” or “conflict solver” to the students.

**Language Support through Immersion**

The student population in this primary school is linguistically very diverse. German is not the mother tongue to most of the students, and their proficiency in German as a second or language varies immensely.

To reduce the heterogeneity of the students’ proficiency in German additional support through German language classes is provided. Even though the school focuses on increasing the students’ knowledge of the German language through support classes prior to school start, they offer some additional language classes, which focus on structure and grammar of German, throughout the four years of primary school as well (P, p. 5).

The school’s main strategy to improve the students’ proficiency in German is their style and method of teaching. The principal explains their philosophy as follows:

Well, I think merely the way in which we design the lessons is already very supportive for language. We have only a few phases during the lesson that look something like “Language book out, page 17, all exercises” (mimicking) and the child works quietly for itself. We have throughout the morning a very intense exchange, uhm, of talking to each other, dealing with a task, talking about this task. And the medium there is always language. And through this way of how we structure the lessons, we do a lot for the language development. We introduce children over children’s literature to language, not over primers. That means that we entice them to read. That is what trains language. (P, p. 4)

Throughout all the lessons, the teachers try to develop their students’ language skills in German, for example, through explaining terms (e.g., Day 5, p. 4), speaking clearly (Day 1, p. 7), using precise terms and correcting grammar (e.g., Day 3, p. 1, Day 5,
p. 5) and applying exercises that foster hearing and differentiation skills (Day 3, p. 1). In addition, the topics of the regular lessons and the mother tongue lessons are aligned.

The students are often encouraged to talk by using informative texts about the topics they are working on as well as by stories from children’s literature, which the teacher often reads aloud. The principal as well as the school program mentioned how important literature is in their approach to enhance proficiency in German (P, p. 4; Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 27). The following extract from my observation notes demonstrates how T1 deploys reading aloud both as language support and as a source of information for the students:

T1 holds up a book on animals. One student is selected to come to the front of the circle where T1 is sitting and to blindly pick a page with an informative story about an animal. It turns out to be a story about giraffes. T1 starts reading this story. Whenever students have questions, they raise their hands. T1 stops reading and calls on students who utter their questions and other students are asked to answer if they can. T1 also asks math question in connection with the height of the giraffe and other animals they have apparently already talked about earlier. T1 reads in a clear and slow voice. He gesticulates while reading, e.g. “jumping,” “walk slowly,” and “long neck.” He asks students to describe what a “treetop” is. He encourages students through the questions he asks to make connections to stories about other animals they had talked about earlier, e.g., about what the respective animals eat.

After he finished the story he puts the book on the shelf next to the sitting circle, and he reminds the students that there are more books about zoos and animals. He encourages especially the little ones to look at the books, even if they can’t read them yet. But the pictures were interesting too, he says. (Day 1, p. 7)

T1 stresses oral communication throughout all lessons. The sitting circle plays an important role in encouraging students to communicate with each other, either about school topics or also about things of personal interest.

Uhm, we immerse the children in a language bath here. So the oral communication is very important for us. That’s why there’s the sitting circle, for example.….Every morning a morning circle. Simply that the children hear German. Experience the German language as a means of communication. (T1, p. 21)
I have observed the morning circle on every day throughout my visit in this school. In addition, the sitting circle is used throughout the school day to discuss new topics or exercise sheets or to listen to student presentations (e.g., Day 1, p. 5; Day 2, p. 3; Day 5, p. 4).

Another strategy of immersion, which is particularly important for students who have difficulties with the German language and whose parents cannot support them in this area as needed, is full-time day care. Both the principal and T1 explain the advantages of full-time day care for language development.

We try to get these children into full-time day care. The longer they are immersed in a German language bath, the more their language develops. And I think that the level of the German language of these children is relatively high. (P, p. 4)

T1 holds a similar opinion about the advantages of full-time day care especially for children with difficulties in the German language:

And what happens in the afternoon, that’s something I can’t necessarily influence. Only in the way that I recommend in particular to those students who have severe language problems, or rather to their parents, “Send your child into day care” (mimicking)…. Talk as much German to each other as possible. And this from 7:30am to 4pm at best. That’s day care then. (T1, p. 21)

Students in full-time day care receive breakfast and lunch at school. In the afternoon, after the children have done their homework, they can participate in different play and sports activities (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

Not only are the students immersed in the German language for most of the day, but also they have more time to study and to spend time with other students. Thereby, both their educational and social skills are fostered (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007).

The school also values mother tongue education classes as a crucial part of the language support for Turkish and Greek students. With the example of the Turkish class, I explain this particular strategy of language support in more detail later.
Education for Integration

The school has answered the particular needs of Turkish and Moslem students with one hour of Islam education and one hour of mother tongue education in Turkish per week. T3, who teaches both Islam education and Turkish, explains the importance of these classes as follows:

And, uhm, because they come from a very different culture, uhm, I think this is also good for their identity development. Because at home they have a very different life. And here, they come to school and here there is a whole different life too; partly due to religion. That is a completely different religion or also a completely different culture. (T3, p. 2)

T3 plays in integral part in this school, especially in her role as a mediator between Turkish or other immigrant families and the school with mainly German mainstream teachers. In these courses, she is a role model in particular for the Turkish students. She is well aware of this function, as demonstrated in the following quotation:

And here during the lessons, I am also a role model as a teacher. So I basically try to link both cultures. That I can communicate to the children that one can [live] in these cultures, in both of them, well, link both cultures. So basically learn interculturally too. (T3, p. 2)

She models an immigrant who has successfully integrated into the German society while partly keeping and partly developing the own cultural identity. Islam education and mother tongue classes are regarded as crucial strategies to achieve this particular form of integration.

Notions of Integration

In a school with a very high percentage of students with immigration backgrounds, the question of integration is very crucial. However, for different people integration can mean various things. Some people understand integration as complete assimilation of
immigrants into the existing society. Others might think that integration is successful when immigrants live their own lives in parallel societies on the margin of society without interfering with other people’s lives. In this latter scenario, immigrants are merely tolerated, but not accepted or recognized. On the other end of the continuum, integration can be regarded as a process, in which the different groups in a society work together to develop into a new society, in which everyone can actively participate.

Due to the different notions of integration that teachers hold, different pedagogies arise. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the teachers’ and the principal’s understandings of integration.

In general, it can be said that the three participants have very similar understandings of integration. They all regard education and proficiency in German as integral parts of the integration process. The principal makes the central role of education for integration very clear: “That the lessons have to be in the centre, of course, because integration, uhm, success in life…only works through education.” (p. 1) However, personal and social competencies are also considered to be important aspects: “We want for these children to have a chance, to really participate in this society. That means apart from the factual knowledge also the development of personal and social competence of acting.” (P, p. 1) The principal characterizes successful integration of students with an immigrant background as follows:

So, uhm, a successful school career is part of this for me. Uhm, part of it is that the most important social values are known and are agreed on. Otherwise one positions oneself outside of this society…. And part of it is something like a we-feeling,21 which is present at this school very much. These children have a very great we-feeling in regards of “Kleine Kielstraße”. (P, p. 2)

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21 A feeling of belonging; team spirit.
Integration in this understanding seems like a personal decision of the individual to either integrate into an existing society to certain conditions or not. School and education play important roles in this process because in school, children are exposed to the life style and the values that are regarded as necessary for successful integration.

T1 understands successful integration as follows:

That this happens almost unnoticed, so to say. Harmoniously intertwined, all these support, these support places. Mother tongue education, language support, all these things. That through the support in the class community, yes, this isn’t audible anymore…. Language is heard first and foremost, that we have 26 Nations here at this school…. But that the children in this have very clear rules as well. Can orient themselves on these. That we learn the civic virtues like punctuality, thoughtfulness, civility here. And that works through clear rules. At eight the door is locked. Here in the Kleine Kielstraße lessons start at eight sharp. That might be somewhat different in other cultures. That’s how it is here. (T1, pp. 19-20)

This teacher regards the educational support classes as well as mother tongue education as important means to facilitate integration. In addition, he stresses the importance of living according to certain values that are regarded as crucial in the German society. These values are learned and lived in school. His understanding seems similar to that of the principal mentioned before.

In the interview with the T3, integration and identity are important topics. Her personal experience of being an immigrant to Germany and knowing about the process of integration gives her a very special position and perspective on these topics. Similar to the principal, she seems to regard integration as a conscious decision and an active process of the individual. Linking and living both the home culture as well as the culture of the new country is a competence she regards as vital for successful integration.

But for me it’s very important, for example, as I said, this culture. That is, uhm, that the children gain intercultural competence. Not just in the area of Turkish, but also in other areas. That is something I try to convey here. And now not just that we orientate ourselves towards Turkey, but here, we live here, and how can one actually better integrate oneself here. (T3, p. 4)
To my question what successful integration of students with an immigration background means to her, T3 answered that the most important thing is that students keep their identity (p. 4). She also thinks that it is important that the children feel comfortable in Germany (p. 5). To achieve this comfortable feeling, it is crucial that they have found their own identity and that they are self-secure with who they are. Another vital aspect of integration is proficiency in German, next to literacy in the mother tongue (T3, p. 5). One the one hand, the T3 regards mother tongue education as crucial for identity development and, on the other hand, she understands the importance of proficiency in German to be successful in the German school system (p. 5).

For T3 successful integration is closely linked to identity development. She has the notion that everyone has the capability of creating one’s own identity and that one can choose, to a certain extent, who one wants to be. In order to integrate successfully with the German society immigrants have to find a way to link their home culture with the majority culture they live in. This teacher is a role model for this development, and she tries to encourage her students and their families to do the same.

I also think, that one can learn to live like this, uhm, with a different ethnicity in a different society. And, uhm, also not being discriminating oneself. But like, I am just from, I come from a Turkish family. I live in Germany and have learnt German and try to connect these values with the values I grew up with. That one takes the positive from both sides and just building up a patch-work identity, in which one doesn’t have to emit neither the Turkish nor the German identity, but regards the whole as enrichment. (T3, p. 8)

**Islam Education**

In the school program it is pointed out that Islam education is regarded as an important contribution to a successful integration of Moslem children (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 57).
The school attempts to educate the children to become personalities who, later on as adults, adopt and live according to the social values and norms which are given by the Basic Constitutional Law in the awareness of their cultural origin. (translated by author, Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 56)

The majority of the students in these classes are of Turkish origin, but there are also students from Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Bosnia, Albania, Iraq, Iran, and Macedonia (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 56). Due to this mix of nationalities and first languages, Islam education is taught in German.

T3 explains that many students are surprised to learn that most of their teachers are Christians. They often do not know much about other religions and are misinformed about their own (Day 2, p. 5). Therefore, the main aims of Islam education are to inform the students about their religion and at the same time make them more aware and knowledgeable about other religions. This strategy is intended to support the students’ respect for other religions and to enter into a dialogue with them. The students are supposed to learn not to elevate their own religion over others, but to value all religions (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 57). Furthermore, the school attempts to model the dialogue between different religions by celebrating religious holidays together with different religious groups for example (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 57).

T3 explains that there are misunderstandings about their own as well as of other religions that lead to prejudices. Through comparison of stories of the different religions the teacher tries to point out similarities between them.

I’ve often heard that from families, that the children have problems for example or that some parents are against celebrating Christmas…. But when I explain to the children in the Islam lessons that for example in Islam Jesus is one of the prophets. That these children simply learn to value Christianity, that, for example, prejudices don’t emerge. One always talks a lot about prejudices, uhm, from the German side, basically from the majority society. But I’ve observed that the minority society has many prejudices as well. And here I think is this education,
especially the Islam lessons in great demand. Because one can reduce prejudices. (T3, p. 2)

T3 sees a great demand for Islam education in German schools as an alternative way for Moslem parents to provide their children with qualified religious education. Without Islam education in schools, the only religious education these children receive is often from religious educators in mosques. This situation is gauged by T3 as potentially problematic:

When the parents want them to receive religious education, they are sent into mosques. But there you don’t necessarily know, whether there are good educators, who can handle children and what content is taught there. There are definitely good mosques too. There are also some that aren’t as good. One just can’t differentiate this. The parents are partly helpless. They want their child to receive value education. (T3, p. 6)

She continues by explaining the situation in which many Moslem students are living:

At home, I have noticed, there’s sometimes a very conservative development to be seen in the families. It’s not always a “modern Islam” or something like that. They are organized in different associations, and through some kind of hearsay, well, they don’t always know the religion very well. And that for example there’s no violence in Islam, like many [people] who aren’t familiar with the Islam don’t know. To communicate this to other people who don’t belong to the Islam religion, these children need a certain competence. This [competence] they achieve in Islam education and then they can also protect themselves against radicalism in other areas. Or that one can protect them against radicalism…. Of course they trust those teachers. I’m a confidante, and then they tell me about this and this is what they’ve heard. And then I can falsify this and say, “That’s not scholarly. It’s not like this.” And then they believe this immediately. (T3, p. 6)

Here, a new important aspect comes into play. T3 is of the opinion that the religious education the students receive is often misleading, and stresses negative sides of religion such as threats and fears instead of value education and respect for other people. Through appropriate and quality religious education in German schools, T3 sees the potential to
protect Moslem children from radical and extremist religious views. She elaborates this point in the following quotation:

And, uhm, because partly the education for this is missing. Which one [mosque] is just good and which is bad. And this education, I think, is then in a way, uhm, that one protects the children against a radicalism and fanatism. That they are simply more open towards other people and that living together peacefully with Christians and other religions can be successful in the future as well. (T3, p. 7)

To summarize, qualified Islam education which also teaches to value other religions is an important means of integration. By making the students more knowledgeable about their own religion and by equipping them with skills to communicate their religion to other people, they learn to be self-secure with this religion and to see it as a positive aspect of their identity. Instead of separatism of different religious groups, this kind of education brings religions together in respect for one another. T3 sees here particularly good chances for success of this strategy in primary school:

And here we learn basically to value all religions and to value all people and just to be different. And I think that this works pretty well in primary school because the children are rather still, how shall I say, they still want to learn and are very open. (T3, p.3)

She elaborates on this idea and the importance of mother tongue education as well as Islam education for integration:

Therefore, I think it is good that one can intervene in primary school, so that these children can be integrated into society. And I make, try to do this parallel in mother tongue education, that everyone can basically have a different culture…. And I simply noticed that they suddenly got a very different perspective. (p. 3)
**Turkish Mother Tongue Education**

In this school, mother tongue education\(^\text{22}\) in Turkish and Greek is offered. According to the school program, mother tongue education is intended to change the perspective from a deficit-oriented focus on the German language to a competence-oriented perspective on multilingualism (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 56). In addition, it is believed that mother tongue education is very supportive of literacy in German as well (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 56).

The Greek lessons are structured according to the official Greek curriculum. Greek students receive more mother tongue education than Turkish students, and they also receive Greek instruction in subjects like history and geography. Since I only talked to the Turkish mother tongue teacher, I will focus on these classes.

The aim of mother tongue education is to achieve literacy for Turkish students not only in German, but also in Turkish. The literacy development in Turkish runs coordinated with literacy in German. The same teaching strategies are applied in order to avoid confusing the students. The topics of the lessons are aligned. Again, continuity of matters is the keyword. T3 points out that one positive result of this coordinated literacy is that the students learn generally faster (p. 2).

T3 explains that there are increasingly more children with Turkish as a second language because only one parent is Turkish. Therefore, the parents talk German at home, but wish for their child to learn Turkish as well (Day 3, p. 3). Because Turkish is only the second language for these students, most of the exercise sheets in these lessons are bilingual in German and Turkish. The German part of the exercise sheets is meant to help

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\(^{22}\) I use the term “mother tongue education” because this is a direct translation from the term the school applies for these classes. However, there are also students in these classes who do not speak Turkish as a first language.
the students to better understand. There are also bilingual books which the teacher uses in
the lessons, and she also encourages the students to take them home (Day 2, p. 5). During
one of our meetings she explains that she stresses topics such as being different, also with
regard to special needs, in her lessons. In addition, she tries to alleviate existing conflicts
between certain student groups (e.g., Moroccan and Turkish children), and she tries to
promote understanding and living peacefully together (Day, 3, p. 3). Usually she uses
children’s literature to bring these topics closer to the children.

Cooperation with the Community

As mentioned before, communication and cooperation with parents is a very
important aspect of the school’s work. The principal goes even a step further: “I think
important is also the opening up to the (town) district. So, that one sees that the parents of
these children become active to take care of the interests of the district.” (P, p. 5) She
explains that the school has co-founded a district coalition with the tenants of the large
apartment building with mainly social housing, which is immediately next to the school.
The main intention of this district union is to enhance neighbourhood solidarity among
the families living in this apartment complex. The school attempts to empower the
families that are living nearby in order to improve the living situation of the children. The
principal explains the success of this coalition: “And this coalition effected many changes
in this district. This is a point, which has to be taken into consideration as well. This is
something one has to work on, not just with the children, but also with the parents” (P, p.
5). This strategy also has positive effects on integration processes. On the one hand, the
parents are encouraged to participate and become active. On the other hand the school
with mainly German teachers makes an effort to understand the often problematic living
situations of many immigrant and low income families and takes action to change these in cooperation with the parents.

**Summary**

This comprehensive description of the school’s work and their pedagogical framework demonstrates the holistic approach. In order to give all students more equitable educational opportunities and to enhance the chances of all students regardless of their family situation and parental support, the school has developed a vast array of strategies, methods, and actions in many different areas such as preschool support, language support, full-time day care, information session for parents. Many of these strategies and practices are meant to compensate for missing support prior to school start and to equip the students with competencies they regard as necessary for success in school and life in general. The strategies and practices are very much tailored to the specific situation and needs of the students and their families that come to this school. Teachers and principal attempt to do everything they can to offer more equitable educational opportunities for their students and support them in successful educational careers.
CHAPTER SIX

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SCHOOL’S PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES

In the this chapter, I analyze aspects of the characteristics and of the pedagogical framework of the school as well as strategies and practices the school applies in the light of approaches of Critical Pedagogy and Intercultural Pedagogy. Since there are several approaches of Intercultural Pedagogy that can be very different in certain aspects of their framework (e.g., in their dealing with cultural differences) for this analysis, I will focus on aspects of Intercultural Pedagogy that are common in all approaches and on more critical approaches such as applied for example by Auernheimer, Prengel, Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz.

This chapter will respond to the two remaining research objectives which are:

3. to explore areas for improvement in the participating school, and
4. to critically analyze the school’s practices, strategies, and perspectives that may or may not alleviate inequities in the German school system.

My time in this school was limited only to six days. Though I believe that I observed interesting incidents and that I learned about the main principles of the school’s work in the interviews, it has to be considered that I visited this school only for a rather short period of time. Furthermore, I observed only one class. Therefore, it is difficult to critique the absence of certain things, which may have been witnessed in a longer observation phase.

School Climate

The importance of a positive social climate in schools for Intercultural Pedagogy has been pointed out by many researchers (e.g., Auernheimer, 2005; Graumann, 2003).
The contributing aspects of a positive social climate that are described by Auernheimer (see Chapter 3, p. 64), can be observed in the participating school. Teachers are aware of the importance of these strategies and apply them as part of their daily practice.

The positive and motivating school climate is seen as an important aspect of school quality and of student accomplishments, especially in diverse contexts, by Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006). They mention two other characteristics of quality education in schools with a heterogeneous student population: an anti-racism pedagogy that explicitly values the linguistic and cultural diversity, and a focus on language development of students in the school’s language of instruction. Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz found these characteristics in studies in England; studies in Germany about these issues are very rare to this point. Whereas the observed school attempts to support the development of the German language (as well as Turkish and Greek in mother tongue education) through their holistic approach to language support, I did not observe an explicit approach of anti-racism pedagogy.

Even though not all teachers seem to be aware of the complexity of Intercultural Pedagogy in their own teaching, T1 displays the competencies that Ledoux, Leeman and Leiprecht (2001) identified in their study as vital preconditions of intercultural learning (see Chapter Three). T1 attempts to create a safe atmosphere in the classroom, by showing interest in the students and by demonstrating respect for them as well as for their families. This is an approach the school as a whole genuinely follows. They encourage students’ progress and value their achievements either in personal interaction (e.g., child-teacher conference) or on a class level when the whole class applauds the accomplishments of students. The teachers give the students guidance and liberty at the
same time to solve their conflicts on their own in democratic ways through the class council.

Graumann (2003, p. 130) describes three aspects that are important in heterogeneous learning groups: (a) a feeling of belonging and security; (b) responsible exposure, so that joint responsibility can develop; and (c) group identity, which is regarded as a necessary supplement to individualistic understanding. All three aspects are included in the pedagogy of the school and have been observed in the daily teaching practice in the classroom.

Auernheimer (2005) refers to a study by Heitmeyer, when stressing the importance of the social climate in a school and of opportunities for participation for the students as prerequisite for the fight against racism. With the stop-rule and the class council, the school attempts to enhance the opportunities for student participation. In addition, the independence of the students is enhanced not only academically but also socially through these practices. The general atmosphere in this school is friendly, open and respectful. T1 explained in several contexts how he and the school in general try to establish a safe atmosphere for the students. During my classroom observations, I also noticed that the students generally treat each other respectfully and interact in a friendly way. It is important to build these foundations of mutual respect among the students, teachers and parents in order for open and trusting collaboration.

In order to support a positive school climate, a feeling of belonging and community is important. The school attempts to create a sense of community not only amongst the students, but everyone involved in this school. Both the principal and T1 mention the “we-feeling” they try to establish (P, p. 2; T1, p. 2). As explained by Kohn (1996) school as community is important for the students to feel safe both physically and
emotionally. In such a community, “students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about others” (Kohn, p. 101). Full-time day care and split grade classes are strategies promoted by Graumann (2003) as prerequisites for an inclusive learning environment. Auernheimer (2005; 2006a) also advocates full-time day care in schools for supporting social and intercultural learning and thereby improving the climate of the school. Students spend more time studying, playing, and making new experiences together in a safe and encouraging environment. Full-time day care is an answer of many schools to the social reality in which most students do not have a guardian waiting for them at home at lunch time. The German part-time school system disadvantages students with working parents since they have no supervision at home in the afternoons. These structures have been created by the participating school in order to be more responsive to the needs and to the general living situation of their students.

**Reflective Practice**

Being reflective about one’s individual work as well as about the work of the school as a whole is strongly promoted in this school. This schoolwide approach of reflective practice is similar to the description of York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere and Montie (2001). The main goal of this practice is to constantly improve the practices in a school with the aim of enhancing student learning (York-Barr et al.). In this approach, everyone involved in schools is regarded as part of a “professional learning community” (York-Barr et al., p. 124). The characteristics of a school-based professional community can be observed in this school. These characteristics are: (a) shared norms and values, (b) reflective dialogue, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) a focus on student learning, and (d) collaboration (York-Barr et al., p. 125). Focus on student learning is regarded as the most
important of these characteristics by York-Barr et al. This is clearly also the focus of the school’s approach. In addition, supportive and shared leadership are aspects that are crucial for the success of schoolwide reflective practice (York-Barr et al.). T1 points out the innovative role of the school’s principal who is not teaching, but solely focusing on arranging an appropriate framework for school development. In addition, responsibilities for the development of the school program or the curriculum are shared with all teachers in different areas.

This reflective practice is very important for a school with a diverse and changing student population in order to assist the students in the best possible ways. Principal and T1 both stressed that school development is an ongoing process, and teachers and administrators constantly analyze, reflect on and learn from the students and therefore also from their own performance. Inadequate student performance is not regarded as individual student failure, but as the school’s failure to provide adequate educational assistance for the students.

**Perspectives on Culture and Diversity in the School**

*Differences and Diversity*

Plurality and diversity in the students’ experiences, histories, and backgrounds are regarded as the norm in the participating school. The teaching staff knows about the constellation of their student population, and they considered this plurality in the development of the school program. Students with an immigration background are not identified as a focus group for a particular kind of pedagogy or class. This recognition of plurality as the norm in the classroom and in society in general corresponds to the understanding of Intercultural Pedagogy (e.g., Auernheimer 2005; Schanz, 2006).
According to the school program (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007), intercultural principles are integrated in their pedagogical work. An important aspect of Intercultural Pedagogy is to not interpret it as mere project work or add-on, but as an integral part of all pedagogical work in a school.

However, the cultural and linguistic plurality of this school does not seem to be made a topic or theme in the regular lessons. Only in the project work “Spurensuche” (translate loosely to “searching for traces”), in which students explain their family’s origin and history, as well as in Islam and mother tongue education, cultural differences (and similarities) seem to be explicitly talked about. Diversity is not fully embraced as a source of experiences in the daily classroom interaction. When asked about aspects of Intercultural Pedagogy in this school T1 mentions the school’s intercultural project “Spurensuche,” which is referred to in the school program as well. He continues: “Taking seriously with what kind of treasure those children, with what kind of wealth of experience those children and those families come here.” (T1, p. 34)

While there is a general respect and acknowledgement of the differences in the cultural backgrounds of the students and their families, this plurality is not integrated in the general lessons. Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006) describe succinctly the differences between a multicultural and an intercultural school in their understanding. In a multicultural school, students, parents and also teachers with different cultural and linguistical background are together independent from the consideration of this plurality in the pedagogy and curriculum of the school. An intercultural school, however, deploys the multiculturalism of its members as an explicit starting point for the development of Intercultural Pedagogy. In this school the cultural and linguistical differences are considered in add-ons such as Islam education and mother tongue education. Apart from
these, the diversity of the student population seems to be often only considered with regard to support classes, for example for language support in German.

The teachers in the participating school are aware of the oftentimes difficult situation of many immigrant families. In addition, they value the diverse backgrounds of their students and their families, and they attempted to demonstrate this respect in their intercultural project. I also believe that the teachers I met have a personal respect for the immigrant families. However, the school has not yet found a way to include this attitude towards cultural diversity in their regular curriculum as well as in their teaching practice. Culturally responsive teaching includes five essential elements, as summarized by Gay (2002): “developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction” (p. 106).

All these elements are included in some ways in the pedagogy of the school. However, a comprehensive approach to include all elements in the general lessons and the everyday classroom interaction is missing. The teachers seem to have an intrinsic understanding of accommodating the needs of their diverse student population, but especially the cultural diversity and the effects on teaching and learning are not critically reflected on to the extent demanded in critical educational approaches (e.g., Giroux, 1992; Prengel, 2006; Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006).

In the school’s approach to dealing with cultural differences, I see similarities to approaches to Intercultural Pedagogy that are described as based on cultural anthropology by Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006). In these approaches, culture is not made a topic of discussion. Either pedagogy is understood as universal and therefore independent from
culture while stressing the autonomy of the individual by simultaneous recognition of the
Other, or culture is regarded as a normative construct built on a social consensus. In the
latter case, pedagogy has the function to convey these norms, so that the individual can
develop a self-determined relation to them and be in a position to further shape these
norms (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz). Both approaches are criticized, however, for their
tendency towards culturalizing assumptions and stereotyping both about the Other as well
as about one’s own cultural or social group. In addition, the problematic social reality of
many marginalized groups is not taken into consideration and a critical reflection about
the construction of their own cultural identity as well as about asymmetrical power
relations does not take place (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz; Hormel & Scherr, 2004).

Even though the acknowledgement of cultural differences in the everyday
classroom interaction does not take place regularly, the school identifies differences in
regard to the academic achievement and prerequisites of the students. The school sees
differences in the upbringing of the children as well as in their general experiences prior
to school start. That leads the school to the assumption that there are differences in their
students’ experiences and levels of skills and competencies. Differences amongst the
students are constructed by identifying the educational areas in which they need special
support, according to the expectations of this school and to curriculum standards. In this
context, these differences are generally regarded as deficits, and the school tries to
compensate for them with support classes.

Identity and “Hybridity”

I agree with the understanding of identity by McLaren and Giroux (1997) as non-
essential and dynamic and as dependent on the historical and social context the individual
lives in. Torres (1998) describes identity as “a process of discovery” (p. 215) as well as “of individual (and collective, as well) learning” (p. 213) that is context dependent. I share this notion of identity, which also implies that “identities are constantly in the process of differentiation, flux, and contradiction but always open to change and transformation” (McLaren, 1997, p. 299).

Culture plays an important part in identity development in Intercultural Pedagogy. In this approach, diversity and equality of cultures as well as the dynamic development of cultural identity are recognized. Identity in Intercultural Pedagogy is similarly understood as a project in process that is never completed (Auernheimer, 2005). It involves the active negotiation of the individual, and it is regarded as “biographical reconstruction” (translated by author, Auernheimer, p. 69).

In increasingly diverse societies and schools, hybridity and patchwork identity are concepts that Auernheimer (2005) refers to in order to describe the flux and dynamic of identity. This understanding is based on Bhabha’s theory of identity development: “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2). Auernheimer (2005) stresses that multiple reference groups and cultural systems are important for reconstructing one’s identity. These notions of identity in Intercultural Pedagogy lead to the aim of supporting a consciousness of one’s own identity, while recognizing other cultures and developing mutual respect (Prengel, 2006, p. 85).

This aim is particularly strived for in Islam education and mother tongue classes in this school. The school seems to understand the importance the school setting plays in the lives of their students for constructing their identities. I believe that the teachers have a
general understanding of the importance of the development of cultural identity. However, in regular classes the applied pedagogy does not focus on this aspect of Intercultural and Critical Pedagogy. The importance of culture for the development of the students’ identity does not seem to be a topic of reflection and of influence for the regular lessons. Only T3 explicitly considers the development of cultural identity.

A problem with focusing on these topics mainly in Islam education and the mother tongue classes is that not all students are exposed to this pedagogy at all times. It would be equally important for German mainstream student as well as for students with other cultural backgrounds to understand other religions and cultures in order to develop mutual recognition of cultural diversity as part of their own identity development. Furthermore, it is important for schools to understand that identity development does not only happen on in individual level, but also “at the level of communities and social movements” (Torres, 1998, p. 218), which are very influential on the development of multiple identities. The individual student does not just have one identity, but multifaceted identities that are influenced by the different social and cultural groups the individual student belongs to or aspires to belong to. Identity development is an active process that also includes conscious decisions and choices, as noticed by T3 (p. 4).

The multifaceted understanding of identity is central to many approaches in Critical Pedagogy. The notion of hybridity, which reflects the complexity and flux of identity, as explained by Bhabha (1994) is similar to Giroux’s border pedagogy (1992). Giroux promotes pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand the otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power (1992, p. 28).
The observed school offers these conditions to certain extents. Especially Greek and Moslem children have the possibility to learn more about their family’s culture and religion as well as about the German culture in this school. T3 talks about the importance of the linkage of home culture and school culture for the students’ identity development. In this context she talks about “patchwork-identity” (T3, p. 8).

Even though culture and religion are important aspects for the identity development, this ongoing process is more complex, as pointed out by many authors (e.g., Bhabha, 1994; Giroux, 1992). Identity must be understood as a flexible, dynamic complexity that is influenced by notions of gender, socio-economic status, locality, language, sexual orientation, ethnicity etc.

I believe the school is on the right way to better understand the complexities of dilemmas as well as the enrichment that are linked to teaching and learning in a culturally and linguistically diverse context. However, I also think that teachers need be become more aware of the situations many children with an immigration background are in. They must understand that their own perspectives are limited and culturally biased, and that the differences between many students’ home culture and the culture promoted by the school influence the identity development of the individual students as well as their own identity.

Acknowledgement of and Critical Reflection on Cultural Differences

Even though there are different approaches to Intercultural Pedagogy, Auernheimer (paraphrased translation by author, 2005, pp. 120-121) identifies four consensual aspects of Intercultural Pedagogy and education.

1. An anti-essentialist, constructivist understanding of culture as being open, heterogeneous and dynamic dominates Intercultural Pedagogy.
2. Attention is paid to structural inequities, discriminations and disadvantages that are especially faced by immigrants.

3. The predefinition of students on a particular ethnic affiliation is rejected. The possibility for negotiating identities is advocated and the notion of identity as patchwork and the concept of hybridity are applied.

4. The primary goal is to achieve reflexivity about the self. It is important to understand and analyze one’s own ethnocentricity.

All four aspects of Intercultural Pedagogy are promoted in this school, at least to some extent. The constructivist notion of non-static culture is clearly understood by T3. However, culture and cultural differences do not seem to be reflected on in their meaning for identity development of the students (and teachers) as well as for the school’s pedagogy. The reflexivity that the school displays mainly focuses on the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. A critical reflection on cultural embeddedness of values, attitudes, and ways of seeing, which appear to be universally acknowledged, does not seem to take place in this school. Neither principal nor T1 mention critical reflection in regards to values and perspectives in their teaching or to their own social and cultural positions. These findings are similar to Auernheimer’s assessment of findings about teacher attitudes in intercultural settings in other studies. He concludes that many participants do not question their own perceptions and assessment criteria when dealing with intercultural issues (Auernheimer, 2006b).

According to the principles of Intercultural Pedagogy, reflection on the historical development of their own culture as well as awareness of the limitations of their own perspective are important characteristics of a teacher (Prengel, 2006). In order to provide more equitable educational opportunities, it is pivotal to be reflective and self-critical not
only about the effectiveness of teaching strategies, but also about one’s own biases, assumptions, and values (Giroux, 1992; Torres, 1998). Auernheimer (2005) advocates an Intercultural Pedagogy that acknowledges the “phenomenon of alienation in human relationships” (translated by author, p. 106). A prerequisite to achieve this aim is that educators admit their alienation and accept differences in order to truly engage with them instead of usurping the other (Auernheimer, 2005). All these aspects highly influence pedagogy and daily teaching practice. Teachers have to become aware of how they themselves as well as schools in general are actively involved in constructing differences between their students. They must critically explore their own values that influence their teaching and their worldview in general.

Important aspects of Intercultural Pedagogy are the investigation of teachers’ own competencies and their own institutions in order to develop intercultural competencies amongst them (Auernheimer, 2005). Prior to this new perspective, the focus of pedagogical work had been on attitudes, competencies, and understandings of the students (Auernheimer, 2005). Now, teachers are encouraged to become aware of their own conceptions. Similarly, Schanz (2006) promotes a change in perspective that does not merely analyze the specific ethnic characteristics of the students with immigration backgrounds, but which focuses consciously on the norms and values of the German majority society.

The following excerpt from the interview with T3 demonstrates that the German mainstream teachers generally do not reflect on the cultural influences on their teaching. She points out that she often has to inform immigrant students about characteristics or traditions of the German society that are unfamiliar to them.
And basically that they [immigrant students] get to know more about the German majority society. And only in the regular lessons, I’ve noticed, this probably simply doesn’t happen because for the teachers, it is taken for granted that one celebrates Christmas. (T3, p. 3)

A comprehensive understanding of the influence of culture in everyone’s daily life as well as in school settings (structures, curricula, teaching and learning styles, assessment, etc.) does not seem to be taken into consideration in the professional discussions in this school. This may have to do with a general reluctance of teachers in Germany to make cultural differences a topic of professional discussions or a topic of the lessons.

Avoidance of Cultural Aspects

The reluctance to make cultural differences a topic in the daily discussion between teachers as well as in the classroom can be partly explained with the political context in Germany, as described by Auernheimer (2005). In Germany, cultural differences are generally not reclaimed by cultural minority groups, as it is the case in Great Britain, Canada or the USA, but they are often understood as the “result of problematic attributions” (translated by author, Auernheimer, 2005, p. 34). This is partly due to the limited political possibilities of participation of immigrants. Auernheimer (2005) points out that there are still major differences in the opportunities of political participation for the majority of immigrants in Germany in comparison to German citizens. Because cultural differences are often associated with negative attributes, teachers seem to be insecure about how to apply these aspects positively in their lessons without turning the discourse about ethnological differences into exoticization, exclusion, and marginalization.

Auernheimer (2006b) summarizes the findings of several German studies about the attitudes and characteristics of German teachers in intercultural situations. Generally
speaking, a tendency to both neglect differences and to understand culture as fixed mentalities can be observed. Furthermore, teachers often display a meaningless or “excluding” tolerance while questioning of the own patterns of perception and evaluation are neglected. In the school program, “tolerance” (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 13) is one of the attitudes that are promoted by the school. However, this term has been widely criticized because it often “means the indifference to the determinations of social being and to the avoidance of social antagonisms” (McLaren & Gutierrez, 1997, p. 215). Similarly, Gültekin (2006) criticizes the claim for tolerance, which is often heard in the debate about cultural issues. She points out the passivity of tolerance, which makes unequal power relations very clear. Tolerance implicates that the dominant group merely allows or bears others without agreeing with them. Gültekin warns that this attitude can be a hindrance for constructive intercultural communication. Gültekin’s concerns can be observed in this school to a certain extent because a critical reflection on their own cultural position does not seem to be taking place.

Here, the school must develop a more progressive approach to considering, acknowledging, and including especially cultural differences in their pedagogy. Merely tolerating other cultural and social groups in this passive understanding does not contribute to the development of a society with more equitable opportunities for everyone. In addition, tolerance does not connote the struggle, effort, and dialogue that are generally included in the process of mutual recognition and acknowledgement between different groups. This, however, is an important aspect in negotiating and creating new social and public spaces (Giroux, 1992).
Culture of the School versus Culture of the Students

In Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, culture is regarded as “the mediating link between ruling class interests and everyday life. It functions to portray the economic and political interest of the dominant classes, not as arbitrary and historically contingent, but as necessary and natural elements of the social order” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, p. 75). Education and in particular schools play a crucial role in the process of reproduction (Aronowitz & Giroux). Even though I agree with Aronowitz and Giroux that the theory of social reproduction in schools neglects the mutual influence of the different groups by stressing only the unilateral influence of the dominant classes on the subordinate ones, I believe that Bourdieu makes an important observation in pointing out that the culture of the school is generally more closely connected to the culture of the dominant classes than to the culture of subordinate ones. The cultural capital of the dominant classes is regarded as more valuable. Schools expect this cultural capital from all their students, and therefore, “students whose families have only a tenuous connection to the dominant cultural capital are at a decided disadvantage” (Aronowitz & Giroux, p. 76). Their cultural capital is not acknowledged because it is often regarded as less valuable or even as a hindrance for the educational development of the children. Only dominant forms of knowledge are included, which leads to marginalization and repression of other forms of knowledges (Aronowitz & Giroux).

Especially T3 knows about the disconnectedness that often exists between the school culture and many students’ home cultures. Accordingly, Kiper (2006) oftentimes sees incongruence between the school and the lived experiences and realities of the children. Therefore, it is important that the children’s culture is acknowledged and
included in the culture of the school especially since the student population is so diverse. Including everyday experiences of all students is vital for education in culturally diverse classrooms. Academic knowledge is more meaningful to the students, “when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). These strategies help closing the social and cultural gap between schools and students’ homes.

The diversity in experiences leads to differences in the cultural capital of the students prior to school start as well as to differences in skill and competence levels. The observed school knows about these differences. In order to offer all students more equitable educational opportunities, the school deploys a double tracked approach. On the one hand they provide preschool support classes that prep the student with the cultural capital needed to be successful in their school and in the German school system in general. On the other hand, they implement a pedagogical framework that is more responsive to the needs of their particular diverse student population (e.g., split-classes for grade one and two, Islam education, mother tongue education in Turkish and Greek).

**Social Change**

Bringing along social change towards more democratic and equitable social structures by raising critical awareness of one’s and other’s positions in existing systems and of unequal power relations as well as by fostering social agency is one the main goals of Critical Pedagogy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; McLaren, 1997; Giroux, 1992, 2003). Both transforming attitudinal discrimination as well as “reconstructing the deep structures of political economy, culture, and power in contemporary social arrangements” (McLaren, 1997, p. 287) is regarded as crucial in what McLaren calls “revolutionary multiculturalism.”
The participating school both criticizes and challenges existing educational and social structures to some extent. I identified attempts to change students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards more respectful, accepting, and inclusive social interactions. Furthermore, the school encourages increased participation of immigrant parents in school matters as well as in social issues in general. One of the aims of the school is to empower their students’ parents. This empowerment takes place through information and education sessions, but also by encouraging parents to self-empowerment. The principal talks about the positive change a coalition consisting of parents and encouraged by the school brought along in this district. In addition, T3 dedicates a major part of her work to informing and thereby encouraging and empowering immigrant parents, especially women, to take charge of their own lives. Modeling this behaviour also supports developing these attitudes in the students, which is also a goal of the school.

T3 can be seen as teacher that represents the characteristics of a critical revolutionary teacher who is a critic and an intellectual not only in schools and classrooms, but also “as part of a wider movement for social change” (McLaren & Giroux, 1997, p. 20). McLaren and Giroux also mention the importance of an alliance between parents and teachers to bring along change. The beginnings of this kind of cooperation initiated by the principal and carried out especially by T3 take place in this school with already positive changes in the surroundings of the school. They attempt to expand the school’s role in the immediate community in order to encourage social change and an improvement of the living situation of their students’ families.

The school fosters an understanding and the attitudes (respect, helpfulness, self-reflection, agency, etc.) that are aimed at contributing to a peaceful and constructive life in society on an individual level, and also on a group level. Encouraging agency as social
communities is part of an approach to wider social change. Torres (1998) explains the importance of the individuals’ understanding themselves as part of larger social groups in a diverse society.

Civil virtues point to a sense of solidarity that unites individuals around common goals. These goals are, at the very least, how to survive and live together in our contemporary, diverse society. These goals, however, can be accomplished as part of a more ambitious agenda: learning to thrive as a community of communities, as a culture of cultures drawing from our cultural diversity as a cultural strength, and promoting affirmative action, broadly understood, as a useful policy. (p. 247)

A Critical Pedagogy according to McLaren and Giroux (1997) assists students in developing a “language of analysis…through which they can assume a critical distance from their more familiar subject positions in order to engage in a cultural praxis better designed to further the project of social transformation” (p. 37). Even though the school focuses mainly on the academic development in regards to particular skills of the students, critical aspects are also included in the curriculum, for example in media or Islam education (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007). The Turkish and Islam teacher attempts the social transformation McLaren and Giroux advocate by informing Moslem students about their religion as well as about commonalities with other religions. As pointed out by her in the interview, she aims at providing them with a religious education that prevents radicalism, the danger she sees in a conservative and misinformed religious education. This is an attempt to make students more aware of these dangers by a critical reflection and to offer them an alternative way to live religiously in acceptance and acknowledgement of other religions in the German society. However, it would be even equally important to foster this kind of critical reflection, understanding and awareness in social majority groups as well.
Education for Integration versus Preparation to Fit in Existing Structures

The question that guides the work of the school and the teachers is “What is a good school for the students who grow up here?” (translated by author, Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 5). The aim is to equip the students with social and professional competencies that are necessary for them to shape their own lives in the constantly changing society as well as enable them to contribute to the development of community and society (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007). Active professional and social participation is strived for.

However, the school finds itself in an educational dilemma: On the one hand, they attempt to be responsive to the students’ diverse needs by finding innovative pedagogical strategies, and on the other hand, they are influenced and also limited in their educational efforts by the structure of the school and social system. The school system, especially secondary schools, still assumes a monolingual and monocultural student population and attempts to homogenize students into ability and age groups. Principles of Intercultural Pedagogy are generally not implemented in the daily practice in secondary schools. In the following part, I describe the main strategies the school implements to assist the students to better integrate into not only their particular school, but also into secondary schools and the German society in general.

Support Classes

The participating primary school’s major focus is on the academic and educational development of their students in order for them to be successful in primary school and move on to a better quality secondary school in the highly selective German school system. Since students are in primary school only for four years, the school has only
limited time to prepare their students adequately for secondary schools. Therefore, they start to compensate for missing educational support of the children prior to school start by preschool support classes for children with diagnosed needs in certain areas of educational development.

The school invests extensively in information, education and empowerment strategies for the children’s families. The interviewed teachers and the principal generally hold low expectations for many immigrant parents’ ability to support their children academically at home. As pointed out earlier, lack of skills and competencies of students prior to school start are often led back to the style of upbringing. The support classes are meant to foster the development of those skills and competencies that are regarded necessary for a successful school career and that had been neglected in the students’ upbringing.

Gomolla (2003, 2006) mentions these assumed deficits in the upbringing of immigrant children as factors in the development of negative learning careers already before students start primary school (see Chapter One, p. 36). These stereotypes and differences are constructed by many schools based on assumptions about the home culture of the students and their families. These stereotypes can lead to lower expectations and negative recommendations to secondary schools (Gomolla, 2003; Terkessidis, 2004, quoted in Schofield, 2006).

Even though similar assumptions, not only about immigrant families but also about low-income families (T3, p. 17), can be observed in this school as well, students are sent to preschool support classes only after certain underdeveloped skill and competence areas are identified in the preschool diagnosis, not only based on the teachers’ assumptions. Diagnosis and support classes are part of a compensation approach in a
deficit-oriented lens. With these strategies, the school tries to compensate for disadvantageous educational situations the children experienced prior to school start. These situations are evaluated as disadvantageous in comparison to the curriculum standards that determine which skills, competencies, and knowledge the students need to possess in primary school and for a successful learning career (e.g. proficiency in German, certain numerical understanding). Other skills and attitudes the students possess, which are not regarded as important for educational success in the German school system, for example proficiency in the students’ first languages, are not assessed.

However, the school does not only focus on the deficits while diagnosing their students, but also on areas of strength. It is not a merely deficit-oriented perspective because the aim of the school is to support the students’ strengths in as many areas as possible (e.g., T1, p. 10; p. 25). This form of diagnosis which also includes the assessment of strengths is promoted by Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006).

Apple (1985) criticizes support classes as means to produce the knowledge and the people that are needed by society. Students with certain “deficits” are identified, and the support classes appear neutral and helpful. The reason for these students being “deviant” is found in the individual students themselves, their economic or cultural situation (Apple). By focusing on these “deficits” within the students and their background, the systemic and institutional inequities on a societal level are neglected (Apple).

Even though I understand the validity of this perspective on support classes, I do not think that it fully applies to the observed school. The difference in this school’s approach is that support classes are only one aspect of a more comprehensive strategy. The school also includes the parents in its empowerment and education strategies. The school’s work goes beyond the regular pedagogical work with the children and can be
seen as an attempt to challenge existing social structures, at least in the immediate context, that both create and are created by inequities. On the one hand, they attempt to support their students as well as possible under the given circumstances. On the other hand, by including the families and the community, they strive for changes on a wider level.

The support classes are a part of the school’s strategy for offering more equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their background. School and teachers “use their understanding of power and the structures of inequality to help alleviate the suffering of students caused by the school’s equation of difference with deficiency” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 46). They understand that the situations of many families involve oppression and struggle of some sort (Kincheloe, 2005). In these concrete contexts and in order to improve the educational situation for the students, they attempt to challenge these difficulties. However, the political aspect of these actions seems to be less focused on than the educational aspect. The teachers do not seem to be fully aware of the political nature of their (pedagogical) actions, and they do not actively challenge existing social structures on a wider social level.

Values and Norms

In the school program as well as in the interviews, it is mentioned that the school aims at conveying certain values, attitudes, and behaviours. These last aspects are closely related to cultural differences that are prevalent among the students in this school. The school assumes diversity of social norms and values that make living and learning together difficult. T1 seems to believe that students from different cultural backgrounds tend to have values and attitudes that are different from the ones promoted by the school. He mentions the example of punctuality, something the school is very strict about.
Behaviour and attitudes that do not correspond with the ones promoted by the school are not tolerated. T1 makes that very clear. For him the alignment of rules, expected attitudes and values is a prerequisite for making learning possible in a (culturally) diverse context like this school (e.g., p. 14; p. 20).

Fuchs and Reuter (2000) state that it is increasingly difficult for schools in Germany with a society that is becoming more diverse in its different life styles to find consent about norms, values, and desired attitudes. In the participating school, values and attitudes are promoted that the school believes to be important for a successful professional and social life of their students. The school program (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007) mentions tolerance and humanity as central orientations the school attempts to convey to the students (p. 13).

However, students and parents do not seem to play a major role in the decision-making process about these areas of social interaction. In order to include the parents more in the education of the children and to more clearly define common goals of education, it is important to acknowledge the notions of the children’s families with regard to desired attitudes and values. Instead of telling the families which values their children will be subjected to in school and are therefore also encouraged to be conveyed at home, as it happens in the education contract between the school and the parents, a more inclusive way would be to develop these values together with the parents.

**Discipline and Strict Rules**

The school attempts to develop the skills, competencies, and attitudes in their students that are necessary for them to both participate in the fast-changing society as well as to shape this society. In this context, the school seems to believe that promoting
these skills, competencies and attitudes will support the reshaping of society towards increased acceptance of difference and diversity, for example in regard to religion, and towards a democratic and peaceful living together. They model this society in their school. They achieve this by imposing rather rigid structures, rules, and routines that serve as a framework for the development of independent, responsible, and tolerant students.

Whang (2005) describes that many schools attempt to “civilize” their students by instilling certain desired attitudes and influencing how they think, feel and behave through the application of power. She points out that one has to be aware of the social construction of the particular forms of behaviour that schools characterize as “civilized.” Especially when the student population is very diverse, schools tend to establish clear rules (e.g., written down on posters in the classrooms) so that all students know what the school expects them to do. These rules are often closer to and therefore more familiar for the dominant culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Whang). Critical educators must become aware of and reflective about the social construction of rules and norms which they desire to implement in their classrooms. They have to be critically conscious of the values, beliefs, and assumptions that constitute the norms of the dominant culture, to which they themselves in general belong (Whang). In addition, they have to understand the differences in the students’ previous knowledge of certain rules and behaviours and the power relations that are at play in this situation. This reflection and self-critical awareness of the cultural aspect in the school’s rules, norms and desired attitudes does not seem to take place among the teachers in this school. There is a general neglect of the cultural influence in many aspects of the school’s pedagogy.

Whang (2005) claims that “efforts to civilize, manage, and discipline not only contribute to a privileging of mind over body but also allow the voices, feelings, desires,
and needs of students to be ignored, over-ridden, negated, or ridiculed” (p. 200). I understand the danger of having extensive rules that control the students’ behaviour at all times, especially when the only intention is to control the children. Pedagogy that focuses on discipline certainly socializes children “against independent thought and in favor of obedience” (Whang).

The school regards simple and strict rules as prerequisites for creating safe classrooms and a safe school environment (T1, p. 20). The implemented rules and the promoted behaviour do not mean that emotions and feelings are suppressed. Students learn to behave in respectful ways in the classroom that allow their classmates to learn and play. Disruptive behaviour as well as behaviour that endangers students is attempted to be suppressed in the phases of the school day that are meant for quiet learning. On other occasions, however, students are encouraged to play, run, sing aloud, etc. The strategy of strict rules does not mean that emotions and desires are disciplined at all times, as Whang (2005) suspects. Only certain behaviours at particular times are not tolerated by the teacher in order to maintain a safe and friendly atmosphere in the school.

One example of conveying social norms is the strict attention teachers pay to punctuality in school. Teaching to be punctual and to follow the rules is identified by Bowles and Gintis (1976) in their reproductive approach to prepare minority and working-class children for the demands of unskilled and low-income work. On the other hand, middle and upper class children often learn about leadership and work very independently. I do not think that this analysis is appropriate for the emphasis on punctuality and rule following in the participating school. T1 explains that this emphasis results from the attempt to not deal sensibly with time in school. By spending as much
time as possible enhancing the students’ academic work equity in educational opportunities are increased.

In addition, rules and norms that are promoted in this school are kept simple so that the students are not overwhelmed with them. In addition, they are often introduced and explained in a specific context and not only abstractive without any relation to a concrete situation. Furthermore, I observed an incident in which the students were included in the process of setting rules for their upcoming visit to the zoo. T1 made the students reflect about the necessity and the importance of these rules, many of which were meant to guarantee the safety of the students on the way the zoo. Kohn (1996) stresses the importance of creating rules and desired behaviour together with the students: “Student-generated rules that emerge from a deep and ongoing conversation are likely to be valuable not because of the rules themselves but because of the conversation that gave rise to them. *The process is the point*” (p. 72). Only then can learning, understanding, and personal development take place. Only then can the students develop socially and morally and not just be manipulated into certain behaviour by the usage of punishments and rewards (Kohn).

Despite their positive attempts, I see even more possibilities for the teachers to include students in the rule-making process and in having them reflect on the necessity of certain rules. In addition, teachers must reflect on the importance of rules as well and be open for criticism. Rules and discipline simply for the sake of keeping control in the classroom is not an appropriate strategy to assist the students in becoming responsible, independent, and empathetic individuals. As Kohn (1996) mentions insightfully, students can only become responsible when teachers give them responsibility. Trusting students with the responsibility to solve conflicts and other problematic situation by themselves is
an important characteristic of critical teachers. In this school, the groundwork for this
development is set; the school introduces the students to strategies of constructive conflict
resolution (stop-rule and class council). It has to be kept in mind the students in the
observed classroom are rather young and need more directiveness and guidance than
older students. At times, the directiveness of the teacher is rather strong, but it is intended
to eventually lead the students to more independence and solidarity at the same time.

**Restrictions of the System**

This school attempts to promote more innovative forms of learning, and they are
responsive to their particular students’ educational needs. The school has to find a
compromise between strategies and methods that they regard as valuable for their
students’ development (e.g., independent learning strategies vs. working with a textbook)
and preparing them with the necessary skills and knowledge and teaching styles that are
dominant in secondary schools.

Here it becomes clear how the school’s interest in educational success of their
students in the secondary school system, which tends to be less innovative than primary
schools and less responsive to particular students’ needs, influences the teaching
strategies and methods in school. Even though the principal replied that she does not see
any external restrictions on the school’s pedagogical work (P, p. 2), T1 mentions in the
interview that they adapt their teaching styles in grade 3 and 4 to the styles which
predominate in secondary schools, in order to avoid “culture shock” (p. 30) for the
students.

All interviewees criticize the structure of the German school system. They point
out the disadvantages of this system especially for their students who are often raised in
educationally difficult situations. The early selection does not give them much time to assist the students in their development of skills, competencies, and understandings. T3 and T1 mention that they would prefer to keep the students longer in primary school, so that they could support them better (T1, p. 36; T3, p. 18). However, the school does not attempt to challenge the general structure of the system in any way. As the principal mentions, she cannot change this system. Nevertheless, she tries to bring along positive change wherever it is possible with her means and influence (P, p. 2). She focuses in her work on the question of what the school can do to support their students. Considering the importance of academic success in primary school for the future of the students, they attempt to equip their students with certain skills, competencies, values, and attitudes that they regard essential for integration in the German educational system and society in general.

**Cooperation with Parents and the Power/Knowledge Relation**

This school regards the involvement of families in the education process of the students as vital. Zaragoza (2005) points out that mutual respect between teachers and the children’s families is crucial for the attempt to include the families in the educational process of their children. Without this mutual trust, attempts for cooperation between teachers and parents will fail. This trust must reside on a foundation of mutual acknowledgement and validation of each other’s knowledges and experiences (Zaragoza, 2005). In the parents-café as well as in the information sessions, these processes are taking place in this school.

Auernheimer (2005) suggests that oftentimes different understandings of and expectations about school are a reason for problems between German teachers and
immigrant families. This school attempts to remedy these misunderstandings by being transparent about their pedagogy, their work, and their aims as well as about expectations they have of the students’ families. On the other hand, they also invite the families to inform them about their expectations for the school and the teachers (e.g., education contract between parents and school). This open dialogue takes place in the first weeks of school as well as in the information sessions prior to school start. Auernheimer (2005) is supportive of information sessions for immigrant parents that encourage them to participate in school matters as well as of the establishment of discussion forums for parents about parental and educational issues. Both strategies are applied by the participating school in order to improve the communication and cooperation especially with immigrant parents and to also increase the educational support for all students in their homes.

The education contract between teachers and parents in this school is very similar to the letter for the initial contact with families that Zaragoza (2005) promotes in her classes. Zaragoza stresses the importance of communicating in a “three-way partnership” (p. 175) between parents, teachers and the children, in which everyone works together to achieve common goals. She regards this genuine request for cooperation as empowering for the parents because “they do have shared control over what is happening in the classroom” (p. 175). Sharing the knowledge about the educational development of the children as well as about ways to enhance the development and information about the classroom curriculum empowers the parents. As Zaragoza states, sharing knowledge allows “families [to] become powerful contributors to the teaching and learning process” (p. 177). Similar understandings of the interaction and cooperation between teachers and parents can certainly be observed in the participating school as well.
School and teachers are in the role of experts who know how to support the students educationally in school and at home with regard to skills and competencies they need for a successful learning career. They share this knowledge with the parents in order to increase support and educational opportunities for all students. However, the knowledge of the school seems to be regarded as more valuable than the knowledge the parents possess. The power/knowledge relation is an important aspect in interactions in educational settings, and it highly influences power relations between the different people and groups involved in schools.

Auernheimer (2005) analyzes the asymmetrical power relations that play an important role in the relationship between immigrant parents and German mainstream teachers. Typical for these intercultural relationships are inequities in economic and social status. In addition, teachers have a position of certain authority merely due to their role of being a teacher, employed by the German regional government. Auernheimer (2005) describes that this role of higher status equips teachers with certain privileges, for example it allows them to set the framework for conversations, to set norms and to judge about behaviour. This is not only true for the interaction between students and teachers, but also for the relationship between teachers and parents, especially immigrant parents. Groups with higher status have the prerogative to enter the private sphere of people with assumed lower status due to the prevalent power relations (Auernheimer, 2005). This position allows teachers to enter the private sphere of their students’ families, for example by judging about their way of educating their children and by advising them how to improve the support for their children. Having an open dialogue, however, requires equal power relations.
It is vital for successful and constructive cooperation based on mutual trust that teachers reflect on and challenge these unequal relations. This, however, seems to take place only marginally in this school. These unequal power relations and the negative effects become visible in the fact that immigrant parents seem to confide their problems preferably in T3 than in German mainstream teachers.

This situation demonstrates that trusting communication and cooperation between German teachers and immigrant parents needs to be further developed and enhanced in this school. Communication between German teachers and immigrant parents seems to be more focused on changes the parents have to make regarding their educational efforts towards their children and less towards empowering the parents through open dialogue. This dialogue, of course, can only be empowering if unequal power relations between parents and the school can be challenged. Even though especially T3 attempts to do this in her work with the children’s families, the German teachers seem to be less inclined to reflect on the unequal situation of power and influence. The school does not display much awareness in regard to power relations that are at work in and around this school.

I mainly ascribe this to the impression German teachers seem to have of many immigrant parents, namely that they are not in the position to support their children appropriately educationally due to their own limited formal education. Even though T3 mentions these impressions of many immigrant parents as well, she attempts to challenge this situation by encouraging the parents to take charge of their lives. Of course, this also happens in the parents-café and the parents’ information sessions which are initiated by the school and regarded as very crucial by the principal. However, the personal interaction generally takes place between T3, social pedagogues, and the mainly
immigrant parents. German teachers do not seem to be a major part of these sessions. According to T1, this is not their role.

Where it’s talked very specifically about upbringing. How is it with going to bed? When do children have to go to bed? Very concrete, for us maybe simple questions. In this discussion forum for parents these things are discussed. We teachers don’t do this. We’re responsible for teaching. I’ve never been there in my life. (T1, pp. 15-16)

It has to be taken into consideration that many immigrant parents may be more inclined to participate in these offers because of T3, who they regard as a confidante due to their shared experiences. They may feel better understood by her than by German teachers. However, I believe that it would be important for the parents to understand that the whole school and all teachers are welcoming and encouraging not only their children’s educational development, but also the empowerment of the families and the community. To achieve this increased trust with parents all teachers have to critically reflect on the power/knowledge relation that dominates in this school and in the wider society in general. Teachers who are aware of their position in the school and in relation to parents can better challenge the existing unequal power relations. “Who owns knowledge? What are the motives of those who own knowledge?” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 45) These are the questions that the teachers must ask themselves in order to provide more equitable education and to foster trusting relationships with students and their families.

**Intercultural Influence on the Curriculum**

Creating an inclusive curriculum based on the principles of Intercultural Pedagogy is one of the most important aspects in providing more equitable educational opportunities for all students.
In primary school, intercultural learning, which is part of social learning, should focus on the development of social cognition and competence and of the promotion of more “normative flexibility” (translated by author, Schmitt, in Auernheimer, 2005, p. 127) through the topics of prejudices and conflicts. This flexibility is important for further promotion of respect and recognition of differences of for example attitudes and values (Auernheimer, 2005). Auernheimer (2005) supports the approach to expose preschool students to experiences that provoke thinking about social categorization because he regards this as a prerequisite for intercultural learning. In the observed school, social cognition and competencies are attempted to be supported by promoting respectful and fair interactions. However, more explicit intercultural principles that focus on cultural aspects do not seem to be consciously considered in these pedagogical strategies of the school.

In the North American context much has been written about culturally responsive curricula, teaching and learning. It has been proposed that in heterogeneous classrooms, academic knowledges and skills appeal more to the interest of the students when they are included in the students’ frames of reference and of their everyday knowledges and experiences so that they are more meaningful to them (Gay, 2002; Giroux, 1992). As Burney (2003) states, all students need to see themselves represented in the curriculum if learning is to be meaningful. Otherwise “equality of opportunity cannot be fulfilled” (Aronowitz, 1997, p. 182). Similarly, in the German context, Schanz (2006) demands a systemic revision of existing curricula according to intercultural principles. Kiper (2006) suggests that the given curricula and guidelines in primary schools must be critically analyzed and supplemented or replaced in an integrative way from an intercultural perspective.
Even though I could not observe any intercultural or culturally responsive content in the regular classroom curriculum, the school attempts to accommodate the needs and interests of their diverse students in their add-ons Islam and mother tongue education in Greek and Turkish. Although the principal as well as T1 hardly mentioned these particular classes, I believe that they are an important element of the school’s pedagogy. They acknowledge and integrate the student’s home culture as part of the school culture, which are often so different from one another. These subjects are more responsive to cultural differences of the students.

*Islam Education*

Islam education is a way to validate the importance of Moslem students’ religious experience and practices. It acknowledges the multicultural diverse student population and their different educational desires. In addition, it opens up a safe space for education of a religion that has been ignored or attributed rather negatively in Germany for the longest time. Critical education implies that many students, especially those from minority groups, have been neglected and are voiceless, and therefore also powerless, in mainstream culture (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993). It must be the goal of educators to empower all students not only intellectually, but also emotionally by validating their voice (Aronowitz & Giroux). Islam education as implemented in this school functions in the way that Aronowitz and Giroux envision for critical education in order to empower students from formerly marginalized groups: On the one hand, it incorporates the students’ existing voice and knowledge which had often been obtained through contradictory sources, and, on the other hand, it attempts to “enrich this voice with historical and critical dimension” (p. 64).
This way of teaching is closely related to Giroux’s border pedagogy. This approach is intended to affirm the complexities of students’ histories as well as to critically reflect upon them (Giroux, 1992). Teachers are encouraged to not just uncritically affirm their students’ histories and experiences, but to give students a voice and a language to “critically examine the historically and socially constructed forms by which they live” (p. 141). Border pedagogy is an approach that is transformative as well as emancipatory (Giroux, 1992). A similar approach of unfolding “hi(stories)” is advocated by Burney (2003), in which the diverse histories of students are valued and affirmed. These are characteristics that T3 stresses in Islam education as well as in the mother tongue classes.

Auernheimer (2005) advocates the principle of multiple perspectives for school curricula in general and for religious education in particular. This “interreligious” education is supposed to open up the discussion about commonalities and universal elements in religion, about similar historical roots, as well as about differences in order to develop an understanding for the perspective of the members of other religions (Auernheimer, 2005). This approach is deployed by T3 in Islam education in this school. She attempts to inform her students about their own as well as about other religions, their differences and commonalities. In addition, the school program (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007) states that the different religious groups in this school work together wherever possible and Muslim and Christian festivities are celebrated together.

Experiencing religions together is also part of the interreligious approach described by Auernheimer (2005).
**Mother Tongue Education**

In various intercultural approaches, multilingualism is regarded as an important aim of education. Auernheimer (2005) indicates that language acquisition research is supportive of the assumption that the support of first language acquisition is beneficial for the development of the second language as well. Coordinated alphabetization in first and second language is an important aspect. This approach to literacy is practiced in the school in the Turkish and Greek mother tongue classes. T3 explains in the interview that she uses the relation between the two different language systems in order to support her students’ bilingual development.

The aim of general German language lessons is to prepare all students with the necessary competencies in this language of instruction and at the same time raise awareness and sensitivity for multilingualism as social reality (Stölting, 2006). The first aspect is stressed as a crucial aim of the school. However, the meta-cognitive competence of awareness about the multilingual reality in society does not seem to be consciously included or debated in the school’s pedagogy on a regular basis.

The following quotation from T1 indicates that multilingualism of the students appears to be discouraged in regular classes as well as in between classes:

> In this school, German is spoken. When I hear children speaking Turkish with each other, I say “We speak German with each other here.” That isn’t written over the door, but [I] simply intervene. Say, “Please talk in German. Then we can, I can understand it too.” And what happens in the afternoon, that’s something I can’t necessarily influence/control. (T1, p. 21)

Even though the school program reads that the variety of languages is deployed in the general lessons (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 23), this quotation points in a different direction. Of course it is difficult to find a compromise between supporting the
students’ German language skills and at the same time avoiding neglecting their mother tongues. On the one hand, the school wants the students with difficulties in German to be immersed in the German language as much as possible. On the other hand, restricting the language even of private communication in the school only to German might devalue the first languages of the students. After all, language is an important aspect of culture and therefore also of the identity development of the students. Language “is a forceful instrument for giving individuals, groups, institutions, and cultures their identity. Through language we communicate our values, attitudes, skills, and aspirations as bearers of culture and as makes of future culture” (Ovando, 2001, pp. 268-269). Turkish and Greek students have the chance to participate in mother tongue education classes during the regular school day, which are an important step to acknowledging their culture. However, it might be possible for the school to find a way to benefit more from their students’ multilingualism than they do at present.

**Independence of the Students**

The school applies an array of strategies and methods to enhance the independence of their students’ learning process as well as the students’ development into independent and responsible personalities in general. The taking over of responsibilities and the enhancement of independence is mainly accomplished through the guidelines and structure the school and teachers offer the students. It is mainly within these frameworks, such as week plan work and student-teacher-conferences, that students take over responsibility for their own learning.

This can be seen as a first step for future development of independence in more general contexts without rigid guidelines like this. The school is a site of learning about
and rehearsing certain social as well as academic practices (Gültekin, 2006). Later, students may have the chance to further develop these practices according to their own judgement and needs. It has to be considered that these students are still too young to take over “subject positions in which [they] are permitted to practice forms of radical critique and engage in social practices informed by a commitment to establishing a more democratic social order” as indicated by McLaren and Giroux (1997, p. 28). Therefore, the possibilities for them to take charge of their own lives and decisions without feeling overwhelming are limited at this point.

A crucial aspect in the development of the students’ independence is that educators “redefine the teacher-student relationship in ways that allow students to draw upon their own personal experience as real knowledge” (Giroux, 1992, p. 136). This allows students “to speak, locate themselves in history, and become subjects in the construction of their identities and the wider society” (Giroux, 1992, p. 136). Of course, these are goals of education that cannot be fully achieved in primary school due to the young age of the students. However, the foundations for critical thinking, understanding of multiple perspectives, and information about and respect for the diversity of experiences of fellow students can be set already in primary school.

This school attempts to achieve these goals in their pedagogical work. Students are encouraged to talk about their everyday experiences, their worries, and questions in class. The teacher does not function as the knowledge bearer, but he supports the students to find answers to their questions on their own. Especially in Islam education as well as in mother tongue classes, participating students learn more about their own and their families’ complex histories, and they can also contribute their own experiences. In addition, in Islam education and media literacy, for example, they are assisted in
developing a critical attitude towards information transmitted as knowledge. However, there are more possibilities for reflective teaching and learning strategies (e.g., peer-review of student’s work, including the students in setting criteria for assessing their work, more problem-solving, and exploratory lessons), which could be included in the general lessons especially in higher grades, to enhance the independence of the students.

**Summary of Analysis**

Despite the limitations of the structure of the German school system, the participating school does important work in achieving equitable educational opportunities in their particular context. In a holistic pedagogical approach they deploy innovative and progressive strategies and practices with the aim of assisting the students to become independent and cooperative learners as well as active members of society. Some of these strategies can certainly also be observed in other German primary schools. What sets this school apart from other schools, in my opinion, is the scale on which the different strategies are applied in a comprehensive and all-encompassing fashion.

Strategies such as close cooperation and communication with many students’ families, information session for parents, preschool diagnosis and support classes, and full-time day care are meant to improve the living and the educational situation of the children. Mother tongue classes, Islam education, and a concept for language immersion and support are the school’s answers to recognizing and acknowledging the linguistic and cultural diversity of their students. Through constant reflection on and evaluation of their pedagogical strategies and concepts the teachers and the school as a whole attempts to offer the most appropriate and suitable education for their current students. Though systemic changes are necessary to challenge the built-in inequities of this system, the
participating school’s practices can be a model for creating more equitable educational opportunities and to be more responsive to their students’ needs in other schools as well.

The pedagogical approach of the school goes well beyond the educational work with the students in the school. By including parents and the community they attempt to improve the living and educational situation of their students as well as their families. In a child-centred approach, they aspire for their students to be successful in the existing school system. Therefore, they attempt to find a compromise in their educational work by implementing innovative and progressive strategies of teaching and learning that are responsive to their students’ particular situations, but, on the other hand, they consider expectations and structures of the existing school system. They have the responsibility to equip the students with skills and competencies and familiarize them with teaching and learning styles that are necessary for and expected by qualitatively better secondary schools. Not to prepare their students educationally for the requirements in secondary schools (which might include learning methods that are less innovative, e.g., working with a textbook versus working more independently on a week plan), would decrease educational opportunities for them. To a certain extent, the school is “forced” to follow the given system and curricula with their particular expectations in the interest of their students.

In this critical analysis of the school’s pedagogical framework as well as of applied teaching strategies it is noticeable that the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population is surprisingly not explicitly made a topic of discussion in the general classroom interaction or curriculum, apart from the add-on courses. The influence of the cultural aspect in the diverse areas of the school’s work does not seem to be consciously reflected on. With respect to the curriculum, the approach of this school to respond to the
culturally and linguistically diverse student population can be interpreted as an additive multicultural approach, according to Banks’ (2001) categorization through “addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purpose, and characteristics” (pp. 231-232). Although the school program mentions that “intercultural education is a fundamentally integrated principle of our pedagogical work” (translated by author, Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007, p. 55), the focus of this school seems to be on intercultural projects, add-on courses such as mother-tongue and Islam education, and an enrichment of the curriculum with topics that include aspects from other cultures (e.g., a unit on traditional family homes in different countries).

However, Hormel and Scherr (2004) are of the opinion that heterogeneity and differences must be an explicit topic in the lesson by deploying the diversity of experiences, languages, histories, and perspectives of their students and their families in order to enrich their curriculum on a regular basis.

Furthermore, German mainstream teachers do not seem to be critically reflective about the cultural embeddedness of their pedagogy, aspired values, norms, and attitudes. However, the school frequently reflects on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their pedagogy for their current students. They are very conscious of the importance of constant school development for the quality of education they offer to their students. The teachers of this school want their students to be successful in school and in life in general. They aspire for them to become active participants in the German society (Grundschule Kleine Kielstraße, 2007). Necessary to achieve this goal is integration in German society. All participants regarded successful education as one of the major prerequisites for integration. Only with a degree from Gymnasium or Realschule will the students have chances for a good job. With a degree from Hauptschule, the professional possibilities are
limited since post secondary education is only possible in the form of vocational training, mainly to manual jobs.

I agree that the educational success of the students and thereby the chance of more influential professional positions is very important for integration as well as for social change. Chances for developing and actively shaping a society with more equitable opportunities for everyone and genuine recognition of different cultures can be better achieved when people with diverse backgrounds are represented throughout society. It may be easier to change systematic discriminations and inequitable systemic structures once the disadvantaged groups are a more influential part of the societal and political systems. To get there, however, success in the given structures and existing institutions is a prerequisite.

From my observations and interviews in the participating school, the personal engagement and motivation of the teacher who has an immigration background herself impressed me the most. She contributes immensely to the intercultural development of this school and to the cooperation and communication between school and (immigrant) parents. Her role in this school is very important because she manages to bring the culture of the school closer to the culture of the students and vice versa. This is something that can be better achieved by a person who shares similar experiences with immigrant students and their parents and therefore understands their worries and expectations. Her case clearly demonstrates the importance of increasing the numbers of teachers with immigration backgrounds in German schools. Immigrant students and their families feel oftentimes better understood by a teacher with similar experiences than by a German mainstream teacher. The societal cultural diversity needs to be represented as well in the teaching staff in schools if more equitable educational opportunities are the aim.
Overall, the school seems to have found an appropriate compromise to fulfill the different expectations that are set in them while always having the best interest of the students in mind. In order to become an intercultural school that also includes aspects of Critical Pedagogy the school has to overcome the reluctance to make differences and culture an open topic of discussion and create a curriculum that is more culturally responsive.
CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND POSSIBILITIES

Systemic Changes

As important as this work of the primary school and the efforts of the individual teachers are, the school system itself limits the opportunities for more equitable education. Secondary schools tend to be less responsive to the students’ needs. After students have been selected into the different secondary schools, changing to a school of higher educational quality becomes increasingly difficult. Primary schools are given only four years to support their students to fulfill the requirements for secondary schools. Considering the highly diverse experiences, skills, and competence levels of the students, this is not enough time. As recommended in many studies, for example PISA, the structure of the German school system creates inequities. Only structural changes such as extended primary school of six years, a less selective secondary school system, and integration of special education in regular schools will enhance educational equity.

Educational Support already in Kindergarten

The observed school assesses their future students’ competencies and skills already nine months prior to school start. They offer support classes for the students with diagnosed needs in certain developmental areas. In cooperation with parents and kindergartens, they implement comprehensive educational support.

The key competence, not as a sufficient but necessary one, for educational success in German schools is proficiency in the German language. Therefore, systematic language support must start already in kindergarten (Karakaşoğlu-Aydin, 2001). However, seeing
the problem only in deficits in language is too short-sighted. Missing language skills in German are not the only reason for school problems (Auernheimer, 2005). Every approach for educational support must be multidimensional in order to acknowledge the complexity of the students’ situation.

Binding guidelines and professional development for kindergarten teachers are necessary in order to enhance educational support especially for children with an immigration background as early as possible. In addition, intercultural learning is not only important in school but, already in kindergarten, children can benefit from these approaches.

**Intercultural Principles and Awareness throughout all Schools**

Schools in Germany host an increasingly diverse student population. To ensure that the students’ experiences, needs, and expectations are sufficiently recognized, intercultural education must become an underlying principle throughout all schools. Even though educational guidelines exist that call for intercultural education as a basic qualification for all children (e.g., Kultusministerkonferenz, 1996), the daily teaching practice, especially in secondary schools, generally ignores these guidelines.

Schools have to redefine their pedagogical mandate of educating citizens for the monocultural German nation state (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). The oftentimes dominating understanding of culture as national culture has to be overcome (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz). In order to offer more equitable education curricula and methods of teaching and learning, pedagogical approaches in general must be responsive to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the students. This is only possible if teachers and administrators reflect on the influence of their own culture on curricula and methods, on
expected and promoted attitudes, norms, and values. The reluctance in Germany to openly discuss cultural topics, not only as folkloristic add-ons to the general curricula or as reasons for the students’ school problems, has to be challenged. For Hormel and Scherr (2004) it is crucial to not just promote the acknowledgment of differences, but also to make conflicts that result from differences a topic in class. Accordingly, they advocate a combination of Intercultural Pedagogy with anti-racism pedagogy. Theoretical considerations like this must be promoted and applied on a practical level in the everyday work of schools.

Apart from acknowledging the plurality of cultural backgrounds of students as the norm in schools and in society in general, bi-and multilingualism must be promoted as well. Multilingualism of immigrants must be understood as a general positive model, not as problematic and deficient as is often the case (Stölting, 2006). At the same time, the students’ first and second languages need to be supported and developed in school (Gogolin, 1994). Prerequisites for this development are binding guidelines and curricula for German as a second language that generally do not yet exist (Stölting).

In order to genuinely value and acknowledge as well as critically analyze cultural differences, the relation between different cultural groups, and the importance of culture for identity development, intercultural educational must become a key principle in all schools.

**Professional Development for Teachers and Teacher Candidates**

Many teachers in Germany seem uncomfortable or insecure with including intercultural elements in a constructive way in their teaching approach (Auernheimer, 2006b). Making intercultural and Critical Pedagogy fundamental principles in educational
approaches is still an exception in schools. Intercultural and professional development and workshops would be a possibility to assist teachers to become more aware of the importance of culture for the identity development of their students with an immigration background. Similarly, Auernheimer (2005) states that “intercultural education depends less or not only on the particularities of the school program, but on the development of sensitivities of the teachers” (translated by author, p. 46). I agree with this opinion since a curriculum or school program is only as good as the teacher who translates it into teaching practice.

In increasingly diverse contexts, “preparing teachers to teach children of diverse racial, ethnic, social class, and language backgrounds is a pressing issue in teacher education” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 20). Therefore, courses on intercultural education and issues of cultural differences and diversity need to be a mandatory part of teacher education programs. Nowadays, all teachers encounter a diverse student population in their classrooms. This social reality has not yet been accepted by universities that prepare teachers. Only few universities offer courses on Intercultural Pedagogy, and these courses are generally optional.

Teachers need to understand how their own culture influences their pedagogy, their attitudes, norms, and values. Gültekin (2006) advocates an approach to a competent and professional handling of social and cultural plurality on the basis of “acknowledgment of diversity as social norms” (translation by author, p. 373). Self-reflection about one’s own position of power and one’s social group as well as the ability to change one’s own perspective is a central aspect of this approach. Knowing how to construct curricula and how to apply innovative teaching and learning methods in culturally responsive ways are essential assets of teachers in diverse contexts. Without
appropriate professional support, educational guidelines for intercultural education cannot be implemented successfully on a wide scale.

**Creating more Equitable Opportunities for Political Participation**

The importance of acknowledging and understanding (cultural) differences in critical educational approaches such as Intercultural Pedagogy has been stressed throughout this thesis. However, many problems that especially students with an immigration background encounter in schools are caused by structural and social inequities. Gültekin (2006) refers to a problem she sees in the approach of intercultural competencies. She criticizes this approach when it is meant to remedy societal and structural institutional failures. An open discussion is missing about the “deferment of economic power relations and societal hierarchies in the last years and their consequences for social groups” (translated by author, Gültekin, p. 371). School cannot solve or be held responsible for problems that need to be challenged on a political and social level (Warzecha, 2003b). Successful participation in a society entails more than a well-paid professional position. It also involves political and social participation. Due to the immigration status of many children, political participation will only be possible after obtaining German citizenship. This process is still rather complicated for everyone born before the immigration law was changed in 2000 in Germany. As long as these social and structural disadvantages for immigrants are not challenged equitable opportunities cannot be provided.
Concluding Thoughts

It is still a long way to go until the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students is acknowledged and actively integrated in the curriculum of all schools. However, it is crucial that every student can see herself or himself represented in the curriculum and the culture of the school (Burney, 2003). Implicitly and explicitly cultural topics become part of the school when teaching and learning is more relevant to the students by incorporating their interests and experiences in the classroom. Teachers and students can learn from each other and explore new and unfamiliar knowledge together.

What is even more difficult to achieve than a change in curriculum and school culture is a change in notions of policy makers and teachers from an understanding of Germany as a nearly monocultural and monolingual country to an acknowledgement of the plurality in schools and in society in general. A change in attitude, especially in teachers, is necessary in order to offer more equitable educational opportunities. Teachers must accept the presence of students with an immigration background in their classes as normal. They must encounter them with an open attitude, with equally high expectations for all students, and with a sincere motivation to understand the complex situations in which students grow up today.

It is not sufficient to publish educational guidelines for Intercultural Pedagogy without providing accompanying professional development and teacher training. Guidelines generally do not change attitudes, notions and understandings of teachers. Only through a theoretical understanding of the importance of culture and identity and through professional discourse can awareness of these issues be raised on a wider level. Many teachers seem to reject Intercultural Pedagogy as a fundamental principle of their own teaching because they are insecure about how to address especially cultural
differences in an enriching way in the classroom. For fear of creating more inequities by acknowledging differences, these differences are often neglected altogether.

However, more equitable education that is responsive to the diverse experiences and needs of all students can only be achieved when these issues are reflected on as an integral part of creating an Intercultural Pedagogy. Neglect of (cultural) differences does not erase them; differences are part of society and part of school cultures. Oftentimes, differences are regarded negatively, as something deviating from the norm, as something that needs to be adjusted. This general misunderstanding of acknowledging differences as being incompatible with the principles of equality has to be challenged. Only when relevant differences are acknowledged is equality possible. I regard Critical and Intercultural Pedagogy as a mandatory aspect of teacher education and professional development as well as an underlying principle of teaching and learning in schools as a crucial means of creating more equitable educational opportunities for all students.

While writing this thesis, I constantly thought about how I would react in specific situations as a teacher. I reflected on my own attitudes and notions, and on my understanding of Intercultural Pedagogy. I recognized how difficult it is to realize an Intercultural Pedagogy that values differences without alienating students or leading to separatism; an Intercultural Pedagogy that creates a harmonious and open atmosphere in the classroom without shying away from conflicts; an Intercultural Pedagogy that understands the importance of culture for the identity development of all students without ascribing particular character traits to the students and “locking” them into their culture.

These are issues that teachers have to deal with on a constant basis. There are no universal solutions or “recipes” for dealing with issues like these. Critical analysis of given situations and continuous self-reflection are important means that allow finding
appropriate possibilities to do justice to the students with their diverse experiences and needs.

However, as long as the current highly selective system persists, there will always be students who are referred to the lower school levels and who therefore will receive only reduced and limited education that hinders their qualification for higher education. Most likely, these students will continue to be the ones who are already disadvantaged in the existing social and educational system: Students with an immigration background, students from the lower socio-economic strata, students with parents who are less familiar with the education system due to their own limited education in Germany.

Already today, chances of successful vocational training for many graduates from Hauptschule are extremely limited and the reputation of this degree worsens. International competition for the whole spectrum of professional positions is stronger than ever. In our globalized and ever-changing world, this outdated education system “produces” students that do not possess the social and cognitive skills to become either active participants in German society or “world citizens.” How can a system that restricts quality education only to a limited percentage of the population and that requests decisions about career opportunities of the students at the age of nine to ten years be justified? Being excluded from educational opportunities at this young age also excludes these students from active social participation and from influential positions in society. Thereby, existing social and socio-economic structures are reproduced and inequities are perpetuated.

A change in the general pedagogy and attitudes of teachers is a necessary but not a sufficient prerequisite for more equitable education in Germany. On the other hand, if only the structure is changed without accompanying change in curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher attitudes, inequities will persists. In the US, for example, the structure of the
school system is far less selective than in Germany. However, differences in academic achievement between native and immigrant students can be observed there as well (e.g., Schleicher, 2006). Only when the existing school structure is challenged and replaced by a less selective system, for example a comprehensive school for all students without streaming, but with highly qualified teachers who understand how to engage and motivate students with different interests and different experiences in an intercultural approach, can the educational chances of all students be enhanced.

I have only low expectations that the German school system will change in the near future. The restructuring has been discussed for decades now, but never implemented. The lobby for this existing system is still very strong. Restructuring would not only include changes in the school system itself, but also in teacher education, which is differentiated according to the different school types and grade levels as well.

As a future primary school teacher, the only way for me to create more equitable education is in my classroom and in my school. I will make the principles of Intercultural Pedagogy the basis of all my educational work in order to increase educational opportunities for all my future students regardless of their background. I am convinced that starting in the classroom is an important first step. When more students with an immigration background have an opportunity to attend a Gymnasium and a university, increasingly diverse peoples will be represented in more influential positions, not just professionally, but also socially. Maybe when the voices of currently marginalized groups can be heard, this increased pressure might lead to changes in the existing system.
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