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All day long in school? A critical view on a major current school reform in Germany.

Main Description

In contrast to most other modern societies, German schools, particularly at the primary level, are open for instruction for only half a day. School begins in general, at 8am and finishes between 12am and 1pm. Recently this model has been widely discussed in the media. Among other reasons, the weak scores of German pupils in the OECD-study PISA have lead many politicians to the conclusion that extending the school day would improve the quality of learning. The most expensive national education program ever has been instituted in order to initiate thousands of schools all over Germany to become all-day schools. Participation of the individual pupils is voluntary. The paper discusses the many aspects and contradictions of the reform through discourse analysis. Furthermore it presents a case study of a school changing to an all-day-school. The study focuses on the perspective of children towards the change and discusses methodological questions in researching about and with children.

Short Description

The paper, about a major current school reform in Germany (all-day school), analyses the discourse and presents a case study

Keywords

School reform
All-day school
Discourse analysis
Case study
Childhood research

Introduction

Scenario: One of many families in Germany. The oldest child's first day at school. Alongside the pride and joy of all persons involved about the child's transition to the new status as a pupil, the uncertain future about after school childcare dampens the mood. Whereas in nursery school/preschool the child had been cared for all-day since age 3 and both parents were employed, the family faces a great challenge now. The new school timetable is irregular: Mondays from 8 am to 11:25 am, Tuesdays from 8:45 am to 12:25 pm, and Wednesdays from 8:45 am to 1:10 pm. A school day never extends much beyond 1 pm. Unlike in nursery school/preschool, lunch is not offered. As a rule, children eat at home. The child spends the afternoon doing homework supervised by parents and in order to participate in a variety of recreational activities such as music and sports, the child must be taken there by car. If the teacher falls ill classes are often cancelled because compulsory teacher substitution as found in other countries does not exist in Germany. This can be the case for several hours but can also go on for days, for example during flu epidemics in winter. Furthermore, there are 3 months of school holidays that are distributed throughout the school year during which time the parents must organize childcare. Working parents only have around 30 days of vacation time available per year.

This scenario has been typical for most families living in Germany until recently. In contrast to many modern countries, an all-day school system was never instituted during the 20th century in Germany. The 19th century model of divided instruction, morning and afternoon lessons separated by a lunch break taken at home, lasted until about WW I. Since then school was reduced to only morning lessons. Responsibility for childcare and extra-curricula activities remained in the home. This division of responsibility was written into law at the time and has essentially been unchanged since. Outside of the home supervisory and childcare programs offered by the state are only available to a few - as a rule, only for particularly disadvantaged children - and are institutionally separated from school. Those who can afford it, continue to care for their children at home. This is still typically the mother¹, but some employ suitable personnel privately. Historically speaking, there were several opportunities for fundamental reform of

¹ The number of working mothers is comparatively low in Germany. Furthermore, most take maternity leave for the first 3 years after giving birth, thus leaving the workforce entirely. After that, many mothers work only part-time. The link between the problems of daycare and the number of working women is currently being discussed in Germany in correlation with one of the lowest birth rates internationally and its affect on the economy and the social system. About 40% of academically educated women live without children, either intended or unintended.

the German educational system (1919/20, 1945/49, 1969, 1990)², including the issue of all-day school. Ultimately though, none of the intentions of those reforms have ever been realized fundamentally or on a national level. Structurally and culturally, a system developed during the 19th century has remained nearly unchanged until today (cf. Oelkers 2003, 16). As comparative studies of the past several years such as those under the direction of the OECD reveal, Germany's educational system stands almost completely apart from those of all other modern industrial countries. Since the so-called PISA-shock two central differences have been discussed in the public in terms of educational policy.

The “PISA-shock” and its effect on the education system

Comparative standardized testing of student achievement on national and regional levels has not, until recently, been common practise in Germany. Therefore, the international comparative studies of recent years, particularly TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) not surprisingly, lead to an unusual reaction. Today one speaks of the PISA-shock, which hit Germany hard. After all, most Germans still believed that their country, in keeping with its traditional reputation as the land of ‘Poets and Thinkers,’ was safely in the upper echelon of international, educational leadership, an assumption that hadn't really ever been re-evaluated for decades. From the onset of international comparative studies,

² **1919/20:** The Weimar Republic. Active ever since the 19th century, advocates for a comprehensive school merely achieved a compromise of a mutual 4 years in school at the elementary level.

1945/49: Between the end of World War I and the formation of two German nations, the attempt to introduce the American program, the so-called Re-Education, failed. The program called for comprehensive schools following the model of the American High School. Cold War politics and the division of Germany into two nations put the Federal Republic of Germany (West) under pressure to distance itself from anything resembling the ideologies of the comprehensive school system of the German Democratic Republic (East). Any kind of initiative towards integrative school systems was pushed to background.

1969: During this period of educational reforms, a series of comprehensive schools was introduced into states ruled by Social Democratic Party but parallel to the existing three-track system. By doing so, a real reform was doomed to fail from the beginning. The issue of comprehensive schools has since been in the centre of an ideological debate between the political camps and has a strong influence on voter reaction.

Instead of utilizing the opportunity for a unified reform, the comprehensive school system of the DDR was abolished at the time of the German reunification of **1990**. The system of the Federal Republic that has in essence existed since the 19th century was transferred onto the Neue Bundeslaender (new states) in the East.

German students have demonstrated almost consistently moderate to poor results, with only a few exceptions.³

The PISA-shock gave rise to a variety of reactions within the realm of educational policy. A reform within the early childhood sector as well as the introduction of compulsory, educational standards and comparative testing are two examples. Furthermore and of particular significance, are two educational policy issues that essentially exist independently of each other, though they are commonly mentioned in one breath⁴ in Germany and appear to be connected in a paradoxical way.⁵ The first is the issue of an all-day childcare system at school as referred to above, and the second is the issue of an integrated or comprehensive school system, that does not stream children at such an early age.

The latter of the two pertains to the early selection system for different school types that exists only in Germany and to a certain extent in Austria and Switzerland. After 4 years of commonly shared elementary schooling⁶, children are evaluated at the approximate age of 9-10 years, in order to be sent to different school types, at the beginning of 5th grade.⁷ These schools differ in terms of the number of years of required attendance and in academic standard. Thus a crucial course is set for the children at an early age in terms of professional career track. General qualification for university entrance (ca. a third of all students born in a given year) can only be achieved by completing grade 13 at a German High School. The selection process, contrary to its original intention at the time of the system's transitional reformation from a class-oriented to a performance-oriented system (1919/20), is still predominantly influenced by the social background of the pupils. The correlation between social background and educational opportunity are in no other comparable industrial country as high as in Germany

³ IGLU (Internationale Grundschul-Lese-Untersuchung), a study on the elementary school level (Bos et al. 2003) is an exception.

⁴ The university I teach at is situated in a state in which comprehensive schools are virtually unknown. Interestingly, in the beginning, students attending my lectures often confuse the terms all-day school and comprehensive school. The reason for this may be the fact that the German pronunciation of the two terms sound somewhat similar. It may also possibly be an expression of the paradoxically linked projects of both school reforms within the public debate.

⁵ Oelkers (2004) talks about a historical relation between all-day school and comprehensive school as an indication of political dimensions within the German education system.

⁶ Since 1919/20 all children between the ages of 6 and 10 attend the elementary school together. In contrast to many other modern countries though, a relatively high number of pupils with special needs are instructed at special schools even today. Therefore, one can really speak only in relative terms about one school for all children.

⁷ Hauptschule (secondary school) until grade 9 (compulsory schooling); Realschule (secondary school) until grade 10; Gymnasium (secondary high school) until grade 13. Some states also offer the opportunity to attend a comprehensive school. Formally speaking, the entire system has become somewhat 'porous' over the last several decades. That is, access through transfer to an academically qualifying education is possible, though, for a variety of reasons, it is difficult to realize and is relatively seldom done.

(cf. e.g., Baumert/Schümer 2002, 159ff.; Schümer 2004, 74). In addition to this, at least until recently, the number of university bound pupils has intentionally been kept comparatively low.⁸ Given that the children of academics also tend to take up university studies (with only a few exceptions) and, at the same time, the children of blue collar workers have a lesser chance of achieving an equivalent academic career, one can say that this system primarily reproduces social milieus.

The statement by Schleicher, coordinator for the OECD study, that this is a central weakness of the German education system, that is in part, responsible for comparatively poor scoring of German students in international testing, is being discussed and challenged in academia as well as by general public.⁹ A multitude of measures are surely necessary in order to increase the achievement potential of German students. These measures cannot be adequately discussed due to the limited scope of this article. In addition, the picture of the academic performance of German students is most certainly more heterogeneous if one also considers studies other than PISA. Further, the relevance of the investigated statistical variations can also be challenged. Of particular interest though, is the public discourse on this subject as well as the actions taken by the educational policy makers. These factors reflect the underlying cultural perception and beliefs about school, which, according to the author, have long been effective in preventing necessary reforms. An analysis of these beliefs can help clarify the correlations. This would then finally facilitate a truly pragmatic discussion of reforms.

The notion of a comprehensive school has been a ball on the political playing field within Germany for decades and is ideologically charged. Even though groups apart from the traditional leftist supporters¹⁰, in particular business and trade groups have recently called for a pragmatic rethinking of the early scholastic selection process and differing academic standards, the topic appears to remain taboo. Every attempt by education policy makers in this direction jeopardizes votes and therefore tends to be politically problematic.¹¹ This necessary part of a structural debate is being avoided by the most important political parties and is replaced by other reform projects. The obvious reluctance of German educational

⁸ According to a press release by the Statistisches Bundesamt (Federal Office of Statistics) the high school graduate quota rose in 2003 (including a group of 18 to 21-year-olds) to 39.9%. The number of college and university graduates approximately 18.4%. Hence, less than a fifth of an age group in Germany actually complete their college and university studies. This is comparatively speaking, a very low academic quota. (Statistisches Bundesamt: Mehr Abiturienten und Absolventen eines Erststudiums im Jahr 2003. Pressemitteilung vom 25. Februar 2005. www.destatis.de; 18.8.2005)

⁹ Cf. about this controversy, for instance the dispute between Schleicher and Prenzel in: *Die Zeit* Nr. 8/2005, 17.5.2005

¹⁰ Social democrats and labour unions have been fighting for the idea of a comprehensive school since the 19th century.

¹¹ The analyses of numerous elections since the 1960s call attention to this problem. In particular the Laender that have introduced the comprehensive schools during this time, such as Hessen and Nordrhein-Westfalen, have considered this issue politically explosive during elections.

policy makers in regard to early streaming stands in clear contrast to another reform project mentioned: The all-day school program, initiated by the Federal Government of Germany, is by far the most expensive and the most publicly visible reform under construction since PISA.

The Federal Government bids with extensive poster campaigns and a multitude of additional actions for public appeal for the expansion of all-day schools. Among other things it is suggested that more time in school

- improves instruction and with it the achievement potential of students,
- leads to increased equal opportunity,
- makes children happier and parents more satisfied.

By examining the new model in detail, such assumptions prove to be problematic.

New all-day schools in Germany

For a variety of reasons an all encompassing presentation of the current development of all-day schools in Germany is difficult.¹²

At the outset, it is a lexical and conceptual problem. In many countries the term school corresponds directly to all-day school. This is not the case in Germany. Here, since 2003, the term refers both to a true all-day school as well as to a hybrid structure of instruction for all pupils in the morning and, for only some, after school care. Participation at all-day school programs is voluntary. This redefinition arose out of an investment program by the Federal Government “Zukunft Bildung und Betreuung” (“Future Education and Childcare”) which places 4 Billion Euros at the disposal of the individual Bundeslaender for the installation of new all-day schools between 2003 and 2007. The Laender, which in Germany are responsible for the educational policy, are only able to access of these federal funds if they offer suitable financial return services, primarily in the form of staff expenditures.

A school is considered an all-day school, if in addition to the morning lessons it offers an all-day option for students on at least three days a week. This encompasses at least 7 full hours every day, a lunch break, and supervised afternoon activities organized by the school administration.¹³ The afternoon program is not compulsory for students and its personnel are not necessarily recruited from the teaching staff. It neither changes the actual amount of time of school instruction (timetable) nor the curriculum. The actual teaching time of teachers stays untouched as well. In Germany this is calculated in teaching

¹² See information by Federal Government in English: www.bmbf.de/en/1125.php

¹³ Cf. the resolution at the conference for the ministers for education on 2.1.2004 (www.kmk.org; 18.8.2005)

lessons, not in time in attendance. Teachers caring for students in the afternoon are required to teach fewer classes in the morning.¹⁴

The implementation of these structural changes has taken very diverse forms in the individual Bundesländer. Commonly shared features are:

Generally, not all of the students of a school attend the afternoon program.

For the most part, the afternoon is made up of doing homework, taking part in extra-curricular activities and playtime (no teaching). Pedagogical staff who are not teachers and whose qualifications vary greatly primarily supervises these.

The abundance of models as well as the redefinition from 2003 makes a quantitative compilation difficult. When the minister of the Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung (Ministry for Science and Research) speaks of roughly 5.000 all-day schools out of approximately 40.000 general-education schools in Germany¹⁵ it does not mean that an eighth of all students are cared for all-day. The crucial factor is the portion of participating students. Since participation in the afternoon is voluntary, the actual percentage rate is lower. Holtappels (2005), comparing the all-day care coverage in 1990 of 5% to today's figure of roughly 9.6%, claims that the increase can chiefly be attributed to the redefinition.¹⁶ The Ganztagsschulverband (The Association for All-day School) ironically calls the increase a miracle.¹⁷ Until the start of the investment programs previously existing all-day schools were usually mandatory for all attending students and pertained primarily to schools for special needs and comprehensive schools. The new form of school is distributed among all school types and generally functions as an additive model. The latter can be subdivided into two organizational forms:

Instructions for all students in the morning – after-school care for some students in the afternoon.

Consolidation of all participating students of all-day care in all-day classes: school is composed of half and full-day classes.

¹⁴ Morning and afternoon care are not measured one to one.

¹⁵ BMBF press releases (www.ganztagsschulen.org/338_3424.php?primg=1; 18.8.2005)

¹⁶ The redefinition pertains mainly to the count in the East German Länder. There has never been a classical form of all-day school in the DDR. However, in the afternoon all students were cared for in after-school care. To a certain extent they were supervised by teaching staff. After-school care programs worked in closely with the schools. The after-school care programs in these states still serve area-wide today and are being counted as part of the redefinition of all-day schools. Consequently, through this redefinition, the number of all-day schools rose, for example in Sachsen from 0 to 1,328, without a change actually having taken place.

¹⁷ Cf. Ganztagsschulentwicklung in den Bundesländern. Stand: Januar 2004. (www.ganztagsschulverband.de; 18.8.2005)

An additive model incurs a string of pedagogical problems. Organising a sensible daily routine for students as well structuring a new concept of instruction in terms of the implemented changes in the culture of teaching and learning become difficult if not impossible. (Holtappel 1995). In some Laender, primarily in Nordrhein-Westfalen, implementation of the new all-day schools lead to an integration of out-of-school care into the schools with a simultaneous dissolution of the old structures. From the perspective of *Jugendhilfe* (Public Child and Youth Welfare Service) this leads to a significant loss of quality. In this context, the all-day school proves to be a cost-saving measure within the public budget (cost-neutral, if not cost-reducing). In appearance, in Nordrhein-Westfalen the availability of all-day care has spread quantitatively and is open to more families than before. However, in addition to the loss of quality, the after-school care times have also become less flexible. The reality, from the perspective of the families acquainted with the previous structures, is that of an actual decrease in the availability of all-day care.

In terms of the furtherance of equal opportunity the picture is equivocal: on the one hand additional assistance to educationally disadvantaged students in the afternoon can lead to improved educational chances. On the other hand it has become clear, that some Laender set up all-day schools primarily in social hotspots¹⁸ or that only students from specific socio-economical environments take advantage of the offer. By doing so, an increase in the segregation of societal milieus is instigated. The few available situations where students from various school types (= milieus) are able to commingle in the afternoon, such as at sports clubs, is destroyed by the all-day care of “problem students” (including free of charge sports offers).

Despite the comparatively small number, and the qualitatively questionable impact on the educational system, the all-day school project can still be considered one of the most significant school reforms of recent years. Even though the general framework of this project remains problematical, a wide spectrum of local reforms is being developed. In this context many essential school issues are being reassessed. In addition to collecting quantitative data, a detailed qualitative analysis of such developments can shed light on the relevance of the project. The following case study, carried out in Rheinland-Pfalz from May 2003 to June 2004¹⁹ should serve this end.

¹⁸ For instance in Baden-Württemberg mainly Hauptschulen (secondary schools until grade 9) are equipped with all-day offers. Cf. Ganztagsschulentwicklung in den Bundesländern. Stand: Januar 2005. (www.ganztagsschulverband.de; 18.8.2005)

¹⁹ Rheinland-Pfalz is considered the pioneer of the all-day school development in Germany because its government has started the program already prior to the Federal program. (Rubner 2003)

Case Study/Methodology

The following is an explorative study based on theoretical deliberations on the notion of culture. The micro level of this field study is approached and discussed by means of a discourse-analytical procedure. It is presumed that the investigation of a local everyday practice can only be adequately construed in interplay with the analysis of its cultural context. Cultural context will be considered to be the background grown out of the historical, cultural, and social prerequisites for this everyday practice (Deckert-Peaceman 2002).

The discussions concentrate on one aspect that has gained in significance in the course of the field investigation: homework as a cultural practice in school. These are preliminary empirical insights that serve the planning of future research and will be presented here exemplarily.

This presentation begins with a demonstration of the research approach. This is followed by a sketch of the background of this case study, which forms the framework for the cultural practice of doing homework. The topic of homework will be reflected upon from the *perspective of cultural theory* and will be discussed by way of field observation examples. In closing, the empirical results with regard to the initially discussed discourse on educational policy are reflected on.

Ethnographic school research as seen from the perspective of cultural theory

The case study researches the all-day school practice using ethnographic methods. Included in this is direct participation in this practice over an extended period of time, as well as the collection of data of real school practice through participatory observation, interview, and video recordings. Alongside these data collection methods, one particular method, in which children research their own daily practices, was employed and is of special interest.²⁰ It is presumed that the participants spontaneously create the local practice interactively on site.

²⁰ Inducement for this was the promotional competition “Zeit für mehr – so stellen wir uns unsere Schule vor!” (“Time for more – this is how we envision our school!”) created by the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Federal Ministry of Education and Research). Following our encouragement, a team of 4th graders participated in the competition, researching and documenting the changes at the school in the form of a video titled “Ein ganzer Tag in der Schule” (“An entire day at school”). We supported the students in their project and at the same time observed them using a second camera. This was a fortuitous arrangement. Through our observations of the previous months it had become clear that, though the students were clearly reacting to the changes in their daily routines, they were not necessarily capable of articulating what these changes meant to them. Through the new role of observers, imposed on them by their voluntary involvement in the competition, the changes in their daily routine became a subject of

In keeping with Wulf, Göhlich and Zirfas, local practice is considered to be performative as well as an outgrowth of historical and cultural processes. (cf. Wulf/Göhlich/Zirfas 2001, 13). It follows that performance is considered in the context of cultural scripts. According to Hengst, cultural scripts offer human beings symbol-systems for their worldview as well as for their participation in communicative processes. Cultural scripts govern experiences and actions and at the same time are expressed, validated, and altered by these experiences and actions. (cf. Hengst 2001, 856) The linkage of micro- and macro-perspectives can also be substantiated by Winter. He presumes that ethnographic fields do not create closed and discrete entities but rather, are in global interconnection with other events, practices and places. (cf. Winter 2001, 55). This connection is not limited to the present dimension of time. In the opinion of the author of this article, the cultural memory (“Kulturelles Gedächtnis”: Assmann 1992) of any given subject of research is of particular importance. As such, cultural memory is relevant in regard to the case of homework as well as in respect to the debate on all-day school. This will be briefly discussed. First a look at the background of the case study.

All-day school from the perspective of children

The focal point of the case study is the perspective of children pertaining to the current development towards an all-day stay at this institution. The investigation of the perspective of children is paradigmatically in accordance with the premises of childhood studies.

Keeping in mind that discourse-analytically speaking, the discussions about all-day schooling on familial, social, educational, economical and political levels always place the child at the center, it is important to note that the perspective is always that of the child as the object of interest. Seen as a subject, and if one equates school time with work time, the child, though confronted with an enormous increase in work time, barely has a voice in the matter.

Furthermore, in other current or planned research projects pertaining to the development of all-day schools, in comparison to other research questions, the perspective of the children plays only subordinate role.

The all-day elementary school as instituted in school year 2003/04 is being managed additively. In form it now consists of morning classes for all and an afternoon concept comprised of lunch, homework supervision, and extra-curricular activities for only 40% of the students. The research leitmotif of the study was the reconstruction of the entire day from the perspective of individual students as well as groups of students. Particular attention was paid to smooth and fragmented transitions within the day that accentuate the fact, that supposed all-

reflection. They polled other children in this context and reflected upon their own position during the shooting of the film. The work involved the children in the creation of a script, interviewing, filming and editing scenes.

day schools in their current context are, in reality, little else than two separate school realities: divided into morning and afternoon structures.

Homework is a central topic of the changed school reality.

Homework as a cultural practice

Within the framework of the development of all-day school, the issue of homework gains considerable importance. It is categorized as workload relief from the perspective of parents, particularly for mothers. Surveys in Rheinland-Pfalz go as far as to suggest that many parents perceive homework supervision in the all-day school to be a core issue. (POLIS 2003; 2004). The daily school routine has to be reorganized based on the fact that a substantial number of students now complete their homework at school. This pertains both to the quantity and the quality of homework, as well as the communication between the ones involved in the morning and the afternoon supervision.

The inception of homework corresponds with the introduction into society of school as a public institution (Nilshorn 1999), marking a perceived delineation between familial life and learning. Since then, homework has been a more or less controversial topic, discussed in schools, public, and academic circles (Meumann 1925; Wittmann 1964; Enders-Dragässer 1981; Speichert 1987; Schwemmer 1990; Nilshorn 1995).

When one examines the subject of homework from the perspective of students one is confronted with a series of paradoxes. Children just starting school usually long for homework yet, just a few weeks after beginning school, often reject it, at least verbally. On the other hand, empirical studies (cf. e.g., Schwemmer 1980) demonstrate that, in comparison to other school levels, elementary school children do homework more willingly. Obviously there is a discrepancy that disallows a clear verdict regarding elementary school children's perspective on homework. Nevertheless, apparently children see homework is an inseparable part of school and it stands as a symbol of social status, confirming that the child has become a "real school child."

Homework as cultural practice in the all-day school²¹

The school under investigation has, as do many other all-day schools in Rheinland-Pfalz, one hour of homework supervision around which lunch, playtime recess, and extra-curricular activities are organised. Homework is done in groups of children who are in the same grade under the supervision of teachers and other staff.

²¹ The descriptions are based on field notes and video recordings.

The effects of relocating homework into the school for circa 40% of all students can be seen in several areas. These will be only briefly examined within the limited scope of the article.

To arrive at school in the morning with completed homework, thus ‘avoiding getting into trouble’, is for many children of this socially disadvantaged district a clear improvement. There is seldom anyone at home on whom these children can count to help with homework. On the other hand, the accompanying standardization associated with the practice of doing homework in a publicly supervised situation can lead to a considerable restriction of children’s individualism. They have noticeably less freedom now in deciding on a time frame, the place, or the manner in which they complete the homework. In addition, teachers instructing in the morning assign homework in such a way that it is meant to fill out the afternoon homework supervision time. This standardization of homework practice in the afternoon in turn, often leads to an increased standardization of instruction in the morning. Consequently, a field of conflicting interests arises between the confinements of a somewhat complex standardized daily routine and the individual needs of the children. Within the context of this field it was observed how both children and adults dealt with these conflicts. One particular case in point has been selected from the wide spectrum of observations and follows.

Paradoxes in dealing with time and space

During the field study it had been observed over a period of months that a number of students shortened their outdoor recess time. Though forbidden, they entered the school building 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the scheduled homework supervision. They sat at tables in the hallways and, with astonishing speed and concentration, began to work on their homework. During this ‘illicit’ time a relatively large portion of their assignments was being completed, independently, without cheating by copying and without assistance. This peer group activity occurred in a highly dynamic manner, marked by discussions amongst the children as well as with newly arriving students. The research team discovered that several age groups between grades 1 to 4 were doing the same thing independently of one another. The team concentrated on a particular group of children from grade 3. A group, of which several of the children they had been focusing on during the study, were a part. The researchers participated in this secret practice and with the students’ approval even filmed them at times. Prerequisite was that the research team was required to tolerate this violation of the rules. Interestingly enough, the infraction of the rules was also widely ‘overlooked’ by the supervising adults. The reasons for this are multifaceted.

Paradoxically, the secretly observed homework practices did not result in any advantage for the students. They were still required to attend the homework

supervision period, regardless of how much they had left to do. That is, they did not gain free time from the secret shortening of their recess time. On the contrary, by doing so, they incurred phases of empty idling and boredom for themselves. The reasons for these actions were apparently unconscious because further inquiry revealed that the children were hardly able to reflect upon them.

An in depth interpretation of this phenomenon and others cannot be discussed here. Nevertheless two possible interpretations taken from the spectrum of first analyses are introduced here in brief:

On the one hand, the students acted on the principle of saving time, trying to win a pointless race against the clock, which could not be won. By doing this, they have mirrored a phenomenon typical of our modern society, which in turn, influences the public school system. On the other hand, one could also interpret these actions as a striving for autonomy, a search for individual and collective possibilities of self-determination within a highly structured daily routine. This often takes the form of counter movements, finding expression in a specific acquirement of time and space.

These counter movements are not classic rituals of resistance. Rather, they are exploited opportunities for playful behavior and bargaining within the framework of school. These opportunities are not only defined by the framework. In fact, they mirror and transform the framework, in part, into a component of the culture of children. During the secret homework practice the all-day students grow together into a community independent of adult control. They conquer a terrain that enables them to identify with their school as part of their own living space that exists outside of the classroom and apart from being in a particular class associated with specific teaching staff. This can only occur if the standardized daily routine is not too tightly woven and such niches, which are mostly unintended by the institutions, can accrue. Of particular importance is that such serendipitous developments be recognized and valued by the adults responsible for the well being of the children. Only then will it be possible to make long term changes in the present realities of school and the way society perceives it.

Discussion of the study against the background of the all-day school debate

In light of the above segment on local practice, one can once again ask the question: Does more time spent in school change school? Is this reform the necessary step in the direction toward a modern education system that can meet the demands of the 21st century in Germany?

From a discourse-analytical perspective, the current debate on all-day school and the accompanying changes in the German school landscape actually appear to hinder reform rather than to advance it. A promotional poster issued by the German Federal Government under the slogan of “Ganztagsschulen. Zeit für mehr.” (“All-day schools. Time for more”) shows a picture of laughing students holding musical instruments inside a classroom. Over this the following is

printed: “Die Schulzeit ist die schönste Zeit im Leben. Jetzt auch für Eltern.” (“School time is the best time in life. Now also for parents.”). The poster conveys several messages. On the surface it becomes quite clear that the current development of all-day school is neither focused on the reform of classroom instruction, nor on the redefinition of education and literacy within the school context. Primarily the focus of the promotional campaign is on the additional time to be spent at school and the pleasure it will supposedly bring. Next, the priorities in terms of the target group become transparent. Indeed, the poster says “...also for parents.” and not “...just for parents.” However, a deep discourse analysis reveals that the question of “Mehr Zeit in der Schule” (“More time at school”) obviously refers less to the needs of children or the corresponding educational goals, and more to the parents and to general economic interests. In the long run, the German economy can only remain competitive if a large number of the well-trained, well-educated women are available to the job market full time.²²

Others such as Oelkers consider the debate on all-day schooling to serve to conceal and distract from the actual problems of the German school system such as early streaming. Resistance to reform of German educational policy is, according to Oelkers, a psychologically deeply anchored structure going back to the 19th century. In this context, the question that arises is the one of power. Who gains from this situation and who loses?

This structure prevents the realisation of a democratic school system that offers equal opportunity for all citizens and promotes them systematically. It prevents the adoption of a comprehensive school system that could offer a greater chance for equal opportunity than the current, dominant three-track system is able to. And, it prevents the actual realization of ‘true’ all-day schools for all children with more time at school in terms of a better and more democratic school.

Returning to the theoretical intention of combining micro and macro levels analytically, it is necessary to differentiate more in trying to find an answer. It might seem that reform projects such as the all-day school project in Germany often tend to lead to a solidification of the structurally and psychologically anchored school traditions. Nevertheless, if one observes the praxis, a larger spectrum of change and movement becomes visible. The reactions shown by the children to the new structures can give us impulses for a new cultural definition of school. Therefore, one might go as far as to risk the prognosis that, despite all the educational policy restrictions and distractions from truly necessary debates on structure, the investment program of the German Federal Government could have a positive impact on the German school system. This though, will only be possible

²² This is only an allusion to several dimensions of the mentioned argument. Many women express the desire for improved daycare in order to be better able to enfold their professional possibilities and to earn more. It is of equal importance for the economy that, in particular, better-educated graduates, are able to work. As such, this argument only touches on a small part of this complex issue. Cf. the beginning of this article.

if the educational policy makers show the courage to confront the real challenges for the future of a democratic school system.

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