Ethnic Heterogeneity and the Production of Inequality in Educational Organizations from Early Childhood Onward

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The following contribution deals with a problem yet to be solved within Germany's educational landscape: the educational disadvantage of children with a migrant background. We will illustrate this shameful problem by presenting a research project which has been ongoing since July 2011 at Bielefeld University. This project is being carried out within the framework of a research association consisting of 17 sub-projects, a so-called Collaborative Research Center on the topic "From Heterogeneities to Inequalities". Since such centers are usually scheduled for a period of twelve years, we expect to complete a genuine longitudinal study over this entire period of time. Our central research question is: How do the German educa-tional system and its organizations contribute to (re-)production of these continuous inequali-ties with regard to children with a so-called migration background? Our qualitative-empirical study focuses on the production of inequality during the course of education in the different educational organizations (kindergarten, elementary school, secondary school). It also focuses on the mechanisms which take place during the course of childhood and which finally culmi-nate in educational inequality. In a first step, we give an overview of the state of research on school- and pre-school educa-tional disadvantages of children with a migration background in Germany (1). This is followed by some basic theoretical and methodological considerations (2). Finally, we will present the methodical design of our study (3).

1. State of research

Since Germany's participation in the OECD's regularly conducted Programme for Interna-tional Student Assessment, the amount of data on educational disparities has continuously increased (cf. Baumert et al. 2001). In view of this, Baumert, Maaz and Trautwein (2009: 22) agree that knowledge on these disparities has grown considerably but also point out that sev-eral questions remain unanswered: "While the evidence for mechanisms promoting inequality is robust at transition points of the educational system, research is still far from providing em-piri-cal conclusions on the exact mechanisms for the emergence and increase of social dispari-ties in these and other areas" (ibid).

Educational inequality of schoolchildren with a migration background

The close connection between *educational inequality and ethnic background* is empirically still a largely unsolved problem. This connection was well-known long before the first PISA results (Diefenbach 2008; Nauck 1994; Hopf 1981), but had, up until then, hardly received any attention. Initial assumptions that the low level of achievement among German students in the survey could be traced back to the presence of under-performing children with migration background could not be confirmed (cf. Diefenbach 2008: 11). All follow-up studies confirm the finding of the PISA study of 2001 that *disparities* depending on social background continue to persist in the German school system. However, they are today first and foremost *ethnically*

coded. The "Catholic working man's daughter from the countryside" as a symbol for educational disadvantage during the years between 1960 and -70 is today represented by the "migrant's son" (cf. Geißler 2005).

Available data on educational participation show that, in comparison to German children, *foreign children* are more often recommended *to enter school at a later stage; the proportion of foreign children attending Hauptschule[1]* is significantly higher, twice as many foreign children attend *special schools with special education in learning*, and a relatively large number of them leave Hauptschule without a graduation certificate (20% compared to 7-8% of German children). Regarding competencies, foreign children have significantly *lower scores in reading competencies*. The same is the case for scores in natural sciences and, to a lesser extent, for mathematics (cf. Diefenbach 2008: 76 f.). In view of these data and the fact that the hierarchical school system predetermines the chances and later educational careers at an early stage, the German educational system can, as Diefenbach put it, be described as *ethnically segmented* (ibid: 77).

In the area of elementary schools, the disadvantageous educational situation of children with a migration background is revealed by results of standardized school achievement tests, by grades and recommendations for secondary school types, as well as by typical patterns regarding the transition from elementary school to the different types of secondary schools (cf. Kris-ten 2006: 79).

Heike Diefenbach (2008) summarizes the existing *theoretical explanations* and empirical findings for this significant educational disadvantage of children and adolescents with migra-tion backgrounds in the German school system. Most of these explanatory approaches attempt to find the cause for this discrimination of migrant children in their cultural background, which is considered to be deficient. This is also the case for approaches of human capital the-ory (ibid: 100). Causes are thus principally attributed to the migrant children themselves or to their families, whereby language deficiencies in German play a primary role. Explanations based on such assumptions as well as on approaches of human capital theory were proven to be the best tested but could not, or only to a small degree, be confirmed empirically. Thus, the widespread communicated diagnosis that the *cultural background* and socio-economic charac-teristics prevent these children from adapting to German schools and therefore lead to disad-vantages could not be confirmed statistically. Instead, the significance of such characteristics for success in school is clearly overrated (cf. ibid: 155, 158).

Friedrich Heckmann (2008) has analyzed explanations for the educational disadvantages of migrants in school systems of European host member states on the macro-, meso-, and micro levels. On the macro level (national policy), he emphasizes the high selectivity of a national educational system as well as a late pre-school education as being problematic. The meso level focuses on the school as an organization which is interested in "normalcy", normalization and, consequently, standardization. A good example for this is the explanatory model of the

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1 Among the three types of secondary schools in Germany (Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium), the Hauptschule occupies the lowest rank – it has no prestige and is considered by many to be the "school for all the rest". The Gesamtschule is an alternative to these three types but is not (yet) a common school type throughout the country. Special schools represent a separate school system in addition to the other three types of secondary schools. Thus, one could also say that Germany has a secondary school system consisting of four types.

"Institutional Discrimination" (cf. Gomolla/Radtke 2007). This model detects causes for disadvantages not in the migrant families, but in the organizational logic of homogenization that is prevalent in schools. Furthermore, causes are detected in teachers' decisions and justi-fications at the transition points of school careers: the transition from one school type to the next. The study makes theoretical perspectives of organizational sociology useful which, in line with the neo-institutionalists March/Olsen (1976) and Meyer/Rowan (1978), consider organizations as "loosely coupled systems" and focus on organizational structures. The "structural explanations" offered by the institutional discrimination model "focus on the con-crete unfolding of and effect of institutional knowledge in an organisation's practice with regard to the respective conditions (options for action, resources, participants, etc.)" (Go-molla/Radtke 2007: 82).

Research on educational participation also now focuses on this early transitory stage: the tran-sition from elementary school to secondary school. Educational participation is no longer merely focused on distributive aspects but increasingly on transitory decisions made in mi-grant families (cf. Kristen 2006; Kristen/Döllmann 2010; Baumert/Maaz/Trautwein 2009).This is represented in Heckmann's model by the micro level.

According to Diefenbach's approach, as another explanation for the significant ethnically coded disparities in school, the theorem of the stereotype threat could be taken into account, which so far has hardly been analyzed. This concept considers the learning success of children and adolescents with migration background as being threatened by stereotypes in the envi-ronments outside and inside school. Secondary analyses point to such effects (cf. Schofield 2006).

The influence of teachers' attitudes and behavior in school and in the classroom on the educa-tional success of children with a migration background has been extensively analyzed in the international context (cf. Tyler/Boykin et al. 2006; Elias/Loomis 2004). In the German con-text, however, this research perspective and corresponding explanatory models can hardly be found. This is also true for the concept of 'Denied support discrimination' which Heckmann (2008: 24) considers to be a relevant explanatory approach for the significant disadvantage of particularly vulnerable children of minorities.

Despite a meanwhile extensive and differentiated data basis, the significant educational dis-advantage of children with a migration background in the German school system still cannot be explained to a satisfactory degree. As Diefenbach (2008. 157) put it, the explanatory ap-pro-aches are rather vague and the data is "overall dissatisfactory, as it is insufficient". This is still an accurate description.

Children with migration backgrounds in kindergarten

Further research is also needed with regard to young children with a migrant background in kindergarten. The younger the children are, the less empirically sound findings exist which could explain their (later) educational disadvantage (cf. Krüger et al. 2010: 9). There is infor-mation that ethnic educational inequality begins before children enter the school system (cf. Becker/ Biedinger 2010: 49). The quantitative empirical findings presented by Becker and Biedinger on early ethnic educational inequality show that migrant children – in line with the primary effect of social stratification in Boudon's sense – begin their school career with a "starting disadvantage" (cf. ibid).

It has been confirmed that fewer children with migration background attend pre-school insti-tutions (Diefenbach 2008), but also that attending kindergarten has a positive effect on these

children that should not be underestimated, especially with regard to the acquisition of the German language. The decisive factor is the length of the kindergarten attendance: the longer the attendance, the more positive are the effects, and the greater is the advantage (cf. Spi-ess/Büchel/Wagner 2003).

Despite such general statements based on initial statistics, it is commonly emphasized that further research in the area of early childhood is needed with regard to the production of inequality. The early setting of course seems to be highly relevant for the educational careers of migrant children. Furthermore, there are "sensitive phases in the educational process" (Blossfeld 1988) which should be examined in more detail. Starting disadvantages accumulate and are reinforced in the further educational process and, consequently, contribute to the eth-nic stratification. Therefore, according to Becker/Biedinger (2010: 75), more in-depth expla-nations for early educational inequality are needed, in particular longitudinal analyses (Ditton 2008).

While a relatively large number of quantitive findings on the disparate educational participation (especially in school) exist, qualitative analyses that examine the pedagogical everyday practices of the educational organizations are lacking. With regard to the production of educational inequality, Ditton (1995: 98) has described this context as black box since there are hardly any studies that have analyzed how everyday practices of teachers in different educa-tional organizations contribute to this production, how they are manifested in educational ca-reers and how this is subjectively experienced by the children.

This is where our research project, conducted since July 2011, comes in. The multi-layered micro-analysis on the production of educational inequality puts its main focus on the organizational frameworks of these pedagogical everyday practices in different educational organizations.

2. Theoretical and methodological aspects of the study

The starting point for our analysis is a praxeological theory perspective which states "that the social world is comprised of identifiable, individual, yet interwoven practices (plural): gov-erning practices, organizational practices, partnership practices, negotiation practices, practices of the self etc." (Reckwitz 2003: 289). Regarding the production of educational inequality, our study is based on the assumption that this inequality is also produced by pedagogical everyday differentiation practices (e.g. sufficient or insufficient language competencies, age development and development corresponding or not corresponding to norms, good or bad pupil, making or not making the grade) and reflected in individual educational biographies. Thus it is extending the common rational choice perspectives of quantitative empirical educa-tional research, which mainly explain educational inequality with decision theory. In this sense, inequality-relevant professional differentiation practices are also standardization prac-tices (cf. Kelle 2007) which represent organization-specific structural and functional charac-teristics. Educational organizations like kindergarten and school are the structural basis for the interactions and pedagogical prac-tices conducted in them. They shape and determine these practices, e.g. selectivity decisions in accordance to their functional and intrinsic logics (cf. Tacke 2004, Vanderstraeten 2004). The comparative analytical focus on both standardization and selectivity practices in the consecu-tive, although in their functional logic completely dif-ferent, organizations (cf. Diehm 2004) is supposed to make mechanisms of the production of educational inequality comprehensible.

Our longitudinal ethnographic study comparatively analyzes *everyday differentiation prac-*

tices of professionals in the consecutive educational organizations kindergarten and elementary school, which, with regard to children with a migration background, thus assuming ethnic heterogeneity[2], can generate educational inequality. A multi-layered analysis of such practices aims to reconstruct processes of the production of inequality, which occur over the long-term course of individual educational pathways.

The methodological difficulty is then the micro-macro connection, i.e. the transmission problem between micro and macro level, which has neither been convincingly solved empirically nor theoretically. The interactionist and ethnomethodological theories commonly used to analyze micro-processes of the production of differentiation in concrete everyday situations have a theoretical deficit with respect to inequality. Social inequalities cannot simply be deduced from micro-analytical approaches.

Limiting the analysis to the reconstruction of the situational production of difference does not make it possible to reveal the structural, cross-situational and historically entrenched power relations in which it is embedded (cf. Villa 2000: 68). In addition to this lack of historicity, micro-sociological approaches suffer from a lack of biographicity in their exclusive orientation along the situational and local production of difference (cf. Dausien / Kelle 2005). Inequalities, like those in education, cumulate individually and biographically, i.e. in the course of education through the system. 'Doing'-approaches (Fenstermaker/West 2001) make it possible to reconstruct practices of differentiation in the everyday contexts of educational organizations. This is done through the observation of constant interactive positing of rele-vance. They are also the basis for selectivity decisions, which inform and legitimize institu-tional promotion and decisions regarding the course of education, and can, in their accumula-tion, become educational inequalities. However, they can be reconstructed and visualized as educational inequalities only when biographical education processes are examined from a distance.

These theoretical and methodological limitations of micro-analytical in situ observations can be dealt with when using a longitudinal ethnographic research design which focuses on the pedagogical everyday practices – the black box of the production of educational inequality – from two perspectives:

(1) In a first step, 53 children with and without migration backgrounds are accompanied along their pathway through the educational system. The longitudinal analysis of their formal course of education in relation to that of their class is expected to reveal information on educational inequalities (diachronic observation).

(2) Secondly, organization-specific pedagogical differentiation practices in the educational organizations kindergarten and (elementary) school are compared micro-analytically (syn-chronic observation).

The first analytic phase of the research project covers three years in the kindergarten as well as the first year of elementary school. The second phase comprises the final three years of elementary school (grades 2, 3 and 4), the transition into the three-tiered secondary school system as well as grade 5. The third phase of the study covers grades 6, 7 and 8.

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2 We use the term ethnicity in line with the sociologist Max Weber, as encompassing nationality, culture, language and religion (Weber 1958).

3. Research questions and methodological design of the study

Our multi-perspective focus requires a combination of different research methods. In a longi-tudinal ethnography we will thus use the methods of participant observation, videography, document analysis, interviews with children as well as network analysis. For the sampling and evaluation of data, we use the research strategy and coding method of the Grounded Theory (Strauss/Corbin 1996).

Everyday practices of professionals

Assuming that educational inequality is, among other things, also produced by organization-specific differentiation practices of pedagogical professionals in their daily work, we examine and film their interactions on the micro-level of everyday pedagogical activity (cf. Denzin 2000). These everyday practices of professionals are then looked at from three perspectives:

(1) Firstly, we observe and film the interactions between professionals and children. Our special interest here is how children are addressed by the professionals, how they are encouraged to participate and communicate in the classroom as an everyday context, how they are posi-tioned and sanctioned with regard to space, and how they are described as showing high or low achievement. Our question is then how standardizing differentiation practices differ in kindergarten and elementary school.

(2) Secondly, we analyze so-called artefacts by means of document analysis, such as educational documentation and the standardized language development survey in North-Rhine-West-phalia Delfin4 in kindergarten, as well as the written achievement evaluations in elemen-tary school. The formalized methods of education- and achievement evaluation play a central role in the everyday practices in kindergarten and elementary school. Due to their textual form, they are effective far beyond the momentary situation. School certificates, for example, decide whether the child can pass or repeat a grade and thus have lasting structural effects on a child's course of education. Following the Laboratory Studies (vgl. Lynch 1985; Amann/Knorr-Cetina 1988), the Studies of Work (Bergmann 2006) and the Institutional Eth-nography (Smith 2005), the documentation practices will be examined regarding to what ex-tent these approaches pre-determine, structure and reproduce (cf. also Kelle 2003, 2007) "knowledge practices" (Law/Mol 2002). Using these artefacts, we ask how teachers describe and evaluate the educational and achievement level and what problems arise in that process? In addition, we ask what role such artefacts play in standardization processes of children in organizations; for example, how linguistic normalcy is confirmed or not through the Delfin4 approach? How do professionals produce and use these documents in everyday pedagogical practices? It is assumed that different practices of documentation produce inequalities with regard to educational, achievement or linguistic levels in different ways. In how far are the different documentation approaches in kindergarten and elementary school relevant for the production of educational inequality?

(3) Thirdly, we examine audio recorded material of interactions and conversations between professionals and parents that are obligatory for kindergarten and elementary school. We assume that the professionals, when talking about the children, produce standardized concepts and deviations of educational processes along the lines of differentiation practices and ne-goti-ate them with the parents. A comparative analysis of these conversations could provide in-formation on how the expectations of children to correspond to standards vary depending on the organization, be it kindergarten or elementary school. We thus ask which differentiation

practices are used to mark correspondences to and deviations from standard educational path-ways? In how far are artefacts like educational and achievement documentation the sub-ject in conversations with parents? In how far do professionals use these documents to under-score their arguments and recommendations (for special education)?

Perspectives of the children

Children experience the everyday differentiation practices of professionals in a subjective way. For a study on educational inequality, these have to be reconstructed from the perspec-tive of the actors. The examination of inequality as a subjective (or individual) biographical accumula-tion of experience can compensate the lack of biographicity of pure micro-analyses. We sample the perspectives of children during the course of their education from three per-spectives:

(1) Firstly, the children are interviewed in order to gain information on their subjective accu-mulation of experiences in the educational system. At the beginning of our study the children are only four-years-old and conducting interviews with them is therefore a methodological chal-lenge. For this reason, we use a modification of the so-called Mosaic Approach (Clark/Moss 2001; Clark et al. 2005) which has been developed for the qualitative surveying of young chil-dren. We ask the children questions about their experiences by referring to eve-ryday situa-tions. By using such ethnographical interviews (Spradley 1979, 1980), it is possible to generate (flexibly with regard to context) survey data throughout the entire field research. The primary goal of our study – the reconstruction of the individual biographical accumulation of experiences with regard to educational inequality – needs to be approached in a succesive manner among children of such a young age. We therefore conduct multiple interviews, proposed by Trautmann (2009: 101), in different time intervals and on partially varying topics. The narrative proportion within the interviews can be increased in correspondence to the children's increasing age. Here, we are interested in how children experience the differ-entiation practices of the professionals, i.e., for example, their positive or negative feedback? How do they estimate their strengths and weaknesses? In how far do they, in this case, com-pare themselves with other children of their kindergarten group or school class, and what kinds of differentiations do they use? How do children experience the language development survey Delfin4? How do children experience the transition from kindergarten to elementary school?

(2) Secondly, we observe and film the everyday practices of the children. Children experience the differentiation practices of the professionals in the course of their kindergarten or school day. A longitudinal ethnography surveys the situational reactions of children to such everyday labelling as well as the accumulation of such labelling processes in the course of time. On the one hand, we ask how children react to differentiation practices like achievement evaluations, competence evaluation, praise and reprehension. On the other hand, we ask what kinds of dynamics result from this within the children's group. Do children influence their peers through standardization practices, e.g. by insisting that they adhere to rules of the group? Do peer's cultural differentiation practices also contribute to the production of educational ine-quality? Are ethnic differentiations relevant for children?

(3) Thirdly, by using network analyses, we survey the peer-relations in their dynamics in kin-dergarten and at the elementary schools. Following Delfos' (2004) proposal to interview young children in a context where they play, we combine the qualitative network analysis with the photograph-based collage method of the Mosaic Approach. As already practiced by Häußling (2007, 2008), by using a frame story, we encourage the children to name network members of

their kindergarten group (resp. their school class) to whom they feel emotionally attached by picking out photographs. Additionally, this photograph-based approach serves as a stimulus for questioning the children about their subjective perceptions, experiences and estimation of these network relationships. The results of the formal network analysis are visu-alized through network pictures (construction of a cluster) (Straus 2002: 219, 223). The inter-views conducted during the network analysis are interpreted according to the coding method of the Grounded Theory (cf. among others Pelizäus-Hoffmeister 2006). We ask in how far different educational success can have effects on the peer-relationships in the everyday con-text of kindergarten and elementary school. Are peer-relationships structured along specific characteristics (e.g. ethnic heterogeneity, achievement homogeneity) and are they then rele-vant with regard to inequality? What dynamics of peer-relationships can be represented by individual children's course of edu-cation? What experiences regarding inclusion and exclusion are biographically accumulated among the children?

Formal courses of education

By using the educational and achievement documentations that are produced during the course of education (language test results, school certificates, or also recommendations to at-tend special schools, recommendations to enter school at a later date), the formal educa-tional success of individual children is reconstructed in a longitudinal perspective. These re-sults are put in relation to the previously surveyed structural data regarding their background (educa-tional achievements, migration background, native language of their families, wage status, fam-ily forms). The analysis of formal courses of education of the surveyed children is necessary in order to adequately contextualize and interpret observations as well as results of the survey. By means of an examination of the educational success of these children in rela-tion to their peers in class, conclusions can then be drawn with regard to educational inequal-ity.

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