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School as a Place of Socialisation and Learning - an International Comparison on School Reality: Description of the Project

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School as a Place of Socialisation and Learning – an International Comparison on School Reality: Description of the Project

Summary:

This paper describes the research project "School as a Place of Socialisation and Learning – an International Comparison on School Reality" at the German Institute for International Educational Research. Central dimensions of the project are "time for school", "curricula in school", and "assessment and evaluation in school". They are presented here, and the research procedures are illustrated by the "studies on time". First comparative results of these can be found in the papers of Wolfgang Huck in this volume.

Erziehungsraum Schule – Ein internationaler Vergleich zur Schulwirklichkeit: Beschreibung des Projekts

Zusammenfassung:

Dieser Beitrag beschreibt das Forschungsprojekt "Erziehungsraum Schule – ein internationaler Vergleich zur Schulwirklichkeit" des Deutschen Instituts für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung. Die Dimensionen "Zeit für Schule", "Curricula in der Schule" und "Prüfungen und Leistungsmessungen" stehen im Mittelpunkt des Projekts und werden hier dargestellt. Die Forschungsprozeduren werden am Beispiel der "Zeitstudien" dargestellt. Erste vergleichende Ergebnisse der "Zeitstudien" sind in den Beiträgen von Wolfgang Huck in diesem Band enthalten.

1. Introduction

The research project "School as a Place of Socialisation and Learning – an International Comparison on School Reality" at the German Institute for International Educational Research was started in 1987 within the greater frame of the research area which is dealing with "schools in the process of social change". To gain insight in "school reality" we tried to move away from the path of structural description and analyses. Instead, the attempt was made to get insight into the functioning of various educational systems from the perspective of the student. It is envisaged to finalise this project in 1995. Four main items will be subject of international comparisons:

- time for school,
- curricula in school,
- assessment and evaluation in school, and
- teaching methods/teaching styles in school.

This paper will deal with the first three items and the process of research in this project, which will be illustrated especially by the item "time for school".

2. Time for school

Knowledge on "time for school" in an international comparison seems easily to be acquired. Physical time units like the year, months, weeks, days, hours are common to anybody and there seem to be no difficulties to their application in the educational field. But the European educational systems, having grown over centuries, have build up peculiar habits to use time in their every-day school life. These every-day situations have become the main target of the project. Periods of instruction are lasting 35, 40, 45, 55 or 60 minutes; their duration can even differ between the morning and the afternoon. This makes comparisons difficult and requires a reduction of each system down to comparable units, in this case it is "minutes". Then it is possible to aggregate data to more understandable units like "hours", etc. Besides comparable units it is necessary to have defined categories for the comparison. As there are many differences between the systems, these categories should be drawn from existing similarities and insight into the details of the systems.

Normally, knowledge on "time for school" is not produced in this way. International agencies like EURYDICE, which is the information system on education of the European Community and at the same time background of governmental knowledge in this international field of the 12 member states, normally collect data and information which are compiled to documentation on various issues. To give an example on the length of the school year:

- Denmark and Italy report: 200 days
- Ireland reports: 184 days at primary level
- Germany reports: 75 days of holidays per year.

These reports are correct from the national perspective of each country, but they are not comparable. A lot of additional information is necessary for an international comparison. First of all, comparable definitions of what is needed and in which way various components are to be structured are requested, to receive at least a fair comparison. Thus the task of the project has been to find comparable data, even if they are not of the same empirical standard. The best way would have been to have representative random sampling in all countries involved as a basis of comparison. But this way is very time-consuming, highly expensive and in the case where it is "specific hypothesis testing" there are some doubts, whether or not national peculiarities – which are important for the interpretations of results – can be carefully taken into account. Apart from these problems of representative research it is at least doubtful whether the results will be better in terms of content afterwards.

Being aware of the problems of data from international agencies on one hand and problems of deductive, pure empirical research – which has a value in itself – on the other, we decided to move on with our research in an inductive way for two reasons:

- we did not know what we would discover through our questions on time for school in the various countries; if we had have known we would not have had to do research on it;
- there was only a limited amount of money available for an international comparative study.

In November 1988 we published a series of workshop reports on nine countries. These reports were based on a set of questions and items of interest that should be incorporated and answered in each of the reports, but *not* on defined categories, which are comparable in itself. Comparing

the nine workshop reports we found considerable differences with regard to similar problems. E.g. time for assessment at secondary level in Greece, which is two weeks at the end of the school year, had been extracted from instructional time, whereas time for continuous assessment during the school year in Germany remained within instructional time, as we could not extract it without an in-depth-study on the assessment procedures in Germany to find out the real difference between "instructional time" and "time for assessment". So we left "time for assessment" within "instructional time", to have at least a fair comparison between the countries.

From these nine workshop reports we have drawn the definitions for three categories of time for school:

- Instructional time is defined as: "the time during which instruction is taking place, including assessment and examination time".
- Time in school: "total of time spent in school, including instructional time, changeover time, recreation periods, study and assembly times, that is, the entire period from the official beginning to the end of the school day".
- School-related time: "this includes total time in school, along with time spent on home work assignments/study, travel time to and from school, as well as time devoted to tuition outside of normal school hours either privately organised and paid like "grinds" or publicly organised and financed as additional offers".

According to this definitions the workshop reports have been revised and in some cases amended, as they did not comprise the whole range of the school system from relevant pre-primary schools to the end of upper secondary general education. Meanwhile these nine studies have been published and additional studies have been produced for six other countries. All of them are the background of the comparison on "Time for school". These procedures have also been selected to make the national peculiarities as well as visible as the comparative data and analyses. The procedures and methods of the project can be summed up as four steps:

1. Writing of workshop reports for each country according to a common set of questions of interest and/or some kind of a proposed common structure of the reports. The situation from pre-school activities (if relevant) until the end of upper secondary general education should be described and analysed. Workshop reports will be printed for internal and external communication of the project.

2. Development of more narrow and precise definitions and questions from the workshop reports, aiming at comparable analyses, data and descriptions.
3. Revision and amendment of workshop reports for publication as country reports within a series of the institute.
4. Elaborate an international comparison on each of the four main items of the project.

If there is sufficient capacity, two further dimensions of comparison have been envisaged. One is the national comparison along the four main items together with a historically oriented study on the origins of the phenomena, a second is an international overall comparison on the four items and their impact on "school reality".

3. Curriculum

"Curriculum" is understood as the whole content of the living – and learning – process in instruction, as well as extra-curricular and social activities related to school.

This far-reaching definition shall comprise the whole content of work in school and related to school analogue to the far-reaching definition of "times": "time for instruction", "time in school", and "school-related time". We think there is a huge diversity of correlation between "instruction, leading to success in school", "additional extra-curricular offers by the school itself or in relation with others institutions" and "social life inside school and in connection with the community". It can be assumed that there are different situations, e.g. when the school is intervening in student's life with an enlarged time consumption beyond time for instruction, home work or additional offers determining this "extra" time. Altogether we want to find out "what is the content of time that is spent by students in school and in school related activities?" In a more simplistic sense the workshop reports shall also answer the question: "is school regarded as a place of preparation for life (postponing relevance of school activities for life at a later moment, following the time of schooling) or is school understood as a vital part of student's life, where his/her actual interests of life are taken into account too?"

Of central interest is the question of "relative autonomy of the individual school" in a position between two extremes:

1. Curriculum of the single teacher in terms of methods and content – as one of the extremes.
2. Relative autonomy of the individual school as an entity in terms of methods and content.
3. Curriculum of the state in terms of prescribed and controlled content and methods.

The following questions are also of basic interest:

- how is the content of the curriculum implemented in the individual school?
- what is the role of the individual school in the implementation process of the curriculum?
- what is the role of the teacher in this process?
- what is the basic function of the school:
 - a) an essential part of preservation of national identity, or
 - b) a relative autonomous section of public service?

In which way it is foreseen to elaborate on the respective workshop reports, can be seen from the example in annex 1, dealing with the Republic of Ireland.

4. Assessment and evaluation

This part of the project shall deal with practical questions of assessment and evaluation seen from the perspective of the students, as the other items generally were regarded too. The practical questions will be of the following kind:

- is there continuous or punctual assessment throughout the school year?
- what is the relationship between written and oral testing?
- are there general rules on assessment, and in which way are they used?
- what is the dominant model: internal or external assessment?
- is assessment used as a means of keeping discipline?
- what is the process of assessment from the beginning of schooling to the end of upper secondary general education?
- is there repetition, to what degree, following which rules and regulations?
- what are procedures for formal assesment like marking, in which way are these procedures practised?

- what is the role of different subjects of the curriculum for annual promotion?
- is there a second chance to prevent repetition?
- are there any empirical national studies in this field?
- what is the influence of international testing on national changes in assessment?
- what is the national habit/culture towards assessment and evaluation?

Details of materials and questions asked for the reports on assessment and evaluation are listed in annex 2.

Annex 1

Workshop Report "Curricula in school - Ireland"

Draft of a structure of the report

1. Preliminary remarks or introduction with hints on the following items:
 - aims and structure of the report
 - methods of information collection and sources
 - hints on supportive persons (who participated?)
 - introduction into the topic "curriculum": what is special and contextual in Ireland?
 - the structure and content of the report
2. Legal and historical background of Irish curricula
 - 2.1 Historical background of the Irish curriculum
 - the aims in the constitution and major developments
 - why is there a lack of an educational law as a link between the constitution and the existing rules?
 - influence of court decisions on the curriculum, etc.
 - 2.2 New requirements from the European Community
 - Maastricht and general education
 - More and earlier foreign language education
 - more exchange of students and teachers
 - 2.3 The "Green Paper" and its impact on curriculum
 - 2.3.1 Requirements from the OECD-report
 - 2.3.2 Culliton Report
 - 2.3.3 The "Green Paper"
 - 2.3.4 Major aims and objectives
 - 2.3.4.1 Primary schools
 - 2.3.4.2 Secondary schools

- 2.4 Major aims and issues in the rules and regulations
 - 2.4.1 Infant schools
 - 2.4.2 Primary schools
 - 2.4.3 Secondary schools (including secondary schools, comprehensives, etc.)
 - 2.4.4 Provision of resources (curricula, textbooks, rooms, gymnasiums, special rooms for science and practical activities, creative subjects, media ..., etc.)
 - 2.4.5 The role of the National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) as a developing agency
 - 2.4.6 Regulations for special schools
- 2.5 How is the curriculum controlled?
 - 2.5.1 Textbooks, etc.
 - 2.5.2 Inspectorate
 - 2.5.3 NCCA as a controlling agency
 - 2.5.4 The role of state examinations (JCE, LCE, etc.)
- 2.6 Basic curricular principles
 - class teacher from infant to grade 6, little differentiation
 - subject teacher (how many subjects?) in grade 7-11
 - orientation of (obligatory?)-optional courses, determinants of subject choice in secondary schools
 - principles of training of primary and secondary school teachers
- 3 Analysis of curricula
 - 3.1 Child centred curricula, syllabus and options
 - 3.1.1 Curricula in the infant school
 - 3.1.2 Curricula in the primary schools (including experiments, "European dimension", foreign languages)
 - 3.1.3 Curricula in the junior cycle of post-primary schools
 - 3.1.3.1 School year 1988/89
 - 3.1.3.2 School year 1992/93
 - 3.1.4 Curricula in the senior cycle of post-primary
 - 3.1.4.1 School year 1988/89
 - 3.1.4.2 School year 1992/93 (including the "transition year")
 - 3.2 Curricula in Ireland – quantitative analysis of official rules (how many hours are devoted to what? Or: what is the official allocation of time under which conditions?)
 - 3.2.1 Infant schools
 - 3.2.2 Primary schools
 - 3.2.3 Junior cycle
 - 3.2.4 Senior cycle

- 3.3 Extra-curricular activities and community involvement and its time-dimension (festivities, performances of the school in music, theatre, etc., games, project weeks, involvement of the community and the environment, "opening of the school towards life and other places of learning, experiences and work")
 - 3.3.1 Infant schools
 - 3.3.2 Primary schools
 - 3.3.3 Junior cycle
 - 3.3.4 Senior cycle
- 3.4 Curricula – qualitative analysis (relations of the subjects, significance of Irish, English and foreign languages, significance of mathematics and science, social studies, religious instruction, aesthetic-creative instruction, practical instruction, physical education, relations between the curriculum and extra-curricular activities)
- 3.5 Additional instruction outside school
 - 3.5.1 Foreign language instruction (especially in the primary)
 - 3.5.2 Music, arts, sports
 - 3.5.3 "Grinds" in general (including foreign languages that are taught in the secondary schools)
- 3.6 How are textbooks recognised? How many different textbooks are recognised in 1992/93 (appendix/documentation: official guidelines for the publication of textbooks/list of textbooks in 1992/93)
- 3.7 Curricula in Ireland – a first summary of the official position (how things ought to be?)
- 4 Curricula in school-practice (how is the official curriculum put into practice of the case-studies?)
 - 4.1 General aspects of planning and delivery of the curriculum, differences in resources, necessary caveats, choice of cases
 - 4.1.1 Primary schools (one in a deprived area, one in "suburbia", or another one)
 - 4.1.2 Secondary schools (secondary school, comprehensive school in ...)
 - 4.1.3 Planning of curricular processes (content and pedagogy), relation towards the environment (either parents/students involvement in the planning/decision process, influence and relation to the community)
 - 4.2 Case study 1: Primary school ... (No. 1)
 - 4.2.1 General data and description of the school (number of pupils, classes, teachers, rooms, special rooms, sports grounds, gymnasium, arts room, practical special rooms ...)
 - 4.2.2 Curricular planning and activities in infant classes (including planning for the year, the week, etc.)

Annex 2

Workshop Report "Examinations in school – England and Wales"

In this workshop report the procedures, modes and frequency of assessment in English schools shall be described from the infant schools until the end of post-sixteen general education. Assessment is assumed to be directed towards the performance and the conduct of the students (e.g. motivation, commitment, conduct, attention). This report should comprise the rules and regulations as well as their application in school. Secondary literature on the social thinking of or about exams should be mentioned.

Basis of the report is the structure for "Examination and assessment in school" of the research project "School as a Place of Socialisation and Learning – an International Comparison on School Reality" of the German Institute for International Educational Research. In this case the structure of questions has been transformed into a structure of the workshop report and has been adapted to the English situation. Under "Material" we have named the basic sources that should be incorporated and under "Questions" the content (the answers) that should be presented in the respective chapter.

Background of this report is the ongoing debate on the "National Curriculum and Assessment" in England and Wales. New assessment schemes, being introduced with the National Curriculum in 1988, and – at the same time – the application of traditional assessment schemes in primary and secondary education; some shifts in the application of the new schemes etc. give evidence of a major change and its uncertainties. Information on both situations, the traditional and the new is necessary. The report will deal with the maintained sector of schooling mainly, but some comparisons with the (private) independent sector are indispensable and should comprise quantitative data.

Structure, Material, Questions

Chapter 1

- 1 Introduction
- 1.1 Aims of the report
- 1.2 Methods and sources
- 1.3 The role of examinations and assessment

Material:

an overview of the report and its aims, description of research methods and the sources used, introduction into the problem and phenomenon of exams and assessment

Chapter 2

- 2 Exams and assessment between 1967 and 1988
- 2.1 Role of exams
- 2.2 Classroom assessment

Material:

- rules and regulations
- secondary literature

Questions:

- which forms of exams existed in primary/secondary schools earlier, connections with teachers' payment (external exams) ...?
- what kind of selective exams existed between primary and secondary education and within secondary education, what were the chances of candidates?
- what had been the backwash effect of exams or entrance exams on the previous school stage?
- what kinds of competition existed (E.g. for scholarships)?
- what are the differences between the maintained and independent sector of education?
- what has been the reason and content for the shift towards national assessment schemes in 7, 11, 14, 16?
- in which way has the GCE-A exam changed?

Chapter 3

- 3 Exams and certificates in English and Welsh schools 1992/93
- 3.1 Infant classes
- 3.2 Primary schools
- 3.3 Secondary schools (11-16) and GCSE
- 3.4 Post-sixteen schools in general education and GCE A-Level

Material

- rules and regulations
- official circulars
- secondary literature

Questions

- how is the system of assessment determined?
- are there internal and/or external exams?
- are there terminal or continuous kinds of assessment?
- what is the basic format/type of exams and certificates?
- what is the role of exams and certificates in public life and what are the expectations of parents, intaking institutions of education, employers, etc.?
- what role is played by certificates and exams in vocational decisions and in occupation?

- which role play certificates and exams for further education?
- are there differences between the maintained and independent sector?
- are there gender differences?

Chapter 4

- 4 Assessment of student performance, marks and promotion 1992/93
- 4.1 Infant classes
- 4.2 Primary schools
- 4.3 Secondary education (11-16)
- 4.4 Post-sixteen general education

Material

- rules, regulations
- circulars
- secondary literature

Questions

- which formats of assessment of students performance exist:
 - a) related to every-day practice?
 - b) related to the school year, the three terms?
 - c) related to the stages during the period of schooling?
 - d) how often is which format of assessment being used?
(per day, per week, per school year, during the whole period of schooling)
- which format of assessment dominates at various levels?
- what role do marks (in figures/letters) play, and for what level of schooling?
- which rules for marks in figures/letters do exist?
- are there rules for other kinds of assessment?
- what are the basic principles/fundamentals for assessment?
- what is the basic orientation of assessment? ("Knowledge and 'learning by heart' = product orientation" or "process orientation, problem solving, self evaluation of the student")
- is there objective and obligatory assessment?
- are there nation-wide tests/assessment schemes? (E.g. public exams vs. local or school-based internal exams)
- are there special/compulsory guidelines for the practice of assessment and evaluation?
- which rules/aids exist for teachers?
- what degree of discretion (Ermessen) exists for teachers, how do they use it?
- how are the criteria for assessment made transparent and valid for the students?
- what is the relationship between pedagogical functions of assessment and their function towards selection and entitlement; resp. is there an evaluation (even self-evaluation) of learner's performance or a control in the sense of selection?

- what format of failure is there ("repetition") from infant to final classes? What is the rate of failure (repetition) in % and absolute figures per year?
- which format is there in case of cheating during tests, class work, assessment?

Chapter 5

- 5 Practice of assessment and certification in Dorset
- 5.1 Infant classes
- 5.2 Primary schools
- 5.3 Secondary schools (11-16)
- 5.4 Post-sixteen general education

Material

- if possible: case studies for the different levels of schooling
- reports from the assessment unit Dorset Educational Authority
- experience-based material
- illustrative material for the situation in Dorset County
- secondary literature

Questions:

- which formal stages of assessment exist and how are they applied/used in practice (marking by figures/letters in stages from ... to ...; meaning of stages)?
- what is the relation of single subjects (core subjects and others) with regard to success in given years of schooling? Are there possibilities of compensation for bad/good performance between the subjects?
- how many assessments occur during and at the end of each school year, what form do these assessments take (class work, exercise tests, tests on a loose sheet of paper, oral but marked tests, marked home work, essay writing at home, standardised tests); what amount of time is needed for that?
- how are the dimensions of behaviour assessed (motivation, conduct, attention, commitment in school) and how are these assessments mentioned in certificates (as figures/letters or texts; please give some examples)?
- what are the relations between the marks for "behaviour" and the marks for academic achievement? Are marks for behaviour included into the marks for academic achievement in cases when there are no separated marks for behaviour?
- how are the learners involved in assessment and evaluation, in which ways are the criteria for assessment made transparent?
- which format of failure (e.g. repetition) is used in the various grades from infant to the end of post-sixteen education? How many children out of ... (as a whole of the grade) did not succeed in the school year 1991/92 in their class or in the respective exams (absolute and in % of the given grade)?
- what has been done to prevent failure? Is there a format of remediation or "second chance", e.g. an exam in one or two subjects after the end of the school year and how is this format applied?

- how consistently have the regulations on "cheating" been applied in the schools? What happens if someone is caught e.g. in a written exam/class work, etc.? How many of these cases occurred in the schools during the past two years?

Chapter 6

Concluding remarks

Annex 3

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT

I Volumes published at Böhlau-Verlag, Köln, Weimar and Vienna as parts of "Studien zu vergleichenden Bildungsforschung", ed. by Wolfgang Mitter

Vol. 48: ZEIT FÜR SCHULE

- 1 Peter Döbrich/Wolfgang Huck/Gerlind Schmidt
BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND/
DEUTSCHE DEMOKRATISCHE REPUBLIK. 1990.
- 2 Botho von Kopp
JAPAN. 1990.
- 3 Heliodor Muszynski/Leonid Novikov
POLEN/SOWJETUNION. 1990.
- 4 Günter Brinkmann/Peter Döbrich/Joannis Pirgiotakis
GRIECHENLAND/ITALIEN. 1991.
- 5 Günter Brinkmann/John Peters/Peter Stokes
ENGLAND und WALES/NIEDERLANDE. 1991.
- 6 Hermann-Günter Hesse/Christoph Kodron
FRANKREICH/SPANIEN. 1991.

II Workshop Reports

Frankfurt am Main: German Institute for International Educational Research
(Nos. 1-9 have been replaced by the above volumes)

- 10 Rüdiger Haug
ZEIT IN DER SCHULE: DEUTSCHLAND (WEST)
FALLBEISPIEL: FREIE WALDORFSCHULE. 1991.

- 11 Peter Döbrich
ZEIT FÜR SCHULE: DEUTSCHLAND (WEST)
ABITUR NACH 12 JAHREN? 1991.
- 12 Andrew Burke/Peter Döbrich/Ciaran Sugrue
TIME FOR SCHOOL:
IRELAND. 1991.
- 15 Heliodor Muszynski
CURRICULA IN DER SCHULE: POLEN. 1991.
- 16 Günter Brinkmann
CURRICULA IN DER SCHULE: ITALIEN. 1991.
- 17 Fu Li
CURRICULA IN DER SCHULE: CHINA: 1991:
- 18 Maria Miclescu
CURRICULA IN DER SCHULE: SPANIEN. 1992.