



“Training for all” calls for a pedagogy of diversity

► The aim behind the principle of “training for all” is to enable all young people to achieve integration into employment and society through an initial vocational qualification in a skilled occupation. It is the vision of inclusive education to give all young people access to high-quality education, putting everyone in a position to develop his or her potential. In the UNESCO “Education for All” programme this is formulated as a universal aspiration, irrespective of a person’s gender, social and economic conditions or particular learning needs. This article looks at which steps have been taken, what has been achieved so far and where further action is needed in order to progress towards this goal. It also asks how important the concept of inclusion is for the assistance of disadvantaged individuals in the vocational training system.

Training for all – becoming a reality?

The policy objective of “training for all” is by no means new. German education policy guidelines have referred to it since the 1960s with the intention of using target-group appropriate training strategies to integrate “excluded” and “disadvantaged” learners into vocational education processes. The result has been increasing diversification and modification of the German system of recognised occupations and vocational training. Yet fundamental structural changes to the vocational education and training (VET) system as a whole have not taken place – although they have been called for repeatedly (cf. inter alia Deutscher Bildungsrat 1970, EULER/SEVERING 2007). Instead, changes were made primarily in relation to the specific field of assisting disadvantaged individuals. These involved not only adaptations to a labour market situation affected by structural changes of a technological, occupational and social nature but also adaptations due to the diversifying and changing nature of the target group. Young people seeking initial vocational education and training (IVET) in a recognised occupation are becoming increasingly diverse, taking account of such factors as nationality, age, gender and living circumstances.

The almost unmanageable proliferation of special programmes that grew up in the 1980s/1990s, supported by the Federal Government, the German Länder and the EU, contributed in part to the emergence of a specific system for assisting disadvantaged individuals. Alongside dual-system and full-time school-based training, a third sector has become established within the vocational education system: it is known as the “transition system” although it only enables a small proportion of (disadvantaged) young people to accomplish transitions into training programmes conferring a full vocational qualification.

ASSISTING DISADVANTAGED INDIVIDUALS AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

With the resolutions of the working group on “Initial and Continuing Vocational Education and Training” of the former “Alliance for Jobs, Training and Competitiveness”,



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assistance for disadvantaged individuals in the vocational training system was defined as a permanent task and an integral component of vocational education, irrespective of developments in the apprenticeship place market (cf. BMBF 2000). The consensus was that training prospects should be improved, particularly for young people “without a school-leaving qualification but with often considerable behavioural and learning problems”. To this end, the broad-scale provision of specific measures to prevent disadvantaged target groups from missing out on training was deemed to be a “permanent necessity” (ibid). The BQF programme (“Vocational qualifications for target groups with special needs”), launched by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in 2001, took up this issue. Its foremost objective was further structural development of assistance for disadvantaged individuals in the vocational system; “training for all” and “integration through qualification” were the central guidelines. In this context, a “new assistance structure” for prevocational training was developed and piloted (cf. inter alia THIEL 2001). The resultant broad-scale introduction of the strategic concept for vocational preparation schemes (German Social Code, Book III, Section 61) was intended to foster apprenticeship-entry maturity, career choice and integration into IVET. After an introductory diagnostic test, young people should receive optimal assistance in the form of individual support plans and tailored educational strategies. Since then, efforts have focused on increasing the company-based, practical share of training and on forming regional networks. Regional cooperation and integration of both training provision and stakeholders are currently being pursued by the BMBF in its “Vocational qualification prospects” programme (2008–2012) and “Education chains leading to vocational qualifications” initiative in the aim of improving the transition into dual-system IVET (cf. www.perspektiveberufsabschluss.de and www.bmbf.de/de/14737.php; cf. also interview with PETER THIELE in BWP 2/2011).

IS A SPECIAL PEDAGOGY REQUIRED FOR ASSISTING DISADVANTAGED INDIVIDUALS?

In the last three decades, assisting disadvantaged individuals has successively developed as a field of activity in its own right. Its specific feature is that the need for assistance is justified by particular criteria of disadvantage, which are attributed to particular individuals. BOJANOWSKI (2005, pp. 331 f.) talks about a group of young people with problems on multiple levels. Particularly in the early days of “IVET oriented to social pedagogy” (1980) separate learning settings were developed for this target group. The particular strength of these lay in the handling of heterogeneity, diversity and difference. This approach was limited to the field of assisting disadvantaged individuals, however, and was not transferred to the German VET system as a whole. Thus assistance to disadvantaged individuals

developed (apparently) independently from the “mainstream system” and increasingly became a “parallel system” in the 1990s (cf. BRAUN 1999). Clear reservations were voiced about a “pedagogy for assisting disadvantaged individuals”. Criticisms were directed at the orientation to deficits, the labelling engendered by the (apparent) special nature of the strategies, and their relative lack of effectiveness. All pedagogic concepts will always collide with the boundaries of institutional structures, VET system structures and the limits imposed on social-state authorities by the laws governing assistance (cf. ENGRUBER 2001; RÜTZEL 2000). Thus pedagogic concepts focused on the objective of “training for all” are of limited effectiveness.

The particular within the general

Thus, the question remains: does the particular need its own pedagogy or do the general learning arrangements of vocational pedagogy apply? A pedagogy for disadvantaged individuals in a specifically designated field of activity harbours the risk of entrenching their excluded status. At the same time, expert knowledge is called for so as to initiate individualised learning processes and to integrate specific contextual conditions. This is currently being debated as an aspect of “diversity competence”. KIMMELMANN (2010, p. 10) describes diversity competences not exclusively as “special competencies” but as “abilities that are fundamentally relevant to vocational education”. “Openness and interest towards the individual learner and his or her personality as it impacts on learning” are numbered among its central features.

DIVERSITY AS A RESOURCE: FROM INTEGRATION TO INCLUSION

In the pedagogy of special education, inclusion is seen as an extended and “optimised integration” (cf. SANDER 2002): integration incorporates special educational support for specific target groups, it is suggested, whereas inclusion takes account of all learners, each with their own specific educational needs. Another author pointing in this direction is HINZ (2004), who describes the inclusion concept as the “theory of a pedagogically indivisible heterogeneous group”, which provides for collective but individual learning and an individualised curriculum for all. What is significant is that people with disabilities or disadvantages are no longer considered within the inclusion concept as self-contained groups “in need of assistance”.

In that sense, the inclusion concept is helpful for work to assist disadvantaged individuals, since the systemic approach – unlike an individual-centred approach as used in integration pedagogy – pursues the institution of a comprehensive system for all. In applied terms, what this means

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The literature database currently comprises approximately 56,000 literature references dating back to the year of publication 1988. Materials evaluated for the LDBB include essays published in journals, articles from edited volumes, monographs, conference documentation and grey literature. Furthermore, references to online documents, that are directly linked with the respective full text, are increasingly being made available within the database.

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is that (vocational) pedagogy directs its focus towards each individual's prerequisites for learning (subject orientation), takes account of young people's competencies and existing support structures (resource orientation), their social living conditions and milieus (system orientation), and actively involves young people in learning processes (participation).

If the principle of inclusion is pursued, then assisting disadvantaged individuals ought to be part and parcel of general pedagogy. Specific aspects must be reflected in a system of didactics that can engage with young people's common features and differences in equal measure – which is implicit to “subject orientation” (cf. RÜTZEL 2000). This is clearly associated with a competence- and resource-oriented approach.

“PREVENTION”: THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS INCLUSION?

Effective early assistance for school pupils in the context of vocational orientation, which begins during their general schooling, is based on the principle that “prevention is better than cure”. If we see prevention as “prospective problem avoidance” which is not oriented solely to individual deficits and the objective of which is to create equal opportunities for young people, it points in the same direction as the inclusion concept. To that extent the question is whether prevention can be considered as the first step towards inclusion. A prerequisite would be that early intervention tackles different levels of the system, addressing such aspects as:

- the individual and an appropriate form of individual support to counteract the process whereby disadvantage develops,
- the structural risk factors, which relate to the individual and which exist because of cultural or social background, gender, level of educational qualification, etc.
- the learning context and the development of integrated and subject-oriented learning situations with individualised learning support (individual support plan), and
- the structural risk factors that relate to the selective structures of the mainstream system (e.g. the tripartite school system).

Only then can systemic and contextual conditions come about in which all young people are reached and enabled to learn, in conditions which foster the development of their potential. This can only be accomplished if, for example, vocational orientation is embedded as a segment in a systematic transition process from school into working life, and if changes are implemented on the institutional level (e.g. school), to education concepts and curricula (e.g. the school programme, educational support), to the regional context (regional transition management) and, not least, in the education system itself (integrative school types, modularisation within VET).

Need for action on different system levels

As this brief reconstruction shows, assistance for disadvantaged individuals has constantly undergone further horizontal and vertical differentiation. It has long lost its originally envisaged function as a short-term steering and intervention instrument (cf. MÜNK 2008, p. 32). Despite enormous resources, its effectiveness is limited (cf. inter alia TIMMERMANN 2004). The aspirations to take account of different learning prerequisites and to strengthen social and personal competencies and integration into IVET and employment are only partly being fulfilled. Although the authors of the 16th Shell Youth Study (cf. ALBERT/HUR-

RELMANN/QUENZEL 2010) state that the majority of young people look optimistically to the future, confidence among the most socially disadvantaged individuals clearly remains on a downward trend. This affects young people who are lower achievers at school, those with migrant backgrounds, and young women, especially young mothers (cf. BEICHT/ULRICH 2008).

Analyses on selection in the education system point to systemic structures as the principle inhibitors of successful vocational integration (cf. e.g. CHRISSTE/REISCH/WENDE 2009). For example, MÜNK (2008, p. 44 f.) sees clinging to the dual system as the “high road” as the principal cause of the transition system’s dysfunctionality, since that mindset turns the dual system into a bottleneck and leads to exclusion instead of integration. The findings of MÜLLER-BENEDIKT (2007), that changes in system structures are more promising than intensive individual assistance, are significant in this context.

Even so, concepts involving support and assistance must not be overlooked. Learning processes begin with the learners themselves and their potential as the starting point. Existing methods of vocational, special and social pedagogy (including exemplified learning, subject orientation and empowerment) are being implemented and refined successfully in the practice of assisting disadvantaged young people. They remain ineffective, however, when they collide with rigid, unchangeable institutional or systemic boundaries.

Thus the idea of inclusion extends perspectives for action because it points out the necessity for change on different levels of the system levels without neglecting the importance of factors relating to the individual. Individual risks of disadvantage can only be eliminated in conjunction with changes on the structural level, i.e. leaving special measures behind and changing the mainstream structures. This also involves embracing the aspect of lifelong learning, and shaping the education system in such a way that it opens up access and educational opportunities to anyone, whatever their biography. Important elements to accomplish this include modularised training courses, credit systems, competence and output orientation as well as certified competencies that are not specific to any given learning venue. To allow individuals to develop their potential, the design of the education system needs to be oriented to the education policy guidelines of inclusion, the goal of which is to open up and change the mainstream system. ■

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