

Monographie pays

Education in Germany: Missions and Challenges

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Avertissement

Ce document fait partie d'une étude de Futuribles International sur les défis auxquels seront confrontés les systèmes d'enseignement et de formation en France à l'horizon de 15 ans et sur les pistes innovantes qui pourraient être suivies dès aujourd'hui pour les relever.

Cette étude a donné lieu à la réalisation :

- d'un document de diagnostic sur le système d'enseignement et de formation français ;
- d'une dizaine de notes thématiques portant sur les principaux déterminants (démographiques, économiques, sociaux, culturels, scientifiques ou techniques) qui apparaissent porteurs de transformations profondes tant des objectifs suivis par les structures d'enseignement et de formation que des modalités d'apprentissage ;
- de monographies portant sur l'organisation et le fonctionnement de cinq systèmes éducatifs de pays membres de l'Union européenne, ainsi que sur les enjeux auxquels ils sont confrontés.
- d'un catalogue de 85 innovations repérées en Europe et dans le monde, dont l'objectif est de stimuler la réflexion sur les différentes possibilités de réformes des dispositifs d'éducation et de formation français ;
- d'un rapport final proposant une synthèse des principales tendances structurantes pour l'avenir des systèmes éducatifs et des enjeux qui y sont associés.

Cette étude a pour ambition d'être utile aux acteurs publics et privés intervenant dans les champs de l'éducation et de la formation, en leur fournissant des éléments de réflexion prospective appropriables et des idées d'actions pouvant être menées à différentes échelles pour moderniser les dispositifs existants.

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Introduction

To understand the main goals and aims of education in Germany and the way these aims are supposed to be achieved through the education system, at least five constitutive elements of German education have to be considered: (1) the institutional and organizational structure; (2) the interplay of education with the other sub-systems of German society, that is to say, the political mission attributed to education as part of the political reproduction of German society; (3) the economic role education plays in providing qualifications for the labour market; (4) the cultural traditions and visionary missions attributed to education by its key actors, not least, by German education professionals, namely the teachers. Finally, the fifth and most important element is the curriculum, mediating the above different objectives via the process of acquiring knowledge and skills.

Any deeper understanding of how these four elements shape education in Germany – and of all the older and recent reform strategies – not only needs to describe these five elements, but to discuss the tensions and conflicts between them. It is, in fact, the tensions between these elements that shape the aims and dynamics of how these aims are approached, achieved or not achieved, and, last but not least, it is these elements that also shape reform activities in the realm of education.

Most importantly, reflections on the ongoing challenges, discourses and attempts to reform education in Germany, which will be discussed in Part 3 of this section, need to be set within a discussion of the interplay between the above elements constituting the education system.

I will try to show, in this case study of education in Germany with particular reference to recent reform projects, that the major driving force behind all these reform projects and their accompanying discourses is the effort to transform education in Germany into a means to promote the global economic and political competitiveness of Germany in the era of globalization. It is these aims that also shape Germany's recent education reforms, or, to use the attendant ideological language, shape an education system that is preparing Germany and its citizens for what is termed a "knowledge-based society". The following statement published by the German government in 2008 summarizes very well the current views which not only the German political elite but also most education professionals have of the challenges facing the German education system:

"Competition over the best options for the future has become an international competition about the quality of education systems. Education reforms in Germany require national efforts from all sides and broad societal debate beyond all ideological barriers. (Translation MK)"
(32.03.2008)

<http://www.bmbf.de/de/1076.php>

1. Missions

The German institutional and organizational structure of education consists broadly of the same elements as other education systems in the Western world, and is aimed at providing the different subsystems of society with an appropriate number of suitably qualified people by way of the selective distribution of learners to the different levels of education. Three major objectives aimed at by these education systems in general and the German education system in particular can be distinguished:

"Ideally, the education system combines three interconnected societal functions:

- *the socio-cultural system;*
- *the economic system;*
- *the social-political system;*

The education system fulfils an integrative function for the socio-cultural system (values, norms and traditions represented by their institutions and societal groups). This takes place via the teaching of cultural values and through cultural bodies safeguarding the socio-cultural system...

The economic system expects the education system to produce qualified individuals. This is important for work, but also for acting in the market. In order to guarantee these services for the economy, the economic system influences the development of curricula and contributes to the education system's resources.

The political and social system of society (its political bodies and political interest-groups) requires a strict selective functionality from education. This political system depends on the loyalty of all members of society, especially with regard to accepting the inequalities in the social system. Guaranteeing this loyalty of all members of society is the key mission of the education system, which therefore has a major mission to distribute life prospects, and, by so doing, serves the needs of the political system, which, in response guarantees the existence of the education system. (Translation MK)''

http://wiki.bildungserver.de/index.php/Deutsches_Bildungssystem

Reforms of the institutional and organizational structure focus on the tensions between the above three conflicting missions embodied in the way the education system is constructed: on the one hand, due to the above-mentioned international economic global competition, the German education system aims to provide society with as highly educated a workforce as possible. However, this economic mission conflicts with the two other responsibilities of the education system: first, with the second mission to reproduce a particular nationally constructed culture and with the third social-political mission to select students for the various unequal life-prospects offered by the class system.

It is obvious that combining these three conflicting roles of the German education system involves prioritizing the extent to which each is considered as the major driving force of education. At this point, it is important to mention that the German education system is not the responsibility of the central German national political bodies, but education policies are constitutionally the responsibility of the *Bundesländer*.

Given these decentralized responsibilities and the changing political parties governing policies in the *Länder*, the education system in Germany has been a frequent subject of politically initiated reforms, mirroring the actual power balances between the political parties in the *Länder*. After almost any change of a *Land* government, the education system becomes a subject for systemic reform.

All these reforms can be characterized as changes in the prioritization of the three major conflicting functions of the German education system, depending on the political priorities of the ruling political groups and parties. Thus, reforming the education system has become a continuous activity in the *Länder*, creating great uncertainty among everyone in the system.

Depending on changing power balances, these reform activities by the *Länder* and their attendant societal discourses tend to overlap with the more fundamental reforms the German education system as a whole is facing and explain a very German reform "actionism" that is very typical of a mildly confusing reform approach, in which overall long-term aims and short-term reforms responding to current political priorities are widely intermingled.

There is a strong historical dimension to the balancing of the above political priorities. All these different prioritizations of the aims of German education relate to a more fundamental

problem inherited from the long-term history of education in Germany, today mirrored in a struggle between the traditional conception of “Bildung” and the modern conception of education expressed in the concept of “skills” or “competencies”. Tensions between the more functionalist education system, directed towards skills, life-long learning and similar concepts, and the German educational traditions of “Bildung” constitute the cultural background for the back-and-forth of institutional and organizational reforms in the German education system.

2. Challenges and Main Outcomes

To put it provocatively, one might say that the low ranking of German education in studies like Pisa indicates the success of education in Germany.

Thinking and discussion on the outcomes of education, especially when carried out by education professionals, seems to prefer not to judge and measure these outcomes against the aims of education and the challenges it faces in particular political, economic and cultural settings, but to see education as being directed toward the acquisition of knowledge.

As a consequence of this slanted view of education – interpreting it as if its aim was to create knowledgeable people – the outcomes of education are measured by comparing the knowledge that students have acquired. Pisa, TIMM and other kinds of studies resolutely forget not only the role learning plays within the education system, but ignore the societal roles education plays and measure the knowledge of students extensively with all sorts of highly sophisticated methods.

However, remembering the way education is constructed as a selection on the basis of the relative amount of knowledge students achieve, compared to other students learning in the same class, could throw more light on these debates about the outcomes of education – reminding us that they are measuring these outcomes against an objective that education is only aiming at most conditionally. This aim may – and must – be the individual objective of teachers teaching children, but it is not the aim of the education system. If knowledge were the aim of education, there would be no different knowledge levels among students, since they would all be educated until they achieved the knowledge they are supposed to achieve, some possibly earlier than others.

However, the school system organizes the acquisition of knowledge as a competition among students within a limited time and excludes those who are the losers in this competition over knowledge. Making students knowledgeable is, thus, not the aim of education. Selecting students on the basis of their abilities to acquire knowledge is what education is aiming at and, for this reason, measuring education against the question of how much knowledge students have gained introduces a measurement criterion education does not have, but which education professionals like to believe in – though they know very well that education has certain societal missions, that are not about creating a society that consists of wise people.

Though education professionals also know very well the societal missions education is aiming to fulfill, when it comes to measuring the outcomes of education, they measure education against a pedagogic ideal, as though the majority of students – who make up around two-thirds of the German population – did not leave education after its compulsory elements. This majority of Germans may be compared with the higher levels of education gained by a

minority of German people, though both are, most obviously, educated appropriately – and not despite, but because of, their different levels of knowledge.

How, then, are we to measure the outcomes of education realistically against its real aims, not the ideals of educational dreamers, and how are we to measure the outcomes of education in Germany here?

Pisa studies and the like regularly and repeatedly confirm that the education outcomes of the German education system rank quite low compared with other countries. For German education professionals and politically ambitious Germans especially, such results are commented on with astonishment and concern, on the obvious assumption that a society as economically successful as Germany must also be a leader in education. However, such comments imply an assumption about the relationship between the economic success of a society and its education – better knowledge improves economic success (I will not discuss this assumption here) – and ignore the other major political, social and cultural missions of education.

In conclusion, let us say that the main outcomes can only be reasonably measured and described in relation to the actual challenges education in Germany faces, reflected against the major missions of education in Germany. The following section therefore summarizes the major current challenges facing education before describing the main related outcomes.

2.1 Challenges and Societal Developments Framing Education

2.1.1 Economic Developments and Labour Market Demands

Considering the role education plays in the economy, and how it is framed by overall national and global economic developments, the following economic factors must be considered as influencing both the conditions in which education is delivered and the services it needs to provide in response to the economic situation.

Worldwide Crisis

While the worldwide crisis has also produced decreasing economic growth in Germany, the economic crisis has not affected education as much via the labour market, since the increase in the numbers of unemployed in Germany has been comparatively low. (The reasons for this cannot be discussed here)

The deterioration of public funds has affected national expenditure in general, though expenditure on education remained steady.

Development towards a Service and Knowledge-Based society

Economic development has moved German society towards a service and knowledge-based society, with the result that more than 70% of jobs in Germany are now provided by these industry sectors. As a consequence, demand in a labour market with a trend towards knowledge and skills is increasingly shifting from physical labour towards more theoretical, analytical and problem-solving competencies, both for female and male employees.

The Dependence of German Industry on an International Market

Though Germany has recently lost its position as the most successful exporting economy in the world to China, more than a quarter of jobs in Germany are directly related to the export

industry sector. Thus, these jobs and the skills of the employees are not only affected by changes in global markets, but have come to be directly affected by the competencies and skills in the economies of other export-orientated countries. Not only do the low-skilled increasingly have difficulties finding any job whatever, but this "dependence" on export industries implies that technical innovations in international competition frequently demand new skills, and the intervals in which these technical demands change are getting shorter, depending on the global "rhythm" of innovations. Thus, the need for a life-long adaptation of knowledge and skills is becoming an increasingly important challenge for education in Germany.

2.1.2 Demographic Changes and their Effects on Knowledge Structures

The second important factor framing the conditions for education in Germany and creating particular demands for education is the issue of the ageing German population. The main features of this development can be briefly sketched as follows.

Changing Structure of the German Population

The trend toward a changed German population-structure is continuing with the increasing age of the non-working group. The size of the younger, working sections of the population is decreasing proportionally by comparison with the section that is beyond working age, in the context of a generally decreasing population (contrasting with an expected growth of populations in other parts of the world).

The Trend towards Low Birth Rates and Later Births

Generally, the birth rate is expected to continue to decrease in the future, especially among native German families, compared to the birth rates of immigrants in Germany.

With regard to their effects on education, low birth rates are complemented by the later age at which parents are having children, resulting in an increasing split between the working and non-working sections of the population.

The comparably increasing birth rates among immigrants are expected to increase the number of children with a lower-level educational background when they enter the school system. This runs counter to the growing demands on the labour market for highly educated people and the particular difficulties children from poorly-educated families face within the German competitive and selective education system.

2.1.3 Changing Individual Living Conditions and Changing Expectations in Education

Economic developments and the changing age-structure of the German population are complemented by another important factor framing education and putting particular demands on education as a resulting of the changing individual living conditions of Germans. The most important factor influencing demands on education is the increasing number of families living without children, the increasing number of working women, thus also affecting the number of children and the later time when they are born, compared to the increasing number of children from families with a migration background or with a low level of education. Both trends in the changing living conditions of Germans obviously contrast, once again, with the labour market's demands for highly educated and highly flexible people responding to skills needs and able to adjust their knowledge to the changing needs of the highly innovative German export industries.

2.1.4 Challenges for Creating and Reproducing Cultural/National Identity in Germany

As a result of the internationally highly successful German economy, which Germans tend to present as the product of their "dependence" on their export-oriented industry, and the accompanying needs for labour, German education is, lastly, framed by a strong public political discourse about German national identity, which German political discourse prefers to define as a debate about "cultural values" and the like. This discourse not only sets another important political frame for education, but also builds another political task, against which the German outcomes of education must be measured.

This mission, to which education in Germany must respond, has a twofold difficulty associated with it: first and foremost, German debates on the issue of national identity, unlike in other European countries, try to avoid any hint of nationalism and, therefore, all these debates and considerations consist of many linguistic constructs.

Second, though the number of immigrants living in Germany is comparatively low, the cultural integration of non-German cultures, the construction of a multi-cultural society, is a challenge for a society that does not have a colonial history and its attendant consequences, as for example do the UK, France and also, to a lesser extent, Italy.

We shall see below, when describing current reform activities, why and how the issue of cultural identity plays an important role in German discourses and practices on the reform of education and thus in understanding, if not measuring, their outcomes.

2.2 Main Outcomes of Education

This section highlights some outcomes responding to the major missions of education sketched out above. Rather than gathering and assessing internationally comparative data about knowledge achievements, the outcomes of education are briefly presented with regard to major missions of the German education system and, last but not least, to provide a background for understanding the major discourses and practices around the main reforming approaches in the German education system and the accompanying political and public debates, as briefly presented here in Section Three.

2.2.1 Education in Response to Economic Challenges and Labour Market Developments

The following major trends in outcomes of education and how it responds to particular economic needs can be summarized in a series of bullet points.

Insufficiently Educated Population to Meet the Increasing Demand for Highly Skilled People

According to the current data on future labour market demands, there is a rising need for employees with Higher Education qualifications and for people with vocational education degrees. Young people without vocational degrees will be particularly at risk in future in the German labour market.

Though this risk situation has been tackled by educational measures, the various measures and instruments supporting children with social backgrounds that are not educationally supportive are obviously insufficient to improve their situation in an increasingly selective labour market. Therefore, various initiatives are discussed to strengthen the participation of these social groups in education and improve their chances of higher achievement in their educational careers. The increasing section of children with a migration background are, in particular, insufficiently supported by the German education system. Improving their educational prospects is a major issue in the debates on current needs for reform in Germany.

Low International Rankings of German Education Indicate that Greater Educational Effort is Needed.

Children educated in the German system have slightly improved their status in the European and worldwide rankings of educational outcomes. These rankings are regarded as being of major importance, on the assumption that a comparably highly educated population provides economic advantages in a competitive international economic environment. German educational achievements are in many aspects still below the indicators specified by the European Union. The outcomes of German education still rank in the lowest third of European education systems. In particular, there are massive deficiencies on the part of students educated in Germany in basic skills like reading. This diverges markedly from the economic advantages of a highly educated population.

2.2.2 Education Reproducing Societal Diversities and Disparities

The effort to assess outcomes of education in terms of the reproduction of societal diversity is generally discussed as a question of how far education allows individual members of society to shift between social levels, thus considering a diversity of social levels as a quasi-natural precondition for education.

Given this assumption – that education can only provide possibilities that allow individuals to shift between different social levels and that inequalities within these levels between individuals are to be reduced along individual status lines – the outcomes of German education can be summarized in terms of the following main achievements.

Increasing Disparities between Levels of Qualification and Social Status Groups

While it can be said that the overall level of qualification of the German population as a whole has been upgraded, disparities between the levels of the highly educated and the less educated have increased. Since it can also be observed that these lower levels of educated Germans are increasingly represented by children from groups at high social risk and with low prospects of improving their social and economic status, we must conclude that social and economic disparities are increasing under the existing system of education. This is most clearly demonstrated by indicators showing the dependence between social classes and their chances of accessing Higher Education.

Gender Disparities

Unlike the disparities between social classes, gender disparities have not just been dramatically minimized, but in many sectors of education, female students are now better qualified than males. Nevertheless, the success story of female students in the realm of education is still thwarted by disparities in salaries for the same level of job, thus still reflecting ongoing societal gender disparities in German society, though these are obviously no longer due to the education system.

Ongoing Disadvantages for Migrants

Improving the integration of migrants into society is one major mission to which German education policies subscribe. However, the outcomes of education indicate not only that these

aims have not been achieved, but rather the opposite. Not only do students from a migration background enter the German school system with significant disadvantages, and not only does the German education system fail to minimize educational disparities through education, but the data on relations between the social background of students and the degrees they achieve prove that education widely confirms the dependencies between social status and individual achievements in education.

Needless to say, given the above-mentioned dependence of levels of qualification on social and economic status, education reproduces this dependence in the case of migrants, their educational achievements and their social and economic status, rather than aiding their integration into German society.

2.2.3 Education for Individual Life-Prospect within Societal Diversity

The same observation can be made about relations between students from highly educated families. While there are a significant number of children from families with a low educational level who manage to shift to a higher level of education, the overall relation between the level of family education and educational achievements still confirms that children from poorly educated families remain in this low level of education with the associated poor life-prospects.

In other words, despite all efforts at achieving greater mobility between levels of education, the education system actually preserves the distinctive social status and economic situation of the German population as a whole.

2.2.4 Education Conserving and Adjusting Cultural Identities

While there is more or less general agreement about the re-conceptualization of education to contribute to an internationalizing society and to position and prepare the German population for global economic competitiveness, the political and cultural implications of an internationalizing society and the attendant needs to re-conceptualize the mission of education are still a major topic of controversial debate in Germany and, also, among all stakeholders in the sphere of education.

Measuring the outcomes of education with regard to the question of how education contributes to the conservation and renewal of values is not only very difficult, because such outcomes cannot be measured by any quantitative criteria. These criteria are themselves so controversial in the various societal discourses, that it would be impossible to claim any shared aims to which education should be steered. Therefore, although the issue of how to define German cultural identity and the contribution of education to it is possibly the most important mission of education, rather than presenting any non-measurable outcomes, it seems much more reasonable to present the positions in this controversy under the following heading of ongoing challenges and debates.

3. Main Ongoing Challenges, Debates and Reforms

What are considered the main ongoing challenges and the discourses constructed from these challenges, such as educational reform discourses and practices, are a matter of political priorities. Current discourses in Germany and the definitions of what the challenges and the corresponding reform practices are have been dominated by the view the German political elites have of education and its role in society. This was not always the case in German discursive practices in the past. Unlike the debates over the last twenty years, when educational issues were also a matter for social movements inspired by ideas of democratizing

the society inherited from German post-war history, today's debates are dominated by the priorities the political and economic elites attach to the German education system.

The mission assigned to education basically has two key objectives – to transform education into an instrument for the global competitiveness of the German economy – more specifically shaping the German people into an economic factor in global economic competition – and, secondly, to prepare German citizens for the new international political role Germany is aiming to play in the new distribution of world powers both within the EU and beyond. All the various reform discourses and actions, though involving very varied topics and efforts, are devoted to these two closely connected political and economic aims or result from the retroactive effect these have on transforming German society as a whole, and education in particular, to perform this twofold mission.

3.1 Education for Globalization: Economicization of Categories, Organization, Management and the Curriculum, Transforming Education into a Labour Market Service.

Without any doubt, the changes education has been facing in Germany since the end of the last century can be called truly paradigmatic. While, from the emergence of compulsory education during the Bismarck regime onwards, including the period of fascism, education was constructed on Humboldt's humanist ideas of "*Bildung*", this fundamental concept has been swept away in the last 15 years and the German people has become a functional factor in Germany's global political and economic ambitions.

The most obvious sign of this paradigm shift is the re-conceptualization of the categories characterizing current reform discourses and practices in the realm of education. First and foremost, the fundamental category of "*Bildung*" can be described as the idea of a knowledgeable citizen being empowered to master his individual life. The category that has replaced this idea in education – "competence" – indicates a functional directing of knowledge towards goals that are not only beyond the influence of the citizen, but are, in fact, knowledge *demands* placed on the citizen, to which his knowledge has to be accommodated as the major aim of learning. These are, henceforth, defined as needs for ever-adaptive mental efforts, adjusted, in accordance with this new conception guiding modern education in Germany, to a knowledge the ordinary citizen clearly never creates or shares.

Thus, the concept of "competence" implies the complementary concept of scientific knowledge, the sphere in which that very knowledge is created and to which competences need to be geared. The modern conception of learning has thus created a new division of modern societies, consisting of knowledge-creators and knowledge-consumers. To remain within the categories of an economicized system of categories, these not only call science the sphere of "knowledge production", but have adjusted the terminology of education towards the terminology of economic management. This has finally made education a function of the national economy, via its services for, and subordination to, the needs of national labour-market priorities.

All other categories, theories and practices, including public and professional discourses about education and its reform, are based on – or are implementing – the above new philosophy of education.

These practices guiding current reform activities are shifting the aims of education, its organizational structures, its management and the curriculum to fulfill the new mission, supplying the German population as a factor of economic global competitiveness, or, in the ideological terminology of education policies, providing people with qualifications for jobs as

the primary goal of all national policies.

In the following, I will highlight some examples of reform activities modifying the organizational structures and the management of education and the curriculum in the direction of this new mission.

Reforms of the Organizational/Institutional Structure of the Education System

The reforms of the education system that are adjusting it to subserve the economy, are aimed mainly at achieving two objectives:

First, the formerly more rigorously separated educational career paths, creating three categories of students – the poorly educated for the physical jobs of the traditional labour force, a middle class education for the administrative job levels in industry and public administration, and, finally, highly educated students from whom the political, cultural and economic elite was recruited – have been made more flexible. There are numerous reforms attempting to combine the selective function of education with the aim of giving education a stronger influence in the selection mechanism and selecting for a social status that is not so dependent on students' social origins and therefore merely reproductive of the existing social status of students.

The introduction of new types of school, combining different educational levels in one school, combining parts of the curriculum for students from different types of school or postponing selection to an older average age, to give more students better chances, and above all, allowing them to shift more easily between the vocational career path and the elite paths of education, have been the main foci of reform where the institutional structure of education is concerned.

The second objective of reforms of the education system has been to improve efficiency within the existing system in various aspects: above all, improving the efficiency of education in providing educated people for the different sections of society and, in particular, for the needs of the labour market is intended to reduce the time students spend in the education system, especially for those aspiring to enter higher education. The maximum number of years students spend at school has been reduced by one year, providing educated students for the highest level of education at a younger age and making the population as a whole available earlier and longer to employers.

Possibly less visible than reforms within the traditional sectors of education, the sphere that has been affected most radically by this new paradigm is Further Education. Further Education, which used to have a kind of orchid status, where people carried out their individual leisure learning, has been radically transformed into an instrument of life-long learning and its new mission is to adapt people's vocational skills and knowledge to the changing needs of increasingly innovative industry and its new jobs, after they have left the traditional education sector. To do this, Further Education, formerly organized by public and charitable organizations, was first widely privatized and made a compulsory part of the adaptation of knowledge required by the needs of the labour market – especially for those who have lost their jobs.

Reforms of the Management of Education

In line with the new philosophy of education as a service for turning the German population into a factor in international economic competitiveness, the organizational conception of schools has shifted towards management approaches taken from the world of economics and applied to the world of education. The best example of this is the transformation of schools into administrative and economic organizations, which have been made much more independent of steering interventions from the political bodies. Under the label of "administrative independence", schools have been transformed into organizations in which there are elements of competition between schools and many managerial instruments affecting the role of teachers, the relation between teachers and students, and the role of the schools' administrative bodies. All these changes might be illustrated by the introduction of instruments of quality assurance, introducing criteria into education that enable their efficiency to be measured against the objectives described above.

Curriculum Reforms

Reforming the curricula at all levels of education and adapting the contents of teaching and learning to the demands of the various sections of the labour market are ongoing activities across the different sectors of the German education system. The most prominent example of re-designing education content is certainly the "Bologna Process" reform of Higher Education, replacing the aim of creating students who are able to think independently, with students who are able to reproduce any given knowledge. Doing this requires much less time than before, thus providing highly educated people for the labour market for all those jobs that put innovation into practice, and providing them earlier and hence longer for the needs of an innovation-driven economy. Creating these innovations has become the intellectual business of a smaller academic elite, selected from the post-Masters level.

However, these curriculum changes are by no means limited to the sphere of Higher Education. Two examples might illustrate how the curriculum has been changed across the education system as a whole.

Students coming from general education, who arrive at the universities today, no longer want to reflect, but rather to be told by their teachers what they wish them to reproduce in order to get high marks, which count in their competition over jobs. In fact, their careers through the level of compulsory education have furnished them with "skills", allowing them to aim their learning at what learning has been made to be about – a race to reproduce knowledge over time, which is rewarded in all kind of rankings, culminating in the international rankings of national populations.

Interestingly enough, the most radical curriculum reforms have again been made in the sphere of Further Education. Further Education has not only been transformed into an institutional section of the politically supervised education system and its politically defined missions, but the contents of learning in further education have been most radically re-designed to serve labour-market needs.

3.2. Educating the Losers and Other "At-Risk Groups".

An education system geared towards supplying a national labour market to meet its changing

needs in a globally competitive economy creates a new view of the old problem of a selective education, whether this is driven by a humanistic philosophy or by the ideas of a neo-liberal society, which prefers to call itself a "knowledge-based society".

The objective of an education system providing a highly educated population for an innovative economy, by way of a selective education system, is to select. The more successfully this system selects for the highest levels of knowledge, the more it also selects at the other end of the scale. Contrary to the surprised and disappointed comments of education professionals on the outcomes of the German education system, its low rankings do not indicate any failure, but the very success of this education. To assume that an education system that is, in all its elements, constructed for selecting the best students should provide only highly educated students is either naivety or hypocrisy - or both.

Creating the losers in this competition, not "in spite", but "because" of this selective mission of education, is not, however, a new phenomenon in the German education system. What is new is the way these losers are now defined in the context of the new mission of education, against which they are now made a subject of other significant strands of reform activities; reform activities, which are largely shifted from measures in the sphere of education to labour market measures, mainly for those who have lost their jobs.

This is not to say that the German education system does not care about its drop-outs. Rather the opposite is the case: whatever the reasons, though the above data show most clearly why children from poorly-educated families are tremendously disadvantaged in the educational race for ranked knowledge, the German education system every day invents new measures to "help", "support" etc. those who obviously have no chance of successfully competing in this competitive system to compete continuously – and hence finally become resistant to learning and prove that the education system has done more than its best.

Learning, despite the fact that it is not rewarded by any benefit for the learner, has therefore been made the subject of a policy of existential sanctions in the labour market, consisting of measures forcing these drop-outs to prove their willingness to learn. Needless to say, this learning is no longer aimed at acquiring knowledge but ensuring that these people accept their conditions of life as if they were the result of their lack of skills.

There is a wide range of ongoing reform activities in labour-market policies, but since this lies outside the sphere of education – though it relates to what is also the outcome of education – this has to be mentioned here, but will not further be elaborated in the context of this paper.

3.3 Educating for the National Identity of a New Global Political Player

The third major reform discourse revolves around the problems of a society in which the life of its citizens is embedded in all kinds of international contexts, not only within the European Union but worldwide. Unlike in other societies with long colonial experience, this evidently raises the issue of the identity of German society, given the tensions the issue of national identity implies for Germans for historical reasons. Unlike France, where the president himself has called for a nationwide debate on the question of what is "French", such a politically imposed debate would not be possible in Germany, despite the fact that the very same discourse was initiated politically and plays a major role also in the realm of education.

Like most debates - an exception here is the debate on nuclear power - this discussion of national identity was initiated by the German political elite. It is not the case that international action provided an entirely new background against which the German political elite felt the

need to raise the issue of whether Germans are appropriately educated. Germany has a long experience of acting in international contexts, but these international activities were largely confined to the sphere of international business relations. Though much less than in countries with former colonies, like France, the UK, Netherlands, Belgium etc, it is also not new for many people who do not have German nationality to live and work in Germany.

What is new, however, and has provoked a debate on how to develop a national identity, is the increasing political and military involvement of Germany across the world. This new political view of the world has called attention to non-German citizens in Germany and created a new important strand of debate that is very much focused on the role national identities play in the German education system.

This debate is too complex to be presented here, but it should be mentioned, since this discussion has received attention within large sections of German society, not least among education professionals.