

Abstract

A journey into the mindsets of teachers on a treasure hunt

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We use some terms constantly, synonymously, almost inflationarily, without questioning their meaning. Talent, aptitude and giftedness are such terms. Am I talented if I can make myself a terrific sandwich every day when I'm still in elementary school, despite having very little pocket money? Are only those gifted who get straight A's and B's on their report cards? Especially when it comes to awarding scholarships, the assessment of personal abilities, potentials - talents - seems to play an important role. What do teachers use as a guide when recommending students for scholarship programs, and what mindset leads them to decide who is talented and eligible for a recommendation?

Educational success in Germany, even more than twenty years after the PISA 2000 study, is still strongly dependent on the social background of the students. The German Ruhr-area, exemplary for many regions worldwide, is facing enormous problems with social deprivation. In a regional comparison, the Ruhr region is characterized by the lowest average household incomes as well as the highest poverty rate. Performance and success are closely linked to the social background of a person. Local schools, among others, are also affected by this problem (cf. Studierendenreport 2019; cf. Reiss et al. 2018; cf. RuhrFutur gGmbH et al. 2020).

Even though in society, talent and intelligence are normally distributed, pupils from disadvantaged families and from working class households, without academic role models, are still underrepresented in scholarship programs (cf. Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes 2019, Vodafone Stiftung 2011). This is an international finding. Why is this? In part, this is due to the attitudes and values of teachers, some of whom are deficit-oriented and less likely to recommend students from less privileged homes to scholarship programs. Particularly at schools in disadvantaged locations in the Ruhr region, which are characterized by a variety of socioeconomic challenges, the potential of students does not yet seem to have been fully tapped. Identification must take on a new direction to increase social justice (cf. Stamm 2007)!

In combating the lack of equal opportunities, teachers in particular seem to play a prominent role. This paper takes the listener into the mindsets of teachers who actively nominate pupils from less privileged families for scholarships – so-called treasure hunters. On the basis of interview results, three types of teachers, which make the different value attitudes of the teachers recognizable, are formulated. The sensegenetic types called Usability, Heart & Soul, and Necessity are presented. These types could provide information about when someone is considered talented and, as a result, is recommended for a scholarship program. Orientations and evaluation bases of the teachers become visible.

Methodologically, the research project can be located in the field of qualitative-reconstructive social research. For the research project, narrative-based interviews with a structured inquiry section were conducted. The analysis of the eighteen interviews with these teachers is done by the documentary method that identifies tacit knowledge (cf. Bohnsack 2014)

The results of the study can be used to derive measures to improve the selection and support practices of teachers, which could contribute to a long-term reduction of educational injustice.

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