

## **GERMANY**

EDELGARD BULMAHN, *Federal Minister of Education, 1998-2005*: The PISA Study, and the discussion of the results of the PISA study, managed to suddenly wake up the majority of people. Because the PISA study held a mirror in front of everyone, and made it obvious that we have considerable weaknesses in our education system that could no longer be ignored and had to be addressed.

TITLE: "Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Germany"

MARTIN SPIEWAK, *Journalist, Die Zeit*: PISA really shook up our education system, because it discredited two things that we were very confident about. Firstly, we in Germany thought that our schools had a very high level of performance, especially in the more academic high schools. But in general we thought that we offered our students a good education. And secondly, we thought we had a relatively fair school system.

CHRISTIAN FULLER, *Journalist, Die Tageszeitung*: The PISA study that was conducted in 2000 and published in 2001 revealed that Germany did not have a democratic school system. The most important finding in the study was that Germany had as many as 25 percent of so-called "at risk" students, and 10 percent of these students were functionally illiterate. This was a huge shock to our system. All of a sudden an industrialized country, a world leader in exports had to recognize that 25 percent of its students went to school without learning what they would need later in life, to contribute to the economy and act as a responsible citizen.

MARIANE DEMMER, *President, German Teachers Union*: The study not only showed that the performance level of the students was not what we expected, or hoped for, but also that there was a strong correlation between social origin and proficiency. It showed that immigrant children had very obvious differences in performance compared to the rest.

TEACHER: *Did you already find the very top? Fifteen fifteen, yes.*

EDELGARD BULMAHN: The PISA study and the debate about the PISA study results questioned the fact that it had become normal and accepted that children from poor families, or so called socially under-privileged families, don't have the same educational opportunities and achievements as children from privileged families. That became obvious through the PISA study, especially through comparison with the results from other countries, where there are also children who grow up with a poor background, but nevertheless are successful in school.

MARTIN SPIEWAK: In Germany we have a multi-pillared school system. This means that we divide up the students relatively early, generally after the fourth grade, to different schools supposedly in accordance with their performance. We have the

Hauptschule, we have the Realschule, and we have the Gymnasium. This is the German three-pillared school system.

EDELGARD BULMAHN: The students who perform very well generally go to Gymnasium, but even that really depends on the social status of the family. For instance, we have very high-performing students from immigrant or working-class families who do not go to a Gymnasium, but to a Realschule. The Realschule is the so-called middle level school, and then there is the Hauptschule. Most children that go to Hauptschule are children from immigrant families, or children that come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Because of this three-pillared system, our system has a lack of permeability. At the age of ten children are assigned to one of these pillars. And this effectively determines their subsequent academic career, and thus also their later working career. And I'll say it again, this is absurd and does not correspond to human development potential.

TEACHER: *This was just a short test, only eight words were given to you. So do this once more, and use your booklets with the vocabulary in it and ask each other about them.*

MARIANE DEMMER: Our main focus was to get a grip on fixing this crying injustice and how could we change the training of teachers to address the different needs of young people.

STUDENT: *Kleidt?*

STUDENT 2: *Dress*

STUDENT: *Waschen?*

STUDENT 2: *Wash*

MARTIN SPIEWAK: This fragmentation of the school system is also mirrored in teacher training. This means that each federal state has its own teacher training certification, which would not be fully recognized by a neighboring federal state. This means that it was not easy for a teacher to transfer from one state to another. There was great immobility of teachers.

TEXT SLIDE: Germany's 16 federal states have primary responsibility for education policy and delivery. The Federal Education Ministry has an oversight role, regulating general education policy and funding research projects and institutions.

MARTIN SPIEWAK: All federal states recognized that teacher training needs to be reformed. Teachers were criticized, for instance, for being insufficiently prepared to diagnose children correctly. We have this divided school system but teachers have repeatedly sorted children into the wrong academic tracks, they sent them on the

wrong path. And so it was said that we have to enable our teachers to better assess our children.

TEACHER: *Now think, if you look at this sentence, could you rephrase it and make a question out of it? This was a very good pass. But the next step will be next week, to determine the noun and the predicate.*

EDELGARD BULMAHN: I made the suggestion that we should change our school system in such a way that the individual support of the student should be the focal point, in kindergarten as well as in all the schools, that it becomes the main principle in education. And secondly, that we change our school day to a full school day because I hoped that this principal of individual student support could be implemented better in a full school day. Simply because you have more time available, and kids can be better supported through more individualized learning opportunities. Thirdly I suggested that we introduce educational standards. Until then there were only general guidelines for different types of schools, for different subjects, different grades, and of course different federal states. I proposed that we introduce federal guidelines in order to make sure that teachers, parents and children know exactly what children are expected to have learned. For instance, when they are ten years old, at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the end of 7<sup>th</sup> grade, or at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, we really have clarity and transparency when it comes to educational competency.

TEXT SLIDE: The example of Rheinland-Pfalz. Rhineland-Pfalz in south-west Germany is one of the country's 16 federal states.

TEXT SLIDE: It has a population of 4 million, of whom just under 8% are from a non-German immigrant background. One of Germany's more prosperous states, it is also one of those that embarked most actively on education reform.

TEACHER: *Although Hilal's weak point is math, she is super good in grammar and she helps other students.*

GERHARD LEISENHEIMER, *Principal, Erich Kastner Realschule Plus*: We have been participating for five years in this pilot school program, "Responsible Schools". And during this pilot program the school has great autonomy and responsibility. I believe that this is connected directly to PISA, simply through the recognition of the fact that schools can be more effective and productive if they are autonomous within a collaborative culture.

TEACHER: *If a student helps other consistently, we should somehow reward this. And perhaps we should discuss this at the next team meeting.*

GERHARD LEISENHEIMER: We simply recognize that you cannot lead a modern school as a lone warrior. It is necessary that teachers get together and work in teams. And so we transformed this necessity into action by getting our teachers to

adopt teamwork as a core method of working. These teams have great autonomy and responsibility, and this is where a lot of ideas are initiated. And if a team is satisfied with their work, then they share their ideas with other teams.

TEACHER: *So we went to Team 5, and listened to what objectives they had agreed on. They have their place-mat method for four-cornered problem-solving, and they had another wonderful idea. They sign contract agreements with their students.*

ANGELA CHRISTMANN, *Teacher, Erich Kastner Realschule Plus*: In our school we have weekly team meetings. For some time, we've been thinking about how to increase individual support for students, because students have individual strengths and weaknesses. We had the idea to get together individually with each student and their parents, so that the whole thing becomes more formal and draft a contract so that the students feel their learning is taken seriously.

TEXT SLIDE: One of the school's most successful innovations has been the introduction of "learning contracts" in Grade 5.

- Teachers, pupils and parents agree on goals for individual students.
- Students improve their learning abilities and enthusiasm for class work rises.

ANGELA CHRISTMANN: *Please read this. Take a close look at everything. In this "development talk", between you, mom and me, you will be given time until May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011. That's after the vacation. But perhaps during the vacation you will have more time to read.*

GERHARD LEISENHEIMER: The teams were very excited when they signed these contracts for the first time with the parents. But the parents were first of all surprised, and then very satisfied with the fact of suddenly being involved in their children's learning. It was very interesting for instance that the children wrote down in their contracts that they would like to read more with their parents and spend more time with them on the weekends, so that the parents were bound to the contracts as well.

TEXT SLIDE: Reforms in Rheinland-Pfalz in the wake of PISA 2000

- More kindergarten places, free kindergarten education from age two
- Special German-language teaching for children and parents in immigrant families
- New training structures for teachers and hiring more teachers

TEXT SLIDE:

- Foreign language teaching (English or French) from grade 1
- All-day school programs for disadvantaged children and more all-day opportunities for others.
- Language tests for children entering school without previously attending kindergarten.

TEXT SLIDE:

- Combining secondary schools to group pupils of different academic ability levels
- Quality programs for teachers and intensified contacts with parents

TEACHER: *Check in between not to take off too much.*

Career guidance plays a very important role for us, because we are convinced that career guidance is a cornerstone of education. From an organizational point of view, our students have the choice to do an internship during the day, usually starting in the eighth grade. That means that students will regularly spend a whole day in a workplace, if possible over half a year. The second option is that students can do an internship starting in ninth grade, when they can work at 14-day block at a business before they go on vacation. And the third option is that students can do an individual internship. For instance, in an internship, the boss could say, "I need you for three or four days in order to find out if you are suitable for this kind of work".

15 min (White hair man) Through our internships, we try to give our students an insight into the world of work. What is even more important is that the students are not just evaluated by their academic performance, but the decisive question is, can we motivate the student to go in a specific direction, and recognize his or her potential.

TEACHER: *Now you have had a day internship, for a second time. Yesterday you had your day internship, and I would like you to provide me with a report. What you liked, what you didn't like about the internship.*

ANGELA CHRISTMANN: Through this kind of cooperative learning and individual work, during their professional internship in eighth grade, students grow more confident. And later on, the students have to write a report about their internship, and tell their peers what they have experienced.

TEXT SLIDE: Between 2003 and 2009, Germany raised its performance in mathematics from rank 21 to rank 10 among OECD countries. Between 2000 and 2009, Germany raised its performance in reading from rank 23 to rank 16 among OECD countries.

TEXT SLIDE: The performance of immigrant students with another language background improved by the equivalent of a school year. The proportion of at-risk students dropped from 22.6% to 18.5%.

MARTIN SPIEWAK: What PISA also introduced into our German debate was the idea that performance can be measured and compared, to a certain degree. For a long time the Germans have shied away from this. Either they did not participate in international studies, or they did not pay attention to them, because it was thought that it was impossible to evaluate students' performance anyway. Because of this, in

Germany we talk about an empirical about-turn in the discussion of the politics of education, educational research, and discourse. So now they are looking closely at studies, to see what the research tells us, what educational studies tell us.

EDELGARD BULMAHN: One result of the debate surrounding the PISA study, and around all the changes of the school system, full days, national standards, is that we also have a change in the types of schools. Most of the federal states are moving towards a so-called two-pillared school system, so that we only have two kinds of schools. This is progress, compared to the various types of schools that we have had in the past, and partially still have today, that divided the students into smaller and smaller boxes. So anything that hinders the early selection of children, and offers more options is the right way to go. Most states are starting to go in this direction.