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The special education profession and the discourse of learning disability in Germany

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Lisa Pfahl, Justin J.W. Powell

The Special Education Profession and the Discourse of Learning Disability in Germany

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Abstract

Even today, school segregation continues to be understood as legitimate in Germany. Charting the discourse of learning disability provides insights into special education's development as a segregated, independent system of school types and the resulting legitimacy that contributes to the maintenance of school segregation throughout educational systems in Germany. We focus on learning disability discourse and knowledge, the special education profession, and the expansion of its main school type, the support school (*Hilfsschule*), from around 1900 to today. The special education profession exhibits not only junctures but also remarkable historical continuity. As delineated here, a key factor in the continued growth of special education is the authority of the profession with respect to "learning disability" and the discourse that continues to legitimate the classification of pupils as "learning disabled" and the resulting segregated schooling.

Zusammenfassung

In Deutschland stellt die Segregation von Kindern und Jugendlichen die gängige Praxis bei der Zuweisung von Schüler/innen an die unterschiedlichen Schultypen des gegliederten Schulwesens dar. Eine Analyse des Lernbehinderungsdiskurses zeigt, wie die Separation von armen Kindern und Jugendlichen an „Förderschulen" (ehemals „Hilfsschulen") historisch begründet und bis heute aufrechterhalten wurde. Den Zusammenhang zwischen dem wissenschaftlichen Lernbehinderungsdiskurs, der Professionalisierung der Sonderpädagogik und der Expansion des Sonderschulwesens fokussierend, wird in dem Beitrag die Entstehung der Sonderschule für Lernbehinderte seit 1900 beschrieben. Es wird gezeigt, dass die professionelle Strategie, ein flächendeckendes und eigenständiges Sonderschulwesen zu etablieren, und der Lernbehinderungsdiskurs sich wechselseitig stützen: Die Klassifizierung von Kindern und Jugendlichen als „lernbehindert" wird diskursiv mit ihrer „Sonderschulbedürftigkeit" begründet und legitimiert ihre schulische Segregation.

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I Introduction

Despite ratification in 2009 of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006), which—in Article 24—demands inclusive education, school segregation continues to be understood as legitimate in Germany. Contrary to this international charter, the special education profession and the discourse of learning disability bolster the special school system in Germany, whose segregated structures have expanded and evolved over the past century. Examining this conflict between global intentions and national persistence, we analyze the institutionalization of "special" education as segregated (on the controversy and meaning associated with the word "special" in the context of disability, see Adams, Swain & Clark 2000). Charting the discourse of learning disability provides insights into special education's development and the resulting legitimacy that contributes to the maintenance of school segregation throughout educational systems in Germany. We focus on learning disability discourse and knowledge, the special education profession, and the expansion of its main school type, the support school (*Hilfsschule*), from around 1900 to today.

Our aim is to demonstrate how knowledge, institutional arrangements and practitioner strategies intersect in a process that constructs "learning disability" as an "objective" reality that stabilizes the status quo of segregated special schooling. This perspective sheds light on the knowledge, interests, strategies, and strong influence of experts, as we analyze scientific and professional discourses to understand how "learning disability" was elaborated over the twentieth century in one of the countries that pioneered special education. Through an analysis of articles in the special education professional association journal *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik* from 1908 to 2008 in Germany, we show how knowledge about learning disability and the constitution of the segregated special school type interacted, strengthening both and contributing to the persistence of school segregation up to the present day.

Here, we explore the institutional inertia of segregated schooling and the dominance of the "learning disability" category in the German context by outlining historical and contemporary debates in Germany about special and inclusive education. What arguments led to the legitimacy of segregated special education for those pupils considered to have "learning disabilities"? We embed this discussion in an analysis of the twentieth century development of Germany's elaborate special school system, among the most highly differentiated in the world. We argue that Germany presents an ideal case to uncover the connection between professional knowledge and school structures that manifests the myriad negative consequences of segregation for the biographies and life chances of classified pupils. Examining the rise to power of the special education profession and its knowledge base provides a crucial source for the "unmasking and recognition" of learning disability as "unexplained underachievement" (Carrier 1983) and the discursive basis of special education practices and the legitimacy of special schooling to contain school failure (see Skrtic 1991).

Over a century, "learning disability" ("*Lernbehinderung*") has risen to become the largest category of special educational support in Germany. Yet the significance of this category for the analysis presented here rests less in quantitative prevalence than in its status as an ideal type for "the disabled subject" resulting from participation in an inegalitarian and highly segregated education system (Pfahl 2009). As a school-based category that only exists in the relationship of individual pupils to socially derived educational standards and behavioural norms, it is a relative status. Without a clear etiology, this category is based on a range of genetic, biological, and social factors (see Sternberg & Spear-Swerling 1999). Yet in Germany, it is closely related to but more specific than general notions of educational and social disadvantage. This category has long been an official and authoritative way of indicating social disadvantage and its negative consequences for learning (e.g., Marquardt 1975; Wocken 2000)—and this legitimized not only specific supports but also selection out of general schools.

Although the debate about school integration has been a continuous feature of special education discourse, the path taken toward full-time school segregation began with the establishment of the organizationally independent *Hilfsschule*. This developmental path—with self-reinforcing feedback typical of school organizational forms once established (see Walters 2000; Lundgreen 2003)—continues to the present day. We argue that the tenacity of this school segregation relies on the professional power that developed on the basis of special education knowledge and discourses, which called for the organizational form of the special school as a solution to student body heterogeneity. The resulting *Hilfsschule* then became the model upon which the special school expansion of the 1960s was based.

The category of learning disability and its school form (now called the *Förderschule*) lies at the nexus of special and general education. This relationship is unavoidable because special educators rely on general educators to identify special needs and transfer pupils into their schools. If widespread school segregation is to be reduced—as called for by international charters as well as legislation in the European Union (2008) and in Germany—the profession must shift its knowledge base and discourse. In the place of school segregation as the most legitimate response, diverse concepts that guide individual educational planning and support within general schools (integration) and inclusive schooling would need to be implemented that have, thus far, remained marginal. Indeed, Germany's National Education Council (*Bildungsrat*) already in the 1980s—long before contemporary international discourses—suggested just that, yet this did not lead to a paradigmatic shift of deconstructing segregated facilities in favour of inclusive classrooms that serve diverse pupils.

We proceed as follows: Briefly, we describe the German (special) educational system, and discuss the method, data, and archive of the discourse analysis conducted. Then, we chart the strands of the discourse of learning disability from 1908-2008. We show junctures across the three historical phases as well as considerable continuity. Finally, we place the findings in the context of a educational system that—

while an early innovator in special education—has yet to fully acknowledge, much less complete, the global paradigm shift to inclusive education.

II Special Schools within Germany's Differentiated School System

Germany affords itself an educational system with separate, hierarchically ordered secondary school types (*Hauptschule, Realschule, Gesamtschule, Gymnasium*), which lead to different postsecondary educational and training opportunities and thus occupational levels. Parallel to this highly differentiated general education system, Germany also maintains one of the most highly differentiated special education systems in the world. While nationally there are only nine "categories of educational support" (*Förderschwerpunkte*) across the sixteen states (*Länder*) in Germany, separate types of schools continue to provide specific learning environments, based on age-old impairment categories congruent with medical, clinical or individual deficit models of disability. Thus, while the national classification system implemented in 1994 embraces a pedagogical paradigm of individual learning supports, this has not led to the closure of segregated special schools. Pupils are selected into special school types at a very early age—mostly around the age of ten years as they transition from primary to secondary schooling; the vast majority of pupils that attends special schools then remains in this school type for the duration of their school careers (see Powell 2010). They often transition into "special" vocational training programmes, which do not much improve their chances in receiving an apprenticeship or transitioning to the labour market (see Pfahl 2006).

In Germany as a whole, about one in twenty pupils of compulsory school age are classified as having special educational needs (KMK 2008). In terms of educational outcomes, approximately eighty percent of special school-leavers each year receive no secondary school credential that qualifies them to go on to postsecondary education; they suffer from challenging transitions from school into training programs or to work, if they succeed in finding vocational training opportunities at all (Powell & Pfahl 2009). This lack of qualification disadvantages and stigmatizes them and thwarts their long-term social and political participation. Thus, the German special school system has been criticized nationally and internationally for failing to provide educational opportunities or to sufficiently reduce these pupils' disadvantages (e.g., Muñoz 2007).[1] Indeed, the reality in Germany contrasts starkly to international

1 Equal access to education and inclusive education: These tenets of education as a human right represent key aims of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24). This treaty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 13, 2006, took effect in Germany on February 24, 2009. Extending beyond the 1994 amendment to Germany's Basic Law ("No one should be disadvantaged because of their disability" [Article 3, § 3]), the newly-ratified Convention demands inclusive educa-

inclusion rhetoric. Since reunification in 1990, ever more children and youth have been diagnosed with "special educational needs" (particularly in the five eastern *Länder*)—the majority classified in the category "learning disability". Despite considerable variation across *Länder*, the national segregation rate remains above 80% (KMK 2008). Our analysis reveals the contribution of the discursive construction of "learning disability" over the twentieth century to the institutionalisation of this segregated, inegalitarian educational system persisting to the present day.

III Discourse Analysis: Methods, Data and Archive

In this section, we focus on the ideologies and history of therapeutic or remedial pedagogy (*Heilpädagogik*) or special education and its impact on the development of the special education profession and special schools. In a mixed-methods research project, a range of quantitative and qualitative data and interpretive methods where used to analyze special education over the 20th century in Germany—and its effects on youth transitioning from special schools into training programs and work.

The existence of specific organizational forms (here: segregated schools) is legitimated by disciplinary discourses (Foucault 1972, 1978). As Paul McIntosh (2002: 78) has argued in a Foucauldian analysis of British special education, "the field of learning disability is linked by a number of classifications that combine to place the client, professional and agency within a particular space of social identity." Here, we reconstruct how the "learning disability" (*Lernbehinderung*) discourse developed in Germany, structuring the profession and practice of special education, ultimately leading to the linkage of arguments that constructed a new category of pupils and a unique school form that would expand dramatically over the twentieth century.

Foucault defines a discourse as a "distribution of statements" or as a "system of diffusion" (Foucault 1972). Discourses can be understood as networks of declarations, in which scientific theories, normative arguments, classification systems, institutionalized pathways, empirical evidence, and forms of intervention are synthesized and bolster each other. The term "statements" refers to solitary events in which someone says, writes, calculates, demands or communicates something. These elements coalesce into the "statements" of a discourse, which are repeated contents and formats expressed by diverse actors in similar contexts. Such "statements" are, in a discourse analysis, interpreted in light of a research question and their genesis is reconstructed (Keller 2005: 72). The objects of a discourse—that which is understood as reality and becomes the object of description—are constructed in processes of reciprocal "typification" (Berger & Luckmann 1966). These objects are reproduced over time and, in turn, can be comprehensively transformed. Thus, the unity of a discourse is not built on the permanence of an object or the

tion as essential for diversity, tolerance, respect, and equal opportunity as universal, indispensable principles in the lives of disabled and not yet disabled people.

meaning made by one or a few actors, but rather on the space of statements in which an object finds its form and changes itself (see Foucault 1972).

The utilized text archive was constructed mainly from selected articles in issues of the journal of Germany's professional association of special educators (today known as the *Verband deutscher Sonderpädagogik*).[2] The Journal of Therapeutic Pedagogy (*Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik*) has been published under various names since the founding of the association: It was first published in 1908 as the "The Support School" (*Die Hilfsschule*), was published as "The German Support School" (*Die Deutsche Hilfsschule*) even during the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1945, and had a sister publication in East Germany published as "The Special School" (*Die Sonderschule*) from 1949 to 1990. Further sources include the 1974 Report of the Education Council of the Standing Conference of *Länder* Culture Ministers (*Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK*)—stating the principles upon which the educational policies and systems of the *Länder* are based and guided by recommendations. This document was analyzed because it is referred to and commented on often by later authors. For the contemporary period, articles again from the Journal of Therapeutic Pedagogy (*Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik*) from the years 2000–2004 were evaluated. This archive was constructed in order to show the historical development of what today is understood as "learning disability" in special education texts. In sampling the material, the focus was on the dominant discourse: that relating to school segregation. Since the beginning of special education, there has also been a counter discourse, that of integration. While of growing importance over the three phases analyzed here, this discourse has not succeeded in dislodging the dominant position of the segregation discourse. Thus, the focus here is on the evolution of a discourse that asserted itself in Germany's educational system, in educational policies, in school organizations, and in the education profession.

We differentiated three historical periods, which are marked by the debates surrounding the maintenance and defence of special education as well as critical junctures in German educational history. The first, foundational phase of special education reached its high point at the beginning of the twentieth century. The second phase examined here is the professionalization and differentiation of special education in the 1960s and, during the following decade, major educational system reforms and youth unemployment. The final phase treated here is the contemporary discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The chosen historical periods have been identified as distinct phases in the formation of special education professionalization (Hänsel 2004, 2005) as well as the debate surrounding segregation and integration. The decades not explicitly discussed here include Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic (1918–33), and the "restoration" of special education discourse and praxis after the Second World War (see Solarova 1983;

2 The association was founded with the name "Association of German Support Schools", then was renamed as the "Association of German Special Schools", and is now called the "Association of German Special Education" (on the history of this organization, see Möckel 1998).

Möckel 1988; Ellger-Rüttgardt 2007). Importantly, after 1945 there was a remarkable continuity in special education professional practice in both Germanys—despite the different economic, political and social foundations in these countries (see Poore 2007). We thus focus mostly on the early and most recent institutionalization processes.

The foundational phase marked the construction of important building blocks of professional perspectives and practices. In the 1970s, special education was challenged to respond to change in education policies and to the demand for more integration of disabled pupils. The contemporary period reflects professional strategies to react to on-going demands for more school integration and inclusive education (see Powell 2009). Findings from internationally comparative studies of school performance (e.g., the PISA studies, see OECD 2009) and the reports of international non-governmental organizations (e.g., the World Bank, see Peters 2003) have placed further pressure on Germany's segregated educational system, which is viewed as lacking legitimacy (Muñoz 2007), especially given the life course consequences of stigma and segregation.

Thus, the aim of this analysis is to interpret these discourses, which have led to the construction of "learning disability," the legitimacy of the special schools as independent school types, and the framing of identities and individual subjectivity within special education. We investigate the influences of discourses and professional knowledge on the expansion of special education and segregative school practices.

IV Discourse and Strategies of the Special Education Profession in Germany, 1908–2008

In the following, we focus on the history of ideas of "learning disability" and the special education profession in Germany. Especially in the early texts, the "abnormal" and especially weakened physical condition of support school pupils was described as "idiocy," "weakness," or as "feebleness" of mind and body; resulting from the hygienic and social conditions produced by poverty and illness. Bodily feebleness and feeblemindedness were viewed as connected. Thus, support school pedagogy implemented specific measures, such as offering a daily milk breakfast, a weekly bath, and sex education, to strengthen the children in body and spirit. By compensating for the disadvantages brought on by poverty, special educators sought to create conditions conducive for learning and thus to protect and support their pupils. It is this charitable and caring stance that ultimately produced the notion of the "protective space" (*Schonraum*) in which pupils are shielded from societal expectations. In Germany, in contrast to Britain, most special education professionals continue to be "paternalisers" and not "normalisers," to use the two main groups

contrasted by Susan Deeley (2002) in her study of professional ideologies and learning disability.

In the beginning, special education was constructed as an "add-on" to the primary school (*Volksschule*). Increasingly, however, support schools were founded in larger cities and industrial centres, and the advantages and disadvantages of such development was often discussed, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Dannemann 1911). Furthermore, from the beginning of special education, educators have recognized that segregated schooling and vocational training exclude pupils leaving special schools from the "normal" labour market and force them into precarious social situations (see Hofmann 1930 on the structural disadvantage special school leavers face transitioning from school to work). Indeed, the discussion of integration of children that schools fail to adequately support is nearly as old as special education itself (Liebermeister & Hochhuth 1999).

Simultaneously with the development of special education discourses, attempts to teach all children and prepare them for occupations began. The complete exclusion of children deemed by primary school teachers to be "ineducable" was counteracted by the establishment of the support schools, legitimated as missionary work. Therapeutic pedagogy thus founded itself as a holistic, healing, and integrative pedagogy of those children previously thought not to be "teachable". At the 1920 Reich school conference (*Reichsschulkonferenz*), special education achieved the status of a separate division of practitioners in a successful drive for recognition of their area of expertise, which resulted in enhanced autonomy and, ultimately, better pay than a number of other groups of teachers.

As we will discuss below, throughout its rising professionalization process, special educators in Germany would return to variants of the foundational argument of a socially, morally, and clinically "conspicuous" (*auffällig*) or exceptional pupil. Beyond medical expertise, the psychological gaze on the individual child and the boundaries of her or his intellectual capacities would be routinely brought into the discourse and praxis of "therapeutic pedagogy".

The methods to measure and diagnose intellectual dis/abilities, developed by Binet and Simon (1916) in the early 1900s as intelligence tests, became a key scientific pillar for special education in Germany as well. This and other psychometric instruments, based on statistical measurement techniques, established the notion of an "average" or "normal" intellect and thus also of "abnormal" or deviant intellectual capacity in the German discourse, as it did in much of the English-speaking world (see Davis 1997). The perspective of psychology on the individual child in comparison to the "average" child thus became significant, producing the representation of a pupil whose intellect is "abnormally" developed. This view transformed the support school pupil from an impoverished, sick or fragile child into an "abnormal" child, which the statistical normal distribution shows can be found on the margins of every society, in every school and classroom, because its very essence is the identification of marginal groups. In Germany as elsewhere, this interpretation is still today a taken-for-granted disciplinary foundation. Psychological theories and measurement techniques have been and continue to be integrated into the dis-

course of learning disability. Psychologists become a part of the group of experts who diagnose and determine the "need of a child to attend a support school" (*Hilfsschulbedürftigkeit*). Who becomes classified and into which categories depends on those who identify, assess, diagnose, and classify pupils. Measurements are themselves based on the goals and decisions of those in control of "special" educational processes (see Tomlinson 1982).

Present in the very early publications and debates, psychology developed into a major stream of the discourse of educational science into the 1960s. From the 1970s to 1990s in Germany, a polarizing debate about "psychologization" took place. Critics argued that the focus on the individual had hidden the collective social situation of this group within the class system of a capitalist society (on the class basis of the learning disability category, see Begemann 1970 for Germany; Carrier 1986 for the United States). They instead called for integration, based on the principle that all children can learn and grow, regardless of their social background. Some authors (Hiller 1989; Klemm 1991) saw in educational expansion a negative aspect in that socially disadvantaged youth would have difficulty meeting the rising standards in schooling and vocational training. Most recently, with the rise of internationally-comparative studies of school performance, Germany has witnessed a further strengthening of educational psychology, its performance and competence measurements, and standardization, despite critiques (Pfahl & Powell 2005).

Special education in Germany, taught in educational colleges and universities, can be understood as a "secondary discipline" (Stichweh 1994). It is characterized by a weak client orientation and strong professional procedures and modes of operation based on psychological and medical diagnostics as part of scientific and professional procedures and a stalwart orientation to the organizational forms in the independent special school sector. The focus on school performance and learning development of classified groups of "difficult" or "abnormal" pupils continues in contemporary discourses of special education that have differentiated categories of "support" and also call for the inclusion of special school pupils in tests of school performance that would increase the accountability of special education. By the 1970s, intellectually disabled children and youth with have been considered "practically educable" (*praktisch bildbar*) and thus have been integrated into schools systems; however, most often they have attended segregated special schools. This resulted in the transfer of a group of pupils from support schools to these schools.

In the 1980s, once again with the parallel development of professional specialization and special school form, a specialty relating to behaviour and emotional disturbance was established. Such differentiation of special education's classification system—and the corresponding special schools—was based on procedures that quantitatively and qualitatively recognize and measure abilities in graduated steps. These procedures and categories are used to classify pupils according to their developmental level, their adaptability to the normal school and learning situations and depending on their family's resources. Contrary to empirical research results, many parents and educators assume that "normal" school conditions demand too much of some pupils and that "normal" pupils are hindered in their learning by the presence

and needs of classmates diagnosed as "having special educational needs." This argument, used to authorize the establishment of independent, segregated schools at the beginning of the twentieth century, continues to function as legitimation for the segregation of pupils who, given the organization of schooling, have not been sufficiently supported to reach their learning goals.

German general education and special education developed in parallel. However, both assume that by differentiating pupils by age and performance levels according to an ascribed innate quantity of talent (*Begabung*), relatively homogenous classes can be formed and these offer the best possible learning conditions. Selections from the Recommendation of the German Education Commission reflect this perspective dominated by different school forms as the appropriate response to differences in development of children and youth. As Barbara Sherman Heyl (1998) has emphasized, parental grass-roots organizations in Germany since the 1970s attempted to counter the school segregation of their disabled children by establishing model school integration projects, but that wide-scale resistance to integration—the defence of special schools and cost considerations—hampered such efforts.

Inclusive education faces a host of barriers, including the existing school structures. In particular, the hierarchically differentiated secondary school types, the legitimacy of the special school system and the sovereignty of the *Länder* in educational matters resist reform (see Below 2002 on differences in the sixteen educational systems). Further, the interests of those who work in well-resourced schools and earn higher salaries than general schoolteachers hinder change, as does the lack of political will to redirect funding and professional talent from special schools to inclusive education programs. Indeed, the institutional logic of dividing pupils among separate school types according to their ability level pervades the German educational system. By contrast, inclusive education calls such structures and functioning into question.

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a lively debate on educational politics in Germany in the aftermath of the international PISA studies of school performance, with consequences such as lengthened schooldays and more accountability for outputs of schools (see Pfahl & Powell 2005). The discussion centred around two questions: How to support more pupils to transition into vocational training and postsecondary education? Is it wise to teach pupils with unequal achievement and different class background (to a lesser extent, ethnic heritage) in the same classroom? The thrust of this discussion aimed at delaying decisive educational choices of parents and pupils into the middle teenage years. While this general debate raged, smaller groups of politicians, journalists, educational scientists, parents and activists attempted, and sometimes succeeded, to intervene in this discussion and to raise public awareness for the issue of special schools within the discussion on educational choice, inclusive education and human rights. In addition to this discursive treatment of the problem, legal battles for inclusive education and parents' school choice right (which is enshrined in the German Constitution but depends on the *Länder* providing the necessary funding to expand inclusive school-

ing) have intensified since the German legislature ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24) in 2009.

In Germany, a country-wide initiative demands one "school for all". A range of justifications for school integration and inclusive education has been prevalent in the discourse.[3] The first reason refers to the necessity for human beings to learn how important social inclusion, including the full participation of disabled people, is. Because of the ubiquitous segregation of disabled children and youth, fewer contacts and experiences are possible with peers, such that each new generation grows up with limited experience of the variety of human abilities. As mentioned throughout this contribution, special schools in Germany can not withstand accountability exercises that measure their outputs, especially when measured in certificates earned (80% do not even earn the lowest secondary certificate, see KMK 2008). The existence of special schools facilitates social selection processes, easing the removal of all those children thought to be "abnormal". This results in the overrepresentation of those social groups least able to self-advocate or challenge professional recommendations, namely poor children and many non-German children (albeit with large differences by nationality and migration experience, see Gabel et al. 2009). Given the importance accorded to vocationally qualified personnel in firms in Germany, the discourse of integration also includes arguments that Germany simply cannot afford to do without each and every person's contribution to economic productivity and growth: Yet not only for economic reasons, but also for humanitarian reasons, every citizen should be provided with opportunities to contribute to and participate in society; more diversity in schooling benefits all children.

The tenacious ideology of innate talent inspires the selection into groups of differential status, who are then distributed after only four to maximally six school years among hierarchically differentiated secondary school types, which are defined as "appropriate" for the ascribed intellectual level—and rigidly predetermine which further education pathways will be available due to school-leaving certificates of vastly different value. This structuration of schooling undergirds the illusion that the groups of pupils are homogenous, which also hinders the acknowledgment of individual differences and the pedagogical strategies and support to meet individual learning goals. This is the key to inclusive schooling, which assumes that each and every learner, with particular strengths, weaknesses, and experiences, will follow a particular developmental trajectory. Yet even school integration would counter the traditional school system structure in Germany that reifies and reproduces existing class boundaries. This differentiation into segregated school types on the basis of social class background runs counter to meritocratic and to democratic ideals of equality (see Solga 2009). Schooling, in which each new cohort is socialized and prepared for active citizenship, demands investment. Germany has only recently awakened to the importance of this investment—as an efficient policy to reduce "educational poverty" (Allmendinger 1999), which in education societies often leads to a

3 The Germany-wide initiative "Eine Schule für Alle," see www.eine-schule-fuer-alle.info/sieben-gruende, last accessed 2009.11.14.

host of negative consequences, from heightened risk of illness and disablement to dependence on social assistance. Thus, education and social policy must be viewed in concert much more than they have been, with the three key areas of disability policy—oriented to compensation, rehabilitation, and participation—understood not as separate but as complementary and each addressing a relevant dimension of disablement and disability (see Maschke 2004).

V Summary

The twentieth century brought elaborated classification systems and more differentiated school systems, and special educators were trained to work in support schools, in special classes and in asylums, with specialties based on types of children and youth, defined according to the categories of the day (Hofsäss 1993). The categories of the clinical disciplines were then integrated into institutionalized practices as they were applied to clients in existing organizations (see Pfahl 2008). In Germany, this occurred along the lines of largely independent educational organizational forms. Furthermore, the school-based and even higher education training programs of special educators have been oriented to impairment categories and/or the types of "special" schools developed to serve these children and youth. How professionals interpret and use such categories has lasting impact on the decision-making process of teachers who are responsible for identifying who, when and where individual pupils are referred, assessed, diagnosed, and classified (see Kottmann 2006 on "learning disability" classification in Germany).

This analysis has delineated the discourse formation of "learning disability" in different phases, showing both continuity and breaks in the course of its transformation over the past hundred years. Such a historical perspective, in which the facts and objectification of special education objects and terms are deconstructed, uncovers the taken-for-granted institutionalization of special schools—indeed, segregated schooling—and the discursive elements that led to their construction. The educational system is the social space in which the distribution of statements about pupils, teachers, administrators as well as about learning, success, failure, and performance coalesce. Knowledge about "learning disability" can be understood through this distribution of statements, not via the subjective meaning that individual actors in complex educational systems ascribe within their educational practices. Aspects of "true statements" about pupils and "appropriate" schooling are especially important in analyzing educational discourses and in unmasking the legitimation effects of scientific discourses.

To do so, we distinguished and described three crucial phases of the development of "healing or therapeutic pedagogy" as a process of professionalization and of strategic professional interests. Phase I began after the establishment of compulsory education and at the start of a century of dramatic educational expansion at the end of the nineteenth century. Teachers interested in social equality began to teach

children from the strata of migrant workers and the *Lumpenproletariat*, which remained excluded from the modernized educational system of the Prussian monarchy. Growing beyond single organizations serving pupils with perceived impairments, special classes and schools were founded and the profession established itself nationwide at the turn of the twentieth century. In the second phase, during and after the post-WW II expansion, the profession succeeded in expanding university departments nationwide. Accordingly, the number of special education schools exploded tenfold in the 1960s. At the same time, the national classification of special educational needs was differentiated and segregated special schooling was supplemented with a system of special vocational training. This was meant to organize the transition of special school leavers into a segregated and highly subsidized labour market, including vocational programs and workshop settings. In the third phase, from the 1980s onwards, a debate about integration and segregation began. While parents and politicians continued this conflict, a strong and entrenched scientific discourse, supported by the practitioners with their vested interests and drawing on both the ideology of innate ability and clinical thinking, dominated public discourse on student disabilities. The field of special education further expanded and cooperated across disciplines, co-founding the so-called science of rehabilitation (*Rehabilitationswissenschaften*). Here too, the academic development, research specialisations and department chairs were built along the existing school types. Teachers, largely through their influential professional associations, succeeded in exerting influence on politics and public administration and effectively articulated their interests in educating disabled pupils almost exclusively in segregated schools.

In Germany, the profession and its segregated schooling organizations create a parallel world that insulates its representatives from criticism, which they often perceive as an external threat to their objective and subjective interests and their identity. This construction of special education is a scientific articulation of the nineteenth century idea of a particular societal distribution of innate talent that demands the "protection" of the most disadvantaged pupils not only from the insults and dangers of capitalist society but also from themselves. At the same time, school segregation—and the resulting divergent life chances—is seen as protecting "society" from dangerous underprivileged individuals as its class and dis/ability boundaries are reproduced.

The special education profession in Germany exhibits remarkable historical continuity. Firstly, professional perspectives understand pupils as needy but also as individually deviant, despite changes in categorical labels—from individual impairments before the 1950s to school types during the special expansion to pedagogical support categories since 1994. A further change on the surface has been the renaming of the professional association from that of support or special schools to the Special Education Association (*Verband deutscher Sonderpädagogik*). Despite such discursive shifts, however, and of considerable consequence for life chances, the treatment of pupils classified in the "learning disability" category continues to build on segregation as appropriate, even necessary. This continuity in disciplinary knowledge and praxis is all the more remarkable given the nadir of the Third Reich,

the Allied occupying forces that attempted but largely failed to establish a democratic school system in West Germany, and considerable international pressures to implement school integration—or, most recently, to restructure the educational system to be inclusive.

The interests of those who work in well-resourced special schools and earn higher salaries than general schoolteachers have hindered change and continue to do so, as does the lack of political will to redirect funding and professional talent from special schools to inclusive education programs. Thus, despite considerable local successes, in most regions of Germany inclusive schools remain exceptional. The profession of special education—and the more specific case of learning disability—has from the beginning based its authority on a specific school form, an organizational solution, which copied the model of German general education, namely an hierarchically structured multi-tiered school system. The general and special schools share a common vision of the pedagogical necessity of gathering pupils into supposedly homogenous groups according to innate abilities, however defined by the education profession's contemporary knowledge base.

The professional construction of learning disabilities focuses on "healing individual intellectual deficits" of pupils. Segregated educational environments, viewed by educators as providing special support by offering a "comforting space" or "safe territory" (*Schonraum*), effectively cap the educational attainment and personal development of their pupils, yet their legitimacy is maintained by the discourse that bolsters and reifies "learning disability".[4] The professional associations participate in the scientific definition and the development of categories and practices and have, over the past hundred years, been highly influential in constructing, differentiating, and maintaining a classification system that undergirds the special schools. Not only are these pupils released into the labour market with a lack of formal resources. They tend to reduce their self-expectations to the degree that they do not feel capable to participate in official forms of employment. The German *Sonderschule* equips its clients with a *Sonderschüler* identity, in line with the general objectification and division of educational identities within an educational system structured along class barriers.

Although a significant number of schools throughout Germany have successfully taught inclusively since pilot projects were first begun in the 1980s, according to most recent data from the Conference of Culture Ministers (*Kultusministerkonferenz*), the national average of pupils with special educational needs integrated in

4 Additionally, the incorporation of scientific discourse elements of physical "incompleteness" and "disruption" shapes the biographical selves of youth, such that they remain in purportedly "safe territories" (*Schonräume*), which restrain and constrict their participation and inclusion. These safe territories can be interpreted as an attempt to protect pupils by placing them in a social territory, which is situated outside of power relations and the competitiveness of capitalist labour markets. This attempt, which has a long history, is deeply paradoxical, especially in a situation in which unskilled labour is increasingly excluded from any kind of labour market participation.

general schools was only 14 percent in 2006, placing Germany among the most segregated educational systems in Europe (see Richardson & Powell, forthcoming).

The legitimacy of special school segregation seems likely to continue despite attempts to reduce the number of general secondary school types in the multi-tier, hierarchically differentiated educational system. Numerous historical junctures indicate this: the Western German *Länder* that implemented a comprehensive secondary school in the 1980s failed to explicitly include disabled children into that "diversity" and the Eastern German *Länder*, which had such a secondary school, in the 1990s after reunification differentiated by school type—and vastly increasing the proportion of pupils in segregated special education (now with the highest rates, see KMK 2008).

In both parts of Germany, paradoxically, school segregation rates have been increasing at the same time that inclusive education programs are strengthened. Differences across the sixteen *Länder* demonstrate that inclusive education is possible in Germany, where the will exists to reform educational policies and practices to be more inclusive. As delineated here, a key factor in the continued growth of largely segregated special education is the authority of the profession with respect to "learning disability" and the discourse that continues to legitimate the classification of pupils as "learning disabled" and the resulting segregated schooling.

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