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Promoting Social Competences and Responsibility of Students

At the end of our sixth international workshop we want to present some data and considerations under the title given in the program: "Promoting social competences and responsibility of students". It would be a misunderstanding, if you expected plans for action or programs for educational practice. On the contrary we start to ask simply: What happens to students at university, especially what are their experiences, and what have they learned at the end of their time at the institution. It is nearly self-evident that all data and results, which we will present, are based on the student survey (which is now starting already for the twelfth time).

It is not possible here to explain it in detail, but it might be helpful to give some hints about the theoretical background:
In the first place we are discussing the *framework of educational aims*. What is the sense of higher or scientific or academic education? We are convinced that one general aim is very important, nevertheless it is often forgotten: "citizenship" – the competence to participate and engage oneself in public affairs, or, even more specific, to gain social competences and a sense of public responsibility during study time.
The other theoretical embedding of our research is the *socialization theory*, meaning in which way students develop their values and habits, preferences, and competences in the social context of universities and in the subject they have chosen. We are asking: what are the central features in this context, what are intentional processes, and what are processes behind our back (called latent ones).
The third important distinction concerns the *cultural dimension of studying* in order to differentiate it from the social dimension or the economic success. This means morality and communication, stiles and convictions about life, self and others, profession and work, politics and public affairs. From its beginnings the student survey investigated this important

part of student life (in distinction to inquiries about their social and financial life).

Let us move now to the empirical basis, the answers of students in our student survey, as gathered in the last fifteen years. We want to confront you with three branches of results:

1) In the first place we register changes of students' orientation and activities concerning public affairs.
2) Secondly we take a look at the demands, expectations and obligations during studying, as students have experienced them.
3) Thirdly, we present students' estimation about the outcome of studying, the results of qualification and socialization at university and in their field of study with students' eyes.

Finally we will offer some considerations about differences and reasons, about consequences and necessities of action.

The Bachelor generation of students in Germany, as we can observe them in the last years, shows indeed some essentially new features concerning the cultural dimension of study expectations and experiences.

They are more eager to follow the regulations and prescriptions; they more often want a short study, efficiency at university and a good exam.

They feel more stress, and often they have a problem with their future life, and wonder whether to do a further grade after the first exam or start working (Master or job).

They are more interested in job security and in a career later on, they do not want to look for alternatives or new ways of living or working.

They often claim to be so overburden with studying that they have no time to engage themselves politically or to be socially active.

All these elements, to sum it up, are features of students' orientations as well as of institutional conditions which do not seem to be helpful in developing political interest, public engagement or social solidarity – in general called "citizenship".

First Observation: Changes in Orientations and Activities

As promised, we will begin with changes in students' orientations and activities. It has been a slow process, really starting at the end of the nineties and covering wider area over time. The study conditions in the Bachelor, as mentioned above, strengthen these developments a little, but they are not the only elements responsible for these results.

Less Participation and Engagement

Partly, this might already be known: students show less interest in politics and in participation.

At university students show less involvement in student unions, they are politically less active, or demonstrations tend to be less aggressive. It is the case in public life as well: students hesitate to be a member of a political party or to take part in social initiatives.

Engagement in social affairs as well as interest in culture and in activities have diminished; we observe less support of solidarity and fairness, instead more votes for concurrence and own advantages.

Low General Responsibility

Bachelor-students hesitate to build up their own opinion or to develop broader concepts. But they expect more support and services; often they have the mindset of consumers who demand well-prepared lessons and easy offerings.

If they consider engaging themselves, they often ask for gratifications, for example in the shape of ECTS-points. They are less idealistic, and more passive: they show greater absence of responsibility.

These are only some traces of the changes we observe. We could add more, but this might be enough in order to put the following questions: why is this happening and how much of it is caused by universities. To get answers we start by considering the experiences of students with regard to the demands put on them: what is expected of them to learn, and how should they behave.

Second: Demands, Expectations and Obligations during Studying

The main expectation in our opinion is: the demands and obligations students experience in their field of study are rather one-sided. There is too much factual knowledge demanded, and too little general, especially social-political, competences. And in addition, this dis-balance is becoming even worse over time. This is our rough hypothesis.

We checked this by using questions about demands and obligations in study. We used nine items belonging to three dimensions:

At the one hand we put questions on three obligations: (1) large amount of content and intensiveness in study, (2) large amount of factual subject knowledge and (3) permanent testing of the learning results.

The three demands are on the other hand: (1) being able to criticize leading positions, (2) developing interest in social and political questions (from the point of view of their subject) and (3) considering ethical and moral questions with regard to their subject.

And in between we have again three expectations, which might be seen as prerequisites for developing social competences: (1) participating in discussions during lessons, (2) working together with other students and (3) developing own interests in special fields.

All these items are indicators with regard to intended habits of persons, you may say, three types of social profiles:

- on the one hand the "adapted, obedient, and effective",

- on the other hand the "critical, interested, and reflective",

- and the third between "participative, interactive and individual".

Let us have a look at the answers of students. The table offers differentiated insights.

At first, the results confirm our hypothesis, that too much emphasis is laid on adaptive learning and working (52%), there are too little demands for critical thinking (56%) or interest in social-political questions (58%), and even not enough (53%) for participation in discussion during lessons.

Especially in the last years (from 2007 to 2010) the obligation to work a lot or to often proof achievements in learning has increased very much. Now we understand why students complain about a heavy study workload and stress.

But we have to admit, as a positive result, that in the dimension of participation, interaction and individualism much more students evaluate the demands and possibilities as "quite right" – in all respects the data show from 1995 to 2010 a continuous growth of students who think the demands to be in a good balance.

One additional remark, concerning the answer "cannot judge". It was the famous Bourdieu who pointed out that the amount of no answers, saying "I do not know" or "I cannot judge", is of social importance, for example the difference between social classes concerning political topics (in his book "About social Differences"). In our case as well, the amount of "cannot judge" is impressive, especially in the development over the years.

It is worthwhile to take a short look at differences between students of different fields of subjects.

We observe three main levels concerning the demands for critical thinking, social-political interest and involvement with ethical questions. In all three cases students of economics and of medicine experience a very low degree of emphasis, much too low for even two thirds of them.

On the other hand, we get the answers of students in cultural and social sciences as we may expect them: they have some more demands in this field, but even for many of them the demands are too low (more than a half is discontent and judge them to be too low). – It might be a little bit surprising, but students of engineering belong to the same level of students which do not show so much discontent, especially concerning the demand for critical abilities and interest in ethical questions.

Between these two levels students of natural science and law are situated. They both reach the identical score for this dimension of demand for critics, politics and ethics – and they are nearer to the first level of greater demands in this respect.

Table 1: Demands and obligations in the field of study: experience of students at universities in Germany (German Student Survey, 1995 – 2010)

	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010
Adaptation, Obedience and Effectiveness						
(A 1): to work much and intensive for studying						
too little	19	22	20	20	18	12
quite right	40	41	37	41	40	34
too much	**37**	**32**	**40**	**37**	**39**	**52**
cannot judge	*4*	*4*	*3*	*3*	*2*	*2*
(A 2): to gain a big amount of factual knowledge						
too little	15	18	16	17	17	12
quite right	41	41	44	47	49	46
too much	39	36	37	33	31	39
cannot judge	*4*	*5*	*4*	*4*	*3*	*3*
(A 3): to offer regular proof of learning achievement (tests etc.)						
too little	22	25	23	22	19	11
quite right	**52**	**51**	**50**	**52**	**52**	46
too much	37	32	40	37	39	**52**
cannot judge	*2*	*3*	*2*	*2*	*2*	*2*
Participation, Interaction and Individualism						
(B 1): to understand basic principles						
too little	**42**	**39**	**36**	**31**	**28**	**28**
quite right	**50**	**51**	**56**	**59**	**62**	**63**
too much	6	7	8	8	8	8
cannot judge	*2*	*3*	*2*	*2*	*2*	*2*
(B 2): to participate in discussions during lessons						
too little	**65**	**64**	**62**	**58**	**55**	**53**
quite right	**29**	**30**	**32**	**35**	**38**	**40**
too much	4	4	4	4	5	4
cannot judge	*3*	*3*	*3*	*3*	*3*	*3*
(B 3): to work together with other students						
too little	**55**	**54**	**51**	**44**	**40**	**38**
quite right	**39**	**40**	**42**	**49**	**52**	**52**
too much	4	3	5	6	7	7
cannot judge	*2*	*3*	*2*	*2*	*2*	*2*
Critical Ability, Social-political Interests and Ethical Reflectivity						
(C 1): critical ability concerning leading opinions						
too little	**67**	**65**	**62**	**57**	**55**	**56**
quite right	39	39	40	39	39	39
too much	3	2	3	3	3	3
cannot judge	*8*	*9*	*8*	*10*	*10*	*11*
(C 2): to be interested in social and political questions						
too little	**64**	**65**	**59**	**57**	**56**	**58**
quite right	34	35	35	36	36	36
too much	3	1	2	1	2	1
cannot judge	*10*	*11*	*12*	*12*	*15*	*15*
(C 3): to be concerned with ethical questions of the subject						
too little	--	--	54	51	50	51
quite right	--	--	26	29	27	28
too much	--	--	1	3	2	2
cannot judge	*--*	*--*	*18*	*18*	*20*	*19*

Source: German Students Survey, RG in Higher Education, University of Konstanz, 1995 – 2010.

Third: The Outcome of Qualification and Socialization

If we know the "input", the demands and obligations at the one hand, we have to ask for the "output", nowadays "outcome" of studying, at th other hand – and then investigate how they might be interconnected. Since several years we are having quite intensive discussions about qualifiction and the results concerning key-qualifications or general competences. Sometimes the lists are very long, for example for engineers.

For the moment we are choosing those elements of qualification and scialization we have gathered in the last six surveys, thus being able to observe the development over the last 15 years.
We discerned four branches or dimensions.
In the first place we have two items for the complex of factual knowledge and using it: (1) factual knowledge and (2) intellectual abilities for logical thinking.
Then two items are following, concerning employability and working as (1) practical abilities, and (2) working techniques, systematic working.
Then we have two items which hint to the traditional academically educated person: as (1) autonomy and self-competence and (2) general education, broad knowledge.
And the last complex combines (1) ability of critical thinking with (2) social responsibility.
Students could evaluate, if their outcome of study with regard to these competences has been nothing (0) up to very strong (6). For the moment it might be enough to have a look at those who registered an excellent improvement of their qualities.

The gain in subject knowledge is evaluated by the students as quite high – nearly all have learned something, more than a half even very much. Also the gain in autonomy is quite high – and the outcome seems to students to be often better than in other fields of competences.

The outcome is low, and even worse than that, when looking at elements which belong to what we call "citizenship", as social responsibility and critical thinking.

Table 2

Outcome of studying at universities in Germany in four branches of core- and general competences (German Student Survey, 1995 – 2010)

	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	balance
Knowledge and Thinking							
(A 1): factual knowledge							
rather good	42	45	43	42	41	43	
very much	51	49	51	53	54	53	
Together	93	94	94	95	95	96	+ 3
(A 2): intellectual abilities, logical thinking							
rather good	45	45	44	45	45	47	
very much	33	32	28	29	32	31	
Together	78	77	72	74	77	78	+/- 0
Employability and Working							
(B 1): practical abilities							
rather good	32	33	35	37	39	41	
very much	12	11	13	14	17	17	
Together	**44**	**44**	**48**	**51**	**56**	**58**	**+ 14**
(B 2): working techniques/systematic working							
rather good	44	44	45	46	47	48	
very much	24	24	19	21	22	22	
Together	68	68	64	67	69	70	+ 2
Autonomy and General Education							
(C 1): autonomy and self-reliance							
rather good	43	42	41	41	41	38	
very much	32	34	38	42	47	46	
Together	**75**	**76**	**79**	**83**	**88**	**84**	**+ 9**
(C 2): general education, broad knowledge							
rather good	34	38	38	39	41	40	
very much	13	15	14	14	17	16	
Together	**47**	**53**	**52**	**53**	**58**	**56**	**+ 9**
Critical Ability and Social Responsibility							
(D 1): critical ability, critical thinking							
rather good	41	40	42	42	43	41	
very much	22	25	25	27	27	27	
Together	63	65	67	69	70	68	+ 5
(D 2): social responsibility							
rather good	30	32	33	35	35	35	
very much	11	13	15	15	18	19	
Together	**41**	**45**	**48**	**50**	**53**	**54**	**+ 13**

Source: German Students Survey, RG in Higher Education, University of Konstanz, 1995 – 2010.

This result may only be a starting point for further research, with our own survey data or with other empirical studies. We will go further on, investigating more precisely the input and the output and the connection of both.

Firstly, concentrating on students in the Bachelor-study or students in special study phases as at the beginning, in the middle or at the end.

Secondly, doing correlative analysis, to see if there is a latent connection with the demands in the field of subject and the outcomes of studying, some might be direct and some indirect.

Thirdly, looking at determinants, especially comparing personal-individual factors at the one hand and institutional conditions at the other. This has been a useful perspective already in other fields of interest as drop-out or study success.

Consequences for Study Situation and Support

In general it seems necessary to implement cultural principles of science and studying as autonomy and mobility, research orientation and responsibility, again in the courses of study. To be a little bit more specific:

Engagement and Responsibility: Often students get offers within class which are too well-prepared, and they are not motivated to discuss, to decide, to make proposals, to criticize and to follow own ideas. These conditions enforce their avoidance of responsibility. They are misleading and are driving them into the *role of a consumer*. This seems as a sweet seduction for teachers as for students, but it does not foster autonomy and responsibility.

That means more time for own thinking, discussion, open processes, that means more cooperation and exchange is needed, as it is the case in projects including team work, combining individuality and responsibility. Erroneously the idea students might learn this in special "qualification courses" is upheld. In contrary, the ideas mentioned above have to be a fundamental issue in all classes and in the course of study from the first day on – to be efficient.

International Mobility and Exchange: A main task is to promote the international mobility of students, even during Bachelor time. It is especially important to develop the international cooperation everywhere, and to give to all students a realistic chance of international mobility. Also the support for going aboard is not already installed often enough: that means counseling, adjustment of workloads, special contracts, integration into the study, better funding by loans for going abroad.

Citizenship and Engagement: It is necessary to regard citizenship to be as important as employability or engagement. That means to offer arrangements, activities, and tasks to students where they can develop engagement and exercise responsibility.

Every level of involvement should be enhanced to counter apathy and helplessness. Every field of activity should be used, building up opinions, work in the students council, activity in orchestra or chorus, continuous participation in political or social groups, interest in initiatives.

There are many possibilities to encourage and support cultural work, social engagement and political orientation of students – in normal lessons as well as in special offers or opportunities, sometimes duties.