

## **MISRECOGNITION OF GIFTED MIGRANTS IN GERMANY**

Prof. Dr. Haci-Halil Uslucan

University of Duisburg-Essen

E-Mail: [haci@uslucan.de](mailto:haci@uslucan.de)

Previous research on the educational participation, educational success and professional careers of migrant students in Germany focused on the reasons for failure and hardly considered their potentials. Dominant is a socio-educationally motivated caring attitude that wants to help the "poor and disadvantaged migrants." But the fact that this group may also have extraordinary skills, knowledge and talents is an idea that sometimes strains the pedagogical belief system.

What kind of potentials are we talking about? These can first be differentiated into non-cognitive (psychological resilience and success factors such as high self-efficacy, motivation and ambition, family ties, supportive social environment, etc.) and cognitive (above-average intellectual talents, bilingualism, etc.). In everyday pedagogical life, they are rarely recognized or systematically misunderstood; in this respect, they are hardly the subject of scientific discourse. The fact that a child with Turkish roots, for example, can speak his or her mother tongue well in addition to German and thus has a significantly expanded linguistic lexicon is hardly appreciated, because the focus is only on his or her German language competencies.

For quite a long time, the percentage of migrant children in programs for the highly gifted in Anglo-Saxon countries as well as in Germany was only between 4 and 9 percent; although there is a consensus that giftedness occurs in all cultures and contexts, and at the same time there is an overwhelming empirical evidence that the percentage of migrant children in the total population is significantly higher - about 30 to 40 %. This means, therefore, that if the allocation were fair, their share in the support programs would have to be roughly similar, around one-third.

This underrepresentation of certain ethnic groups has been addressed several times in U.S. research (see Callahan, 2005; Neumeister et al. 2007); in German-language research, Margrit Stamm (2007; 2009) has so far devoted herself intensively to this issue, focusing her research largely on Switzerland; in Germany, the psychologist Albert Ziegler and his team (Reutlinger, Leana-Taşçılar & Ziegler, 2014) did commendable work on this issue. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the focus is less often on talents and potentials, but rather on deficits and shortcomings of immigrants and their descendants.

Why is it that too little attention is paid to potential? The reasons for this lack of recognition can be seen in the following aspects, which are only outlined here:

1. Culturally and socially restrictive/biased conceptions of aptitudes and talents
2. Test diagnostic biases
3. Distortions in teacher perception
4. Distortions in the self-perception of immigrants.

### **What is meant by these points in detail?**

1. Concepts of psychological resources as well as talents are not culture-free but are always subject to an unspoken cultural valuation: as a consequence, they often lead to an underrepresentation of students with a different cultural tradition or with an immigration history, because their culture-specific gifts/talents are not sufficiently considered or appreciated (Tan, 2008). This is because the notion of what is considered particularly good and who is considered gifted in turn obeys specific societal notions. And these ideas reflect the ideals of the respective ruling middle and upper classes. Immigrants in Germany, especially those from Turkey, are largely recruited from the lower classes or other milieus. This can be exemplified in the field of music by the extraordinary talent of a saz player, whose skills are less recognized in Germany than the extraordinary ability of a person who plays for example the violin or piano. This is simply due to the fact that this musical instrument (string instrument saz) is still too little known in Germany and, for example, a jury cannot judge whether a particular performance is only average, rather good or even exceptionally good. So here we have a cultural blindness for this potential talent.

2. Already in the construction and calibration or the determination of calibration norm values of common giftedness and intelligence tests, cultural diversity has so far been too little taken into account (Barkan & Bernal, 1991). In addition, it should be mentioned that especially very language-bound or language-heavy knowledge and intelligence tests can affect the results if the person or the student has only a low knowledge of German and, among other things, does not fully understand the task or the instruction. It should also be remembered that the knowledge content of intelligence tests does not have the same everyday relevance for immigrants or originate from the same life-world contexts as it does for natives and is therefore not always appropriate.

3 Another aspect of misjudgement is to be located with the teachers: Teachers often show a higher cultural similarity in lifestyle, in their values and world views with native (middle class) pupils; they see, recognize and promote the potentials there rather than with migrant children, for example, if they have a very creative use of language in the mother tongue, but only speak an everyday, limited German. However, the question whether these migrant students have an exceptionally elaborated language use in their mother tongue, or first language is hardly ever asked or examined.

4. Last but not least, it happens that immigrants also internalize the societal view of themselves to such an extent that it has become a part of their self-image and therefore they hardly believe in



their own special gifts and talents or in the gifts and talents of their children or perceive them as a special feature. Psychologist names this process as “social mirroring”. Sometimes, parents also narrow down the intellectual potentials of their children to socially accepted and immediately convertible forms of symbolic capital: Migrant parents, for example, are often less willing to recognize aesthetic, expressive, poetic talents of their children or to promote and develop them (as, by the way, was also the case in Germany a few generations ago), because these are associated with a lower prestige in the countries of origin, they are sometimes very risky career tracks and they are too little familiar with these professions in Germany via social advancement opportunities. And in some cases, they are not aware of the existing support programs for particularly talented/gifted children in the educational landscape. For example, they want their child to become an engineer or a doctor, but not a writer or a musician, because the first-mentioned professions promise social advancement, but artistic careers entail strong economic uncertainties. This uncertainty cannot be afforded - understandably - by immigrant families; for the central motive of migration, namely an economically better life, would thereby be called into question.

If it is taken into account that a large part of the parents of the second generation knew neither the educational nor the school system in Germany sufficiently and that therefore the second generation, which grew up here, could not, like their German peers, rely on the fact that their school career would be co-arranged or guided by their parents, i.e. that they could hardly fall back on a family tradition of attending university, then it can be assumed in retrospect: Educationally successful immigrants have a high capacity for "self-placement." In other words, they were able to control their own school careers from an early age and to represent their interests appropriately towards school and official authorities, which is an indicator of extremely strong psychological resources and resilience. This seems to be the case not only with the second generation of the 1980's, but also with current students (see Lang, Pott & Schneider, 2016).

In the future, these strong cognitive as well as psychological resources must be given much more attention in educational work and research, and self-critical attention must be paid to their possibly unrecognized potentials when assigning migrant students (see Uslucan, 2015).

### **Literature:**

Barkan, J. H. & Bernal, E. M. (1991) Gifted education for bilingual and limited English proficient students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 35, 144-147.

Callahan, C. M. (2005). Identifying gifted students from underrepresented populations. *Theory into Practice*, 44 (2), 98-104.



Lang, C., Pott, A. & Schneider, J. (2016). Unwahrscheinlich erfolgreich: Sozialer Aufstieg in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft (IMIS-Beiträge 49/2016), Osnabrück: IMIS.

Neumeister, K. L. S., Adams, C. M., Pierce, R. L., Cassady, J. C., & Dixon, F. A. (2007). Fourth grade teachers perceptions of giftedness: Implications for identifying and serving diverse students. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 30,479-499.

Reutlinger, M., Leana-Taşçılar, M. Ziegler, A. (2014) <http://www.psychology.uni-erlangen.de/hotm/ebook.pdf> (Access at 22.06.2018)

Stamm, M. (2007). Begabtenförderung und soziale Herkunft. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation*, 27, 227—242.

Stamm, M. (2009). *Begabte Minoritäten*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Tan, D. (2008). Migration als Chance. In: M. Adelman (Hrsg.), *Zukunft braucht Begabung – Begabung braucht Zukunft*. 30 Jahre Deutsche Gesellschaft für das hochbegabte Kind (DGHK), S. 243–260. Münster: LIT.

Uslucan, H.- H. (2015). Kulturelle und Curriculare Barrieren der Potenzialentfaltung von Zuwanderern. In S. Keuchel & V. Kelb (Hg.), *Diversität in der Kulturellen Bildung* (S. 59-73). Bielefeld: transcript.