



KATHOLISCHE UNIVERSITÄT
EICHSTÄTT-INGOLSTADT

Joint Project

Inclusive Living and Learning at School

Dissertation Project in the Graduate Program „Inclusive Education“

Meritocracy and Educational Justice

Published: August 2020



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MERITOCRACY AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Meritocracy is the view that people should be rewarded for their achievements and not on the basis of factors that lie beyond their control and responsibility. In the field of Philosophy of Education, proponents of meritocracy state that recipients of educational services should be rewarded on the basis of merit. This approach is said to prevent the receipt of educational services becoming dependent on the recipients' social and economic background. Instead, users of educational services are rewarded for something they alone are accountable for. Proponents of meritocracy often define merit as talent plus effort: The ones who are talented and show effort should be those receiving educational services.

In my dissertation, I oppose the view that talent and effort, and thus merit, are achievements independent of the background of recipients of educational services. Instead, I propose that merit depends, at least partly, on the socio-economic and family background of an individual. Using an interdisciplinary approach including state-of-the-art findings in the areas of educational theory, neuroscience and psychology, I show exactly how both talent and effort are dependent on the socio-economic background of an individual and thus lie outside the responsibility of the said individual. In a meritocratic educational system, educational success still relies heavily on the socio-economic background of the recipients of educational services, undermining the original aim of the meritocratic approach. This also undermines the inclusion of those who need to be supported the most: structurally disadvantaged people such as migrants, children from poor families, first-generation students and disabled children. Furt-

hermore, I explore the possibility of a more inclusive educational system not reliant on distributional deliberations. Instead, I suggest that a just educational system should ensure that each individual be assisted in fully developing their natural talents in the best way possible, regardless of their background. Such an educational system could be based on the theory of individual recognition (Honneth, Fraser) for each and every learner within the system.

Further Information

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[For the results documentation of the dissertation project \(poster and resultsdocumentation in German and English language\)](#)

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