

Meritocracy and Educational Justice

Franziska Vogt & Prof. Dr. Krassimir Stojanov

29. Denn wer da hat, dem wird gegeben werden, und er wird die Fülle haben; wer aber nicht hat, dem wird auch, was er hat, genommen werden. 2. 13, 12.

- Meritocratic principle: basis for the fair distribution of (scarce) educational services
- Guarantee that individual entitlement to educational services does not depend on social background, origin and the decisions or means of the family of origin
- Merit: IQ/talent + effort

Research question: can merit be a legitimate basis for inequality in the distribution of educational services?

- On the one hand, natural talent is only sheer luck -> should be ruled out as a basis of evaluation especially by the meritocratic principle
- On the other hand, we can only evaluate developed talents. They are not independent of family/socio-economic background and similar influences. This leads to the Matthew effect.

- Neither natural or developed talent can serve as a basis for the distribution of educational services.

- The meritocratic principle could be rescued: eliminate as many inequality-generating factors as possible when assessing merit
-> Assess the talent and motivation of children and young people under approximately equal conditions
> Advantages and disadvantages arising from social inequalities then have no influence on merit
- However, the meritocratic principle would then be rendered dispensable
- In an education system in which inequalities are compensated in this way, we would no longer need the meritocratic principle to establish distributive justice

- Meritocracy leads to unfair distribution in socially unequal societies; in an egalitarian society it is dispensable

Can a meritocratic education system be an inclusive education system?

- It is precisely those who would benefit from an inclusive education system that are disadvantaged in a way that affects the development of their talents and motivation
- Those affected are non-privileged, vulnerable children and adolescents - including children of migrants, children of parents without academic education, children with learning disabilities, first-generation students
- If we judge their merits in comparison to those of privileged children, we do not measure their actual performance excluding their background and the difficulties these children and young people have to overcome
- A meritocratic education system preserves given social structures; injustice is inherited intergenerationally

- A meritocratic education system cannot be an inclusive education system

Characteristics of a non-meritocratic, inclusive alternative proposal

- abandon approaches that favour merit as the basis on which educational goods are distributed
- distribution of services in such a way that everyone is supported as much as possible
- maximally inclusive education system: developing the potential of all/full participation
- instead of rewarding the privileged for merit, encourage those who have more difficulties in life
- focus on *Bildsamkeit* (*adaptability*)
- compensatory mitigation of inequalities and at the same time promotion of potential
- new incentive system: not competitive, but intrinsically motivating
- instead of trickle-down effect: promotion of overall well-being -> increases not only by promoting the gifted, but also by promoting the less gifted, those worse off and those with deficits
- Education is not only a positive-sum service, but also an instrumental service: also the less well-off and less talented must be guaranteed sufficient education as an instrumental service = moral obligation

Interdisciplinary approach:

- interdisciplinary analysis of the concept of talent and motivation
 - ✓ (Developmental) Psychology
 - ✓ Educational Science
 - ✓ Sociology
 - ✓ Neuroscience
- on the empirical basis of the respective specialist science
 - based on the analysis: can the analysed concept of talent and motivation be combined with the meritocratic principle?

Argumentative approach:

- systematic, analytic
- logically consistent philosophical argumentation against the meritocratic principle

Intelligence/Giftedness:

- the concept of giftedness used by meritocrats is based on a naive concept of talent
- natural ability is not a static property
- Neuroplasticity - the brain changes continuously, both neurophysiologically and neuroanatomically, due to experiential influences and learning experiences

Motivation:

- extrinsic motivation depends strongly on the social environment
- but intrinsic motivation can also be specifically supported - the support depends on the social and family environment
- the more favourably the learning environment is designed, the more (self-)motivated a learner can be

- Talent and motivation cannot be earned/are not independent of the (social) environment.
- Merit cannot serve as a basis for the distribution of educational services.
- In a meritocratic education system, there would be no guarantee that the distribution of educational services would be independent of the social background of those who receive or do not receive them.



"Meritocracy worked for my grandfather, it worked for my father, and it's working for me."

Literature (selection)

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