Changes in the Student Role [1]

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ABSTRACT   *Beyond changes in structure, organisation, curriculum, etc. changes in student life and, perhaps, in the student role are an important aspect of the development of university in the past as well as in the future. In this paper five indicators of such changes concerning students in the Federal Republic of Germany—recruitment of students, age, family, jobs, housing—are presented on the basis of recent surveys.*

In the following discussion of their implications, it is suggested that the university as an environment and studying as an activity are losing their central place in student life and that teaching and learning ought to respond to the needs and demands from those learners who in fact have become part-time students.

(1) Preliminary Remarks

The sixth centenary of the University of Heidelberg, the oldest in Western Germany, in 1986 has given rise to quite a few studies and symposia on the history of universities in general. Such historical studies normally focus on changes in organisation, structure and size, on the general policy of (higher) education, on subjects and curriculum. But what of the changes regarding the students at the same time? And how far do all these changes interact, how are the changes of the university as an institution influenced by how students act with and within it and conversely? In this paper I wish to pay special attention to changes in student culture as a factor of change of the university.

This question may be particularly important in the German context where the universities still tend to see themselves adhering to the ethos instilled into them by Humboldt in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the philosophy of the German university as developed by Humboldt and, in this respect, most of all by Schleiermacher, implies a certain concept of the student, too: the concept of a person already autonomous and to be treated as such, who responsibly organises his learning by fully participating in the life of the university. Much as teaching and the organisation of studies in German universities have changed since then, their present state still cannot be understood without considering this implication. But also other higher education systems in Europe and elsewhere, whether more loosely or less loosely organised and therefore more or less bound to a certain type of student than the German one, seem to be affected by changes similar to those in Germany which will be considered here [2].

These remarks and the title of this article, however, presuppose, what first will have to be demonstrated. For whether and how far and since when changes among students have taken place is quite a controversial question. While professors in their common rooms or committee meetings complain that students nowadays are no longer what they used to be, and many intellectual essays postulate a developing crisis in students' behaviour and

attitudes to the university, to learning, and to politics and even foresee a new type of socialisation called narcissistic, there are others, mostly sociologists, who insist that essentially there have not been any important changes in attitudes since the fifties, neither among young people in general (see Allerbeck & Hoag, 1985) nor among students in particular (see Bargel *et al.*, 1984b).

A second question is furthermore, whether and how far the presupposed changes really affect the student role. Those who follow a structuralist paradigm of analysis (as that by Parsons & Platt, 1974) and assume a 'basic role: learner' within a subsystem centred on the value of cognitive rationality tend to perceive but marginal variations in the student role (see Langer, 1984). Those, however, who in their concept of role adhere to the tradition of symbolic interactionism, try to observe how, together with changes in the social situation and in the biography of students, their perceptions and social strategies within the university are changing, too (see e.g. Liebau, 1981).

A third and last question is, whether and how far university and curriculum reform could and should respond to such changes. This is uncertain not only because the facts so far are not clear, but also because values and concepts of fundamental importance for the university are at stake.

Facing these questions I shall first compile a few data concerning the present social situation of students in the Federal Republic of Germany. They are meant to serve as indicators of change in study conditions today to which changes in attitudes and strategies of students could be supposed to correspond. To a foreign reader who is fully aware of such developments in his country (often more advanced) perhaps these data may look neither new or remarkable; however, it is hoped that they will rectify a 'classical' image of the student which presumably still prevails in many German minds, especially those of senior university teachers and administrators. It looks like this: a young man, who has moved from his parents' place to a university town far away is living there alone in a room as a subtenant or in a student dormitory, single, with sufficient, although perhaps scanty means (as suits the ascetic state of a young disciple of learning) and thus is free and unhampered to devote himself totally to the study of his subject.

This image does not hold any more for probably the majority of our students.

(2) Indicators of Change

(2.1) *The Recruitment of Students: social background and sex*

Along with certain shifts in society at large in the course of the last 30 years the higher education system has been expanded so as to include students from social classes who previously did not consider higher education. The resulting changes in the composition of the student body are a world-wide phenomenon and well known. Just to recall the data: in the Federal Republic the proportion of students coming from the families of workers and lesser employees has gone up from 4 and 23% in 1952 to 16 and 38% in 1982 (see Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, p. 30f.; Liebau, 1984, p. 270f.). In terms of social policy this does not mean that equality of opportunities has been achieved, particularly as the 'new' students are not equally represented in the various disciplines and institutions of higher education; however, they represent the majority on average and in many departments.

Such a change in the social recruitment of students is likely to have consequences also for and within the university itself. How far this affects its teaching and training function, to what extent the students from this 'new' background do face problems of studying and learning other than or additional to the traditional ones may be left undecided here: Cross (1971) has drawn much attention to this point regarding American students, while Langer

(1984, p. 58f.) referring to questionnaires answered by European students cannot find significant differences in the perception of problems of studying due to social background, nor can Dippelhofer-Stiem (1985) in the general perception of the university environment; at most, so she states, students from the working-class express themselves somewhat more critically on the missing links between course content and societal or practical needs.

But what may be assumed from the data and is more interesting to our question is that the *cultural* habits generated by the family background will make themselves conspicuous more strongly now also in student life at the university. In a comparable manner this happened at earlier stages when, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, more sons from the nobility turned to university studies, particularly to law, and the life style of the 'cavalier' or 'gentleman' superseded that of the clergyman; or again, when from the eighteenth century onwards ever more children of the bourgeoisie entered universities, most of all in the humanities (see Paulsen, 1919, vol. I, p. 260ss.; vol. II, p. 130ss.; Prahl, 1978, p. 123ss., 179s.). Similarly, students from working-class and most of all from petit bourgeois families are no longer the few who have to adapt to the dominating culture; becoming the majority, they may be, one supposes, in a position to enforce their cultural habits on their academic environment.

Recent research has reminded us to be cautious; but whatever is still held to be true about specific traits of this culture—e.g. a tendency to 'nearness' in any sense: to neighbourhood, familiar groups, close social relationships, intimacy; a habit of rather short than long range planning; a rather practical than theoretical orientation; and certain consumer preferences—could conflict with, e.g. traditional universalism and become a major trait in the departments where these 'new' students are strongly represented. Since for each individual student all the others, his or her peers, form the environment in and through which he or she has to develop, at least the socialisation function of the university is strongly affected by these changes.

We would have to think similarly about the impact which the changed proportion of sexes is likely to have upon student life and departmental culture. The percentage of women has doubled from 20% in 1950 to 40% in 1982 (see Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, p. 25). But as to what this impact consists of is a controversial issue among feminists and their opponents that cannot as yet be decided on the basis of reliable empirical data. I only wish to raise the point but not go into it any further.

(2.2) *Age*

One third of all students in German higher education are 26 years old or older, a tenth even above 30. The portion of these older students has doubled since 1960 (see BMBW, 1977, p. 86s., 140s.; Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, p. 26s.).

The reasons for this development are only partly to be sought in the length of studies (in the German system not limited by state or institutional rules): this indeed amounted in 1981 to 12·5 semesters for diploma courses and 11·8 semesters for all courses on average. Much discussed and considered unreasonably high by many observers, it had, however, up to then increased by only one semester since 1977 and not so very much more since 1967. An explanation could rather lie in the considerable percentage of postgraduate students in what, in vague terms, is called second or additional or complementary or doctoral studies (Zweit-, Zusatz-, Ergänzungs- und Doktorandenstudien). Amounting (1983) to 13·5%, this number has risen on the whole slowly but steadily over the years, especially for women (since 1973). But the decisive factor seems to be that students are already older when entering the university than they used to be traditionally: a quarter of the freshmen are 22 years old or

older (see BMBW, 1983, p. 140s.), more than a fifth have passed the Abitur (the final secondary school examination which entitles students to register with a university) two years or more before entering (ibid. p. 145; see Wissenschaftsrat, 1983, p. 29); also these proportions have increased continuously since 1977.

At first sight this is but continuing a historical development from the early times of medieval universities when it was almost boys who moved into the *collegia* to the time when, say in the eighteenth century students were between 16 and 22 years old, and in the nineteenth and twentieth century when (in Germany) the Abitur, now obligatory, did rarely allow entrance to university under the age of 19. Continuously the average age of students has become higher—along with the general extension of the years spent in schools and of the social and cultural stage of adolescence or 'post-adolescence' (see Zinnecker, 1981, p. 100ss.). The trends are similar in the European neighbour countries (see e.g. Percy, 1985 for Great Britain), most remarkably so in Sweden (see Abrahamsson, 1984).

This picture is drawn even without taking into account further education which in the Federal Republic is being built up only hesitantly by the universities. Once this attracts greater numbers of adult students than it has done up to now it will become even more necessary to correct the classical image of the student as still adolescent who, having passed the Abitur, just exchanges one (the secondary) school for another (the university) and only reaches adulthood with the final university degree. For, the figures given above mean that already among the freshmen almost half have experienced other situations than just school: not only military service (43% of the male students), but also (approx. 50% of all university students) some sort of employment or (18%) professional practice (data for summer term 1979 according to Infratest Sozialforschung, 1982, p. 9).

The figures given also indicate that beyond the majority of 'normal' students a 'special' type of older student is emerging who looks back to long, although not always pleasant, experiences of school and university, of examinations of all sorts, of family and social life outside university, of vocational or practical work and of having to earn—often under difficulties—his or her own money (for the special problems of this group see Schober, 1981, p. 201ss.).

Quite a few of them may have more experience of life in this broad sense than the professors of the generation now teaching at our universities. In any case there is reason enough to assume that students with these experiences are likely to develop an attitude to university, teachers and curriculum different from students who beforehand have only seen the Gymnasium—or that they would do so if the academic environment would allow it. The time will come for them to demand that in the teaching-learning process the questions stemming from their practice are taken up and the experiences they have are built upon in a positive way. And with regard to those students it would be absurd to maintain that the influence of professors on the personal development of their students could and should be conceived after the model of a father-son relationship as Parsons & Platt (1974, cf. 1976; for critique also Burkart, 1982) have done.

(2.3) *Family*

More than half (57%) of the students are married or in a firm liaison with a partner: more, of course, i.e. approximately two-thirds, among the older ones, but already one-third also of the freshmen. For more than half of these students the partner works fulltime; 6% of all students are mainly financed by their partners (see Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, p. 26ss.; p. 99ss.).

Among the reasons for this recent development one certainly is the shift in the average age already mentioned and another is the larger portion of women: for them and for the

older students a stronger tendency to marriage or other firm partnership was already found in earlier surveys. But what is to be added is a cultural development, a change in moral norms, whereby living together unmarried has become socially acceptable as well as communicable and has spread among the young quite generally (see Zinnecker, 1981).

Looking further back in history one comes to realise the stages of this development: from beginnings marked by celibacy and a monastic pattern of life through centuries when universities were attended only by men to the times when they slowly opened also to the 'höhere Töchter', i.e. to the daughters of good family, and as a sort of academic match-making agency served the socially important function of warranting suitable marriages for the upper classes. This is continuing; nevertheless there is now a growing proportion of students who are not seeking a partner any more but living (perhaps on trial) with and caring for a partner they have already found. By this I would not wish or dare to judge whether love-adventures and search for a partner, always in the past a part of student life, or a firm liaison or marriage are more strongly limiting the meaning and importance of academic work and its challenges or duties. But that the students engaged in this way partly adapt to a sort of family life (not only those 6% who have children), that moreover they perhaps have to share the time rhythm of a partner gainfully employed full- or half-time and therefore subject to other than only academic demands upon their time budget, and that partly through their partners they are linked to the world of vocational work outside university—all that, I suggest, is likely to modify their attitudes to studying and make the claim of the university appear less absolute.

(2.4) *Jobs*

Almost 50% of all students have a job during the vacations, approximately 40% also in term time; 13% say they are gainfully employed throughout the year. Since 1967 the percentage for the first group, always high, has grown only slowly; for the second group it has gone up dramatically (by 60%), for the third group it has doubled. Within this third group, as is to be expected, there are to be found especially many of the 'new' type of elder students (see above 2.2), for whom other means of support are not available any more, neither from their parents nor from public grants. But it holds for all students that 40%—i.e. two and a half times more than 1967—partly and 9% mainly depend on jobs for their income (see Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, pp. 75ss., 121ss., 129ss.).

The real figures may be even higher, as everyday observations suggest. As a high amount of time in a job is not compatible with certain regulations for registering as a student or getting a grant, some students may be reluctant to indicate the correct figures in a questionnaire distributed by the main grants agency (the Deutsches Studentenwerk), even if this guarantees anonymity. The same may apply to what they say about the time spent in a job. For the vacations this seems to be all that remains after six to eight weeks of holidays, mainly spent travelling; during term time for 25% of the students who have a job it amounts to roughly a quarter of the weekly working hours. Here most of all the consequences of more or less regular employment have to be considered. The students doing so have to split their time between studies and jobs; the latter tends to absorb most of all the time which by philosophy and tradition of the German university since Humboldt (see page 1) is meant to be used and is reserved for independent study, namely the vacations, but also the hours during term not taken by lessons, etc.

Also the timetable itself, most of all the choice between courses, if free, will be determined with respect to the times given to a job, over which students have little control.

(What students say in discussions or interviews reveals more about this than statistical data from surveys, see e.g. Wolschner, 1980, p. 39.) Moreover, what job experiences (and seeking a job) mean to students emotionally remains yet to be found out; this too is rather reflected and can be felt more intensively in fictional literature, e.g. the experience of being really responsible in or for one's own work or of meeting people with quite different backgrounds and conditions of living than one's own (see e.g. Heinzen & Koch, 1985, or some of the contributions, such as by D. Ulrich, C. Grätz, S. Schütz to Jens, 1985).

It is obvious that decrease or disappearance of other means of financing one's living and studying, most of all the transformation of public grants into loans completed in 1982, are the main reasons for the increasing number of students who take up jobs. There have, of course, been times before when students were hard up: in the years of reconstruction after World War II or during the times of recession in the twenties of this century (see Prahl, 1978, p. 306) and also in earlier periods of history, when a certain number of poor students were forced to earn money along with, or in intervals between, their studies, be it as private tutor or as assistant clerk to a lawyer or the like. The medieval universities, however, seem to have preferred to let the students go begging rather than to have them work for money—and thus, consciously or not kept the student role unified instead of allowing it to be split (see Krause, 1979, p. 17).

However, against this background, study and job side-by-side, as we find it now, seems to be a new phenomenon in quantity and quality. And it is not confined to the Federal Republic. For the United States, Levine (1981, p. 86s.) mentions the same percentage of students working in jobs (54%) following a similar increase since 1969. Among the Western European countries perhaps Italy has moved furthest in this direction (see Ciucci, 1984, esp. p. 303ss.), an insufficient public grant system and a loose structure of courses being the main factors. Not only the universities, but even the final classes of secondary schools seem to be transformed from a socialising institution into—as Ciucci puts it (ibid., 306)—a *piazza*, where experiences from all sides are brought together and exchanged.

Thus while students of the normal type are taking to jobs, there are on the other hand more and more students of another new type, the adults who along with their professional work or in between work turn back to the university for studying. It is true that in this development the Federal Republic is far behind and reformers endeavouring to push it have a hard time (see Edding et al., 1977; Projekt Studium Neben dem Beruf, 1984). But the general trend is there, as the more advanced Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries show (see Cerych, 1983; Percy, 1985). The challenges to the traditional university stemming from such an 'adultification' may perhaps best be seen from the example of Sweden (see Abrahamsson, 1984, esp. p. 293ss.).

Thus also in the Federal Republic the tendency of students towards jobs could foreshadow a thoroughly revised relationship between work and study. In this perspective it would be of great interest to know more exactly than we do so far, to what extent students are just forced to take up jobs in order to secure their living or feel free to decide for or against a job; and, in the latter case, to what extent they are motivated by consumer goods (e.g. hi-fi equipment or travelling), the character of the jobs offered (among which there are also, it may be noted, those of student assistants) or by the studies they are thus setting aside (which may not occupy all their time, or be dull or not challenging). From the figures given by Schnitzer et al. (1983) one may guess that it is less luxury that drives them than a wish for independence from adults: from their parents regarding finance, from landlords or tutors regarding their accommodation. If that is true, it would be similar to analogous tendencies among young people generally.

(2.5) *Housing*

Twenty-four percent of the students live with their parents, 10% each in student residences and in lodgings. But 56% are living in a flat by themselves (often together with their partners) or share a flat with a group, what in German is called 'Wohngemeinschaft' (WG). Even more, i.e. 75%, would prefer this, two-thirds of them voting for a flat for themselves, one-third for a shared flat (WG). The tendency towards WG has gone up rapidly during the first half of the seventies and increased but slowly after that. The wish to live in a flat with or without others corresponds to marriage or liaison (see above 2.3) and higher age; the chance to fulfil this wish depends on social background and financial means, as of course these are the more expensive types of accommodation.

At first sight the aspect of housing seems to be marginal. But of all indicators discussed here this one indicates perhaps most clearly the cultural changes which the changes in the student role are a part of. This assumption is most of all supported by the clear and explicit connection linking the development described to the student movement; but it may also be based upon the differences which separate groups of disciplines—or may we say: disciplinary cultures—from one another in this respect. Students of the humanities and most of all the social sciences (in line with their motives for studying) are those who are more likely to embark upon the always risky social experiment of forming a WG, while students of medicine and engineering aim to find as quickly as possible a flat for themselves (see Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, p. 167s.). And finally this tendency to move away from the parents into a flat of one's own is also one which students share with their whole generation (see Zinnecker, 1981).

As is perhaps the case with decisions for jobs, these decisions for having a flat may also imply a reaction against the university. To the degree that students feel the university climate to be cold, impersonal, labyrinthine, depressing and unchangeable (see the opinions expressed in many documents in Braungart *et al.*, 1981; Wolschner, 1980), their flat may serve as a true home, a warm, familiar, personal small world of its own to be shaped by themselves, a refuge against the university as well as a basis for activities with others also outside university and beyond the degree, most of all in case of unemployment after completion of study (see Neubauer, 1978; Wuggenig, 1980, p. 36ss.).

Again a look back is illuminating. The *collegia* of the medieval universities, in which *magistri et scholares* lived together, were nothing but a part of the university and an instrument for the education of and control to be exerted on its students (see Paulsen, 1919, vol. I, p. 30ss.). The colleges of Oxford and Cambridge may still have preserved some of these traits, and the dormitories on campus have for a long time served the function in American Colleges of acting 'in loco parentis'. But in the US too the percentage of students housed there dropped between 1969 and 1976 by about a third down to 30% (Levine, 1981, p. 86). In Germany, however, traces of an educational concept which implies living together has only been preserved in the colleges attached to faculties of theology and in some attempts to revive it during the fifties of this century (e.g. Leibniz Kolleg Tübingen, Europa-Kolleg Hamburg). The many student residences or rather hostels built since then on the whole never served more than a merely functional purpose. Generally speaking, the educational influence of the universities as exerted through student housing has become thinner and thinner from the time of the colleges via lodging with a professor to lodgings in town, which last meant having a roof over one's head but not to act as a counter weight to the university which is the case with modern ways of student living.

All this is not without consequences for the process of studying itself. The forms of accommodation preferred require more time: time to search for a flat and time to shape and

to maintain it. To be able to pay for rent, furniture and the like is one of the main motives for taking a job, which again requires time (see above 2.4). Once they have found and furnished a nice flat students are less likely to consider changing university as was the custom here in former times. As may be seen from all this the emotional value of such a home is high, and it becomes also the favourite place for individual work (instead of libraries) and group work (instead of seminar rooms). More and more the university buildings are felt to be an alienated place of work and the campus also ceases to be the centre of social life (see again Levine, 1981, p. 86).

(2.6) *Other Indicators of Change*

We could certainly go on collecting such data indicating change, if there were space enough to present them. We could contrast the wandering scholars of old times and the students migrating from one university to another of more recent times with the settled students of today who mostly (60%) choose the university nearest to their home and mostly (84%) stay there for the whole time of their studies (and beyond) (see Framhein, 1983, p. 67ss.; Schnitzer *et al.*, 1983, p. 61ss.; Kath, 1980, p. 26ss., 198ss.). We could consider what it means that almost 60% of the students indicate that they frequently meet friends and acquaintances outside university—more than say so for contacts with fellow students (50%), let alone professors (4%) (see Bargel *et al.*, 1984a, p. 103). We could pursue the question how closely the other activities of the students, be it politics, sport, music, social life or whatever, are linked to the university, and would probably find that this tie too has become looser (as was observed in American colleges, too: see Levine, 1981, p. 88ss.). We could ... But let us assume that such further data too will indicate the same trend as that described already: a trend whereby studying and the university become less and less central for the student's life. What does this mean for the student role and for the future of the university?

(3) The Meaning of the Changes Observed

It has to be stressed that so far we have referred to data which are of an objective kind (i.e. material conditions and facts, not opinions or attitudes), which clearly show changes over the last two or three decades (and of course over centuries) but which are nevertheless the outcome of decisions which the students have taken (regarding their life plans, kind of family, jobs, form of living). It seems to be a matter of course that there are corresponding changes in attitudes. It is therefore astonishing to read in a paper by Bargel *et al.* (1984b) that significant changes in attitudes over the last two decades cannot be obtained on the basis of data from more or less identical student questionnaires or attitude scales: neither in motivation for studying and life goals, satisfaction with social contacts, academic environment and student life, nor in personality traits and emotional state! In order to cope with this contradiction one may first wonder—and the authors themselves do (see Bargel *et al.*, ibid., p. 143f.)—whether the questions and scales used are sufficiently sensitive to changes: the same or similar words used could have a different meaning for students 20 or 30 years ago and now; the categories of answers may be the same, but the degree of intensity attached to them, but not sufficiently grasped by the questionnaire, may have changed or the subjective relevance—all this would require a different approach of empirical research using qualitative methods. It may also be that the answers given have always been and are still those which are socially desired and fitting the expected student role.

Who really studies, wants to learn. As far as this is what all students have in common one could indeed continue to speak of a 'basic role: learner' of students, as Langer (1984),

following Parsons & Platt (1973) does. Certain expectations are attached to this role by the institution where this learning takes place, and by the social environment: that students are motivated most of all by an active interest in scholarly problems and work, after that by an interest in professional qualification and not by purely materialistic objectives (e.g. to prepare for a well-paid job). Apparently such and similar very general expectations, if formulated on this level of abstraction, are confirmed by a proportion, constant over the years, of the students themselves. This—and nothing else—is demonstrated by the findings of the surveys mentioned.

What has to be asked, however, is to what extent student life is still determined by this basic role and how far the basic role is modified in content through changes in student life. It has to be underlined that it has never, at least not in modern times, been a 'total' role; rather it has been a revealing misconception of much research, most of all on attitudes and university environment, to analyse the university as if it were a total institution (see Nitsch, 1973, p. 402ss.; Neidhardt, 1977, p. 345s.). But the traditional concept of the student role saw much of his life centrally determined through the very fact and process of studying: the place where he lived, the way he was accommodated, his status regarding family and his social relations, most of all and through all this his time budget. All these things were arranged in a way that a student would essentially stay within the university or special buildings for students, would meet most of all with fellow students, pursue his activities in sports, culture, politics, etc. in student organisations, associations (as e.g. fraternities and sororities), etc.

Today for a substantial proportion of students, studies and the fact of being a student loses its central place in life—as perhaps do other occupations for other groups, too. They are persons who among other things are studying. 'I am not a student, I am only studying' (Zeller, in: Jens, 1985, p. 27; cf. Abrahamsson, 1984, p. 296). They split their time between study and job, partly also between university and family, shape their private homes as a small familiar world against the huge system of the university, keep or find social contacts with people who do not belong to the university and are politically or culturally active outside university, if at all (cf. again Levine, 1981, p. 84ss.). They live in more than just one world (see Kreutz, 1979).

If that is true, it gives a new twist to the trend foreseen already in the fifties from such different angles as those of Habermas and Schelsky (both 1957, quoted here from Nitsch, 1967, p. 43s.), that studying would become just another sort of vocational training, as merely functional and even perhaps as alienated as any other vocational training and work, and therefore be confined to one sector of a person's life separated from others.

If students have for long been in fact more marginal to the university than publicly admitted in its philosophy—Neidhart (1977, p. 351) has made this point by comparing students to clients of an administration rather than to members of an institution—then certainly the university today has also become much more marginal to the life of students. Or to put it otherwise: even if the basic role of students has not changed, certainly the role of the university for them has changed.

But does the university, do the universities, realise these changes? And how shall they, or should they, play the role which remains?

This question would be answered too simply and too quickly by just referring back to Parsons & Platt (1973; see also Klüver, 1983) and saying that the main value on which the academic subsystem is centred is cognitive rationality, that what cognitive rationality is, is systematically what the disciplines—or the leading people in each individual field—do, and that students, as long and as far as they want to learn and to work scientifically, have just to adapt to these patterns. Perhaps this means abbreviating Parsons & Platt too much and

treating them rudely, but what I wish to stress is that the concept of rationality to which students are requested to adapt themselves has first to be thought about, to be discussed and to be clarified through a permanent and in a sense democratic discourse across and beyond the disciplines and with the participation of people from other worlds so to say, students included. This critique has been brought forward well by Joas (1980). This is to say that the university, most of all in its teaching function, has to become aware of and to react to the changes in student life as well.

So far German universities have not done so: the organisation of teaching, most of all the timetable, presupposes the full-time student; evening courses are the exception, distance courses confined to the Fernuniversität Hagen. The curricula have remained unchanged, and it depends upon the (rare) individual initiative of teachers and/or students whether experience and knowledge gained outside university are dealt with in the classroom; neither is there an assessment of experiental learning nor are there credits for it. The task, therefore, is not only, necessary as it is, to take into account the workload and timetable of students who at the same time are gainfully employed. It also means that the concepts of theory and the paradigms of search for knowledge cultivated in research and teaching have to be widened in such a way as to integrate in teaching and research a discussion, elaboration and clarification—or rather enlightenment—of the growing life and work experience students nowadays bring with them.

In this perspective the changes in the student role described here appear not only as a loss but also as a challenge to, and a chance for, the development of the university. To push that forward could increasingly be the objective task and subjective interest of those students who are living not only within the university and participating in its scientific work, but also in the world outside and concerned with the ambivalent consequences of scientific work there. Perhaps up to now students themselves have not clearly enough articulated and enforced this their claim, and professors, as was observed in the context of further education (see Fischer-Bluhm & Huber, 1986), still succeed in leading them along their own traditional type of theory. But for its own sake, in order to remain a lively institution, the university should try to integrate more of the other domains of student life.

In an early essay (dating from 1914) titled 'The Life of Students', Walter Benjamin pleaded, with an almost irritating enthusiasm, that the whole and only *raison d'être* of a student would consist in being totally devoted to the search for knowledge, philosophically oriented, and in making the idea of learning in this sense penetrate all of his personality and life. Here we have again the classical idea of what it means to be a student. There may still be quite a few students in the more and more heterogeneous student population who correspond to it and whom professors prefer for that reason as their disciples. But if university is ever to become a reality for the other large group of students described in this paper, this can only be if their rich personal and social experiences penetrate academic work and these adult persons are looked to as partners in a dialogue by their professors.

Acknowledgement

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NOTES

[1] Based on a contribution to the symposium 'Tradition and reform of universities—an *international perspective*', Heidelberg, May 1986. I am particularly indebted to Lewis Elton for his help in improving the English version printed here.

[2] For obvious practical reasons it is not possible in this paper to cover the situation in other European countries as well. However, see . . . 'Students in Europe today', *European Journal of Education*, 19, pp. 243-351. 1984.

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