

Transitional Educational Policies and Practices in Italy and Austria

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Summary: This article explores the transitional policies and practices for newly arrived students in the Austrian, Italian, and South Tyrolean school systems which represent a spectrum of approaches for the accommodation of newly arrived students. While in Austria, children with a low perceived proficiency in the German language must undergo remediation prior to entering mainstream classes with their German-proficient peers, newly arrived students in Italy are inserted directly into mainstream classes and are involved in linguistic remediation both in and out of the main classroom. In South Tyrol (an autonomous trilingual province of Italy), the accommodation of newly arrived students is constrained by Italian education policies, fortified by the autonomous province's extra language support, and partly inspired by Austrian policies. This paper provides a historical overview of transitional and/or accommodation policies in these three contexts, as well as an ethnographic perspective on the practices of different actors therein, thus illustrating how these three school systems' accommodations of newly arrived students differ from one another.

Keywords: Transitional Policies, Transitional Practices, Newly Arrived Students, Ethnography, Comparative Education Study, Inclusion

Titel: Bildungsübergänge – Policies und Praktiken in Italien und Österreich

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Artikel werden die Übergangspolitiken und -praktiken für neu zugewanderte Schüler:innen in den Bildungssystemen Österreichs, Italiens und Südtirols untersucht, die ein Spektrum verschiedener Ansätze für die Aufnahme neu zugewandelter Schüler:innen repräsentieren. Während in Österreich Kinder mit als gering eingeschätzten Deutschkompetenzen vor dem Eintritt in die Regelklassen mit ihren deutschsprachigen Mitschüler:innen Fördermaßnahmen absolvieren müssen, werden neu zugewanderte Schüler:innen in Italien direkt in die Regelklassen aufgenommen und sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb des Klassenzimmers in sprachliche Fördermaßnahmen einbezogen. In Südtirol (einer autonomen, dreisprachigen Provinz in Italien) wird die Aufnahme neu zugewandelter Schüler:innen durch die italienische Bildungspolitik bestimmt, durch die zusätzliche Sprachförderung der autonomen Provinz ergänzt und teilweise von der österreichischen Politik beeinflusst. Dieser Beitrag bietet einen historischen Überblick über Übergangs- und Aufnahmepolitiken in diesen drei Kontexten sowie eine ethnografische Perspektive auf die Praktiken der verschiedenen Akteure in diesen Kontexten und verdeutlicht, wie sich die Aufnahme neu zugewandelter Schüler:innen in diesen drei Bildungssystemen unterscheidet.

Schlüsselwörter: Bildungspolitiken, Bildungspraktiken, neu zugewanderte Schüler:innen, Ethnografie, Vergleichende Bildungsforschung, Inklusion

1 Introduction

This article explores the transitional policies, practices, and possible pathways for newly arrived students¹ in three European school systems. In Austrian schools, children who are perceived as lacking German language proficiency are placed in separate classes in order to remediate their German language skills before being inserted into mainstream classes with their peers who have been deemed language-proficient (Alpagu et al.: 2019b). In Italian schools, newly arrived students are instead inserted directly into mainstream classes, where they are ideally assigned both a personalised education plan (*piano educativo personalizzato*, or *PEP*) and a support teacher who provides language support both in and out of their main classroom. And finally, in the Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, where there are three separate school boards for the province's three official languages (German, Italian, and Ladin²) the accommodation of students deemed not to be proficient in the relevant language (as determined by the school in which they are enrolled) is constrained by Italian education policies, but is also fortified by the region's extra language support, and, regarding expectations towards language competences of parents, in the case of German-language educational institutions, inspired by Austrian policies.

Via a historical overview of policies in these three contexts, as well as an ethnographic perspective on the actual practices of administrators, teachers, students, and families affected by them, we illustrate how these school systems' transitional practices provide a spectrum of realities for the educational accommodations of newly arrived students, ranging from a policy focus on societal integration to a policy focus on preservation of local language rights, and from the resulting pull-out or push-in educational approaches (e. g. Nes/Demo/Ianes 2018; Whiting 2017). A consideration of how national and/or regional education policies interact with the lived realities of children in classrooms, schools, and neighbourhoods is essential to improving the educational outcomes and experiences of transnational students and the training of those who assist in their academic inclusion.

2 Theoretical Framework

School systems are behemoth sociopolitical institutions which are sustained by the (semi) coordinated actions of international lawmakers, national ministries of education, regional and local school boards, and teachers in classrooms. Identifying the human element in these behemoth institutions involves understanding the development, interpretation, and implementation of a policy in a given political and sociohistorical context. It is at this nexus of social and political activity that the localised accommodation of newly arrived students in schools – the focus of this paper – is situated. We therefore take a critical comparative approach to notions of language proficiency, belonging, academic achievement, and cit-

1 We recognise that descriptions of 'people from somewhere else' are always partial, subject to local laws/policies/prejudices, and are therefore inherently insufficient to encapsulate how such people identify/are identified in a given local context. In this paper, especially in light of *ius sanguinis* in Italy and Austria, we use 'newly arrived' or 'new arrival' (not 'foreign') to describe such people.

2 In this article, we discuss only the Italian- and German-language schools. For a comprehensive overview of the South Tyrolean school system, refer to Alber (2012).