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English Teachers in the Former G.D.R. Ten Years After the WENDE: What's New?

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TEN YEARS AFTER THE *WENDE*: WHAT'S NEW?

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ABSTRACT

English teachers who work in public schools in the eastern part of Germany are doing a very different type of job than they were ten years ago. Although the physical setting and the subject matter is still the same, they are teaching in a new school system based on the West German model. Their personal and professional relationships with the people they work with are different now, and attitudes toward the language they teach have been altered by the political and social changes. This paper seeks to identify and describe those items the teachers see as being different. It is based on individual interviews conducted in a certain region during a short time span. It is my hope that it will portray the situation of English school teachers as it is now, ten years after the "peaceful revolution" in the G.D.R.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How this project came about

The education system in Germany is much different than the system I experienced as a pupil in the United States. It is also not the same system I experienced when I first came to West Germany over fifteen years ago or to East Germany nearly eleven years ago. As an American who now permanently resides in what used to be East Germany, I am interested in and concerned about the education system in post-unification Germany because my children will be going to public schools here. As an English teacher who works with university students and adults, I need to understand the educational backgrounds my learners bring with them in order to be a more effective teacher.

There has been a lot written on the changes in the German education system and there are many reports which detail the structural changes schools in the eastern part of Germany have undergone. These analyses, usually done by psychologists, political analysts, or education experts, tend to look at either what is new and different about the school system as a whole or at what the changes have meant for the children who are being taught. The voices of the teachers have, until just recently, been largely ignored by the experts who write on school systems. In this paper I am interested in hearing what the teachers have to say about how they see the situation after German unification.

I had spent a semester as an exchange student at the Wilhelm-Pieck University in

Rostock, East Germany from January to August 1989. Later, during that tumultuous year of "peaceful revolution," I returned twice to visit, and then returned for good in summer 1990 to start teaching English at the university, helping prepare students to become English teachers in the public school system. There were not many foreigners living in Rostock at the time, even if one counted the Russian military and officers' families, and there were very few native speakers of English.

I had only been there for a few days when a high school English teacher knocked on my door. She had heard from her neighbor's daughter, who worked in the administration office at the university, that an American had started working in the English department, and she had tracked me down. She wanted to know if I had brought any books or magazines from home she could borrow. Since Russian had always been the first foreign language taught, and because English was the language of the "Capitalist Class Enemy" and had been censored, she had never been able to show her pupils a real newspaper or magazine from an English-speaking country. Over a cup of coffee she asked if I would be willing to come visit her classroom and speak English with the children. She thought that by bringing a "live specimen" to her classroom she could inspire and motivate her pupils more.

I had time on my hands and was curious about what people were doing, so I went to her school for a day. This first contact led to more visitors to my house and to more invitations to classrooms, as well as contacts with the local and state English teachers' clubs and different examination boards. Most teachers were overjoyed at having a native speaker they could call on. Because I was in the right place at the right time, I got the chance to meet and speak with many teachers on what was going on in their lives. They also seemed to trust me because I had spent some time in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) before unification and seemed to understand what they were talking about. At least I made an effort to understand and I was

willing to listen.

A few years later there were several native speakers of English living in Rostock, and peoples' curiosity in me began to die down. I was no longer the only source of "real" English and most teachers had already gone on vacations and exchange programs to English-speaking countries themselves. But because Rostock is not a large city (about 220,000 people), the personal contacts with these teachers remained and we would cross paths often. I would see them now and then at workshops and book fairs, and over an occasional cup of coffee or chat in the grocery store we would talk about the latest gossip. Many of my university students who had graduated were doing their student teaching in schools where I knew the teachers, so this gave us more to talk about.

What surprised me was that the general level of satisfaction with teaching English seemed to be going down instead of up. The same teachers who had come knocking on my door when I first arrived, wanting me to visit their classrooms and help set up school exchange programs, now complained to me that they were disillusioned and no longer satisfied with their jobs. People who had looked forward to teaching English in a new system seemed burned out and tired of their jobs by the mid-1990's. There was no specific point in time where there was a change, nor could I pinpoint any one reason or explanation for the dissatisfaction. I hadn't even noticed when or how it started. But the optimistic plans and elated hopes of 1989-91 had been replaced by resignation a few years later.

I set out in this paper to look at motivation levels and satisfaction of English teachers in schools. I was interested in finding out what the teachers themselves saw as being different and how they felt about it. This was the basis for my original two guiding questions: How has being an English teacher changed since the *Wende* (the term used to describe the political and social changes which started in late summer 1989 and ended with the unification of Germany in October

1990), and what do English teachers think about their work today compared with ten years ago?

My goal was not to compare the two systems or list everything the teachers saw as being better or worse, but simply to portray what some English teachers really think about what has happened in their profession since 1989. I have always thought that teachers who are satisfied with their job will be able to convey this in their teaching and will be "better" teachers than people who are dissatisfied with their work. Perhaps this idea that happy teachers make for happy pupils and more learning is simplistic, but it was the driving force behind my questions. Are the English teachers here any happier today than before the *Wende*?

My research was personal and qualitative, consisting mainly of one-on-one interviews with English teachers, conducted in their homes or schools, where I asked questions about their work and feelings about the work they do. These interviews were done in German and were recorded on cassette tapes with the permission of the teacher. I had done some background reading on the education system of the GDR and some reading on how to construct a questionnaire and gather field data, but basically I let the teachers guide the conversation, even if it meant getting off track from my questionnaire. (An English translation of the interview questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.) After all the interviews were finished, I followed up with classroom visits to four of the twelve teachers so that I could talk with them about how they felt about their work again, right after they had taught an English lesson.

All of the teachers I spoke with are trained and certified public school teachers who had been born and educated in East Germany. All of them had taught English and at least one other subject (usually German or Russian) in the GDR before the *Wende*, and all of them are still teaching English in the public school system now. At the time of the interviews, the youngest was 35 and the oldest was a few months away from turning 60 and retiring. Typical of gender distributions for school language teachers in schools, all twelve of them were female.

Before German unification they had all taught in normal POS schools (*Polytechnische Oberschule*, grades 5-10) in East Germany, and only two had ever taught in an EOS school (*Erweitete Oberschule*, grades through 12 leading to the German *Abitur*). Now they are teaching in many different types of schools. They all live and teach within a 60-mile radius of Rostock, the largest city in our state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommen. All of them have children of their own who are attending or have attended public schools; two of them are grandmothers. A more detailed breakdown of these teachers' backgrounds can also be found in the Appendix.

This paper is not meant to be a comprehensive or representative report on what all English teachers in eastern Germany think about teaching, nor is it necessarily meant to pose the question of what is good or bad about being an English teacher in today's schools. It is a portrayal of what is being felt now by a certain group of people in a certain area at a certain point in time and is an attempt to explain some of the reasons for their thoughts.

This idea of a paper reflecting a certain point in time is not meant to be secondary to other ideas; and I ask the reader to remember this. It is already becoming difficult to recall what life was like here ten years ago. During the interviews the teachers often had to pause in order to concentrate on what had really happened or to differentiate between what was "real" and what was "selective memory" in their train of thought. Several times they contradicted themselves or had to backtrack and start over again with an idea. The same questionnaire would have elicited quite different answers five years ago and would also, no doubt, raise completely different issues another five years in the future. It is important to remember that this paper can only be a snapshot in time and is not intended to be a final analysis whose ideas will hold for years to come.

As an editorial note: I have used the terms East Germany and West Germany to refer to the separate legal states of the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) before official unification in October 1990. When I use lower-case letters

or adjective forms (the east, politicians in eastern Germany, the western German press), it is meant to define a region or a certain group of people in specific area following unification. The media and politicians favor the term *fünf neue Länder* or FNL ("five new Federal States") to refer to the former GDR and *alte Länder* (the "old states") when talking about the former FRG. I have intentionally avoided the use of the terms "new" and "old" because I do not wish to support the idea of seniority, superiority, or one country being added on to another. German terms are explained in the text and are also listed again with more detailed definitions in the Appendix.

As a non-German who has made Germany her home, it is my hope that soon there will no longer be a need to make such a differentiation. There are a few people who wish unification had never occurred or that it had come about on different terms with a different time frame. For others, the process was not nearly as rapid as it could have been and the GDR is only the fuzzy memory of a bad dream, from which they would like to shed themselves as completely and quickly as possible.

In some ways, because I am a foreigner and neither "east" nor "west" German myself, I am unwilling to comment on the situation here for fear that it will seem as if I am passing judgment. On the other hand, I have a permanent residence permit, a German mortgage, and no plans to return to America at any time in the near future. I pay taxes, I am married to a German, and I am probably here to stay. As a member of this society, is it right for me to avoid comment or action for fear of seeming pushy? Most ex-patriots who have invested emotional energy in adapting to and bonding with a new culture and home country have probably also had this feeling of being torn between belonging and not wanting to assume.

Speaking personally, I am sorry that Germany was divided for so long and that so many people suffered because of this. There has not been a similar example of such a division in my native United States that I can identify with, and the whole situation is very difficult to

comprehend. I also am sorry that German unification took place on such western terms and so few "good" aspects of the east were maintained and carried over. Having spent time in both the FRG and the GDR before unification, I know that each system had positive and negative aspects, and that they each had something to offer. I boil over with rage when people from the west speak of things in the east in belittling terms. Worse yet is when westerners seem to have absolutely no interest in this "new" part of their country at all. On the other hand I also get frustrated when people here in the east retreat into a dreamland of how wonderful things used to be "in the old days" and refuse to see the good that has come from unification. I also think that those east Germans who deny the value of their experiences in the GDR are blocking out a valuable chunk of their past lives. They need to acknowledge and honor these experiences in order to be whole people.

It is too late to turn back the clock here, even if we wanted to, and so we have to move forward. And we need to do this in a way that no one is left behind or has to deny part of his or her past. My wish is that someday the next generation will read this paper and ask me, puzzled, what all the fuss was about.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

A Unified Country

People who were in the GDR ten years ago will find it difficult to forget the events of those days. In the late summer and fall of 1989 East Germany started to move into the international spotlight of attention. First there were the stories of people who had crossed the Czech border to the south and escaped to West Germany via Hungary. Rumors were floating around, people were talking. Slowly, without really knowing how it started, there were meetings, which developed into protest marches, rousing speeches, and candlelight vigils. People seemed to be amazed at the non-violent tone of the protest movement and the lack of government crackdowns. China's uprising in Tinemann Square had made headlines only a few months earlier, yet East German protesters were able to storm into the office of the *Stasi*, the secret state police, and throw their files out the windows.

Then came the winter and the open borders. There were people dancing on top of the Berlin Wall, funny-looking *Trabant* cars mixing with Mercedes on the Autobahn, and a feeling of elation and awe at the changes going on. The first real free elections of the GDR were held in the spring of 1990 and they brought a slew of new parties and choices. The currency reform came through in the summer of 1990 and the shop windows were full of new products.

When the German Democratic Republic opened its borders on November 9, 1989 and allowed its citizens the right to come and go as they pleased, life changed forever for East

Germans. They suddenly had the right to travel anywhere they wanted to and could afford to. They had access to hard currency and to free market goods and they were able to start taking control of their own destiny. No one knew what joys or ills the next day might bring, and very few people were thinking about what might happen months or years from then. Unification of the two German states less than a year later, on October 3, 1990, served as the end of what was seen as an imperfect socialist system and became the beginning of a new life for sixteen million people.

The word "unification" gives the impression of two or more becoming one, and is therefore misleading. On October 3, 1990 the GDR ceased to exist and became part of the FRG according to the sections of the West German constitutional law (the *Grundgesetz*) which provided for the re-joining of the sectors of Germany which had been occupied by the Soviet Union following World War II. The two countries did not join together in the same way that two people enter into an ideal marriage union, where each retains their own identity and each brings contributions to the partnership. A better analogy would be that of adoption, where a family with many children takes in a new child. There is adjustment to be made by all concerned, and there will be problems and misunderstandings before family life settles down to normal again, but the most difficult task of adjusting falls to the adopted child, who must learn to live in his or her new home and get along with other family members in their pre-existing unit. The eastern part of Germany is still, nine years after official unification, referred to as the *fünf neue Länder* (five new states), underlying the fact that the easterners are the new ones, and they are the people who have to adapt. "The east Germans have to bear the brunt of unification. The westerners can support them and show solidarity, but...the easterners are going through a process of adjustment and achievement which is unparalleled in history." [1]

[1] Federal Minister Rolf Schwanitz, responsible for "Eastern Questions", as quoted in the article "Schwanitz: Ostdeutsche tragen Last der Wiedervereinigung" in the Ostseezeitung, Friday, 14 May 1999, page 2.

In this way, the situation in Germany is different than that of Hungary, Poland, or other former Soviet Bloc countries. Because they were "adopted" by the west Germans, the east Germans have often had an easier time moving to a free market economy than others. They had a new "family" to support them during the transition. Their economy, although still weak, was buoyed by the strong DM of West Germany. The political parties and government of the FRG and its connections to NATO and the European Union were already in place, and there were plenty of people with experience and energy to show the way and to explain how things were done. Although the population in the east is still shrinking because of the many people moving west in search of jobs or better opportunity, there are a large number of westerners who have moved east to help install new systems and help out with the transition.

The negative side of this is that, by asking to be or by allowing themselves to be adopted, East Germans also lost out on the chance to make their own decisions and mistakes, to learn to adapt on their own, and to possibly find a different and new way of doing things. They quickly took on the western way of life, rejecting the old, eastern way. A "third way" of doing things, which could have come from a blending of the two systems, never came about. In almost all facets of life, the GDR system was replaced by the western one. Rarely, if ever, was there talk of salvaging anything from the GDR or implementing it in the west. The Germans in the east had their lives turned completely upside down, everything was new and different, while the Germans in the west continued, for the most part, to live as they had before.

A New Education System

This also holds true for the education systems of the two countries. The 1990-91 school year started in August, a few months before official unification, with two separate systems

existing side by side. During the summer holidays of 1991 the Education Ministry was responsible for making sure that a unified Germany had a unified school system, and they decreed that this system would be the system which was in practice in western Germany.

The West German education system, which is now the system in all of Germany, dates back to pre-war Weimar Germany. It is a system which separates children relatively early on in their schooling (at age ten in fifteen of the sixteen states) and places them in different types of schools where their different needs and talents can be more easily addressed. Recommendations are made by the elementary teachers as to which pupils should attend which type of school, and parents and teachers must then decide together what would be best for the child. Once assigned to a certain type of school, changes are difficult but not impossible.

> "The traditional West German secondary education system is three tiered and includes the Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium. The Gymnasium is equivalent to a university preparatory high school and the two other forms lead to professional and trade college schools." [2]

In addition to these three levels of schools, there is a fourth kind which seeks to combine all forms under one roof:

> "The introduction of the Gesamtschule in the 1960s was an attempt by West German policymakers to circumvent the elitist structure of the three tiers and enhance equality in both access to education and educational success through a comprehensive system of post-elementary education." [3]

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[2] Weiler, H. N. (1989). Why reforms Fail: the politics of education in France and the Federal Republic of Germany, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 21 pp. 291-305, in Hildebrandt, Robert F..
[3] ibid.

This grouping of children according to their academic ability makes it easier to target certain learning groups. The bright *Gymnasium* pupils start learning their first foreign language in grade five, the second foreign language in grade seven, and a third in grades ten or eleven. The normal learners of the *Realschule* will only need to take two foreign languages, and only have to pass final exams in one of the foreign languages. Slower learners in the *Hauptschule* usually only have to cope with one foreign language. They can get the attention and nurturing they need to develop to their full ability. They needn't compete with children who are much better academically, and they aren't left feeling like they are the "dummies" who are slowing the class down. Teachers can plan their lessons for a group at a certain level and they have a good idea of what they can expect or demand in terms of school performance.

Problems with this type of system come about not only because children identify and classify themselves and others according to which school they are in, but also because there is pushing from parents and society to attend the best school possible. Many average ability children will aim to attend the university-preparatory *Gymnasium* even though they know they do not want to go to university or even actually finish the *Abitur* diploma at the end of their school years. Attending a *Gymnasium* is seen as a way of guaranteeing them an apprenticeship in a good trade when they leave school. With high unemployment rates and larger numbers of children finishing school in the past few years, attendance at the *Gymnasium* is seen as a necessary bonus point in landing one of the few and more coveted apprenticeships in business, banking, or other white-collar areas.

By the same token, pupils of lesser ability are often pushed towards the mainstream *Realschule* instead of the *Hauptschule*. The *Hauptschule*, as one teacher told me, is now seen as the "garbage can of the education system, a place to put the losers we don't know how to deal with otherwise." Parents worry about the stigma attached to sending their children to the

Hauptschule and how such a school certificate will affect their chances of getting an apprenticeship position or job later on. The *Hauptschulen* are seen as places with the highest rates of crime, delinquency, and vandalism. Learning problems are increased when combined with discipline problems, and *Hauptschule* teachers are regarded as the teachers who have been stuck with the worst job.

In rural areas and school districts short on public education funding, the two types of schools are usually combined into a "*verbundene Haupt- und Realschule*" with parallel groups at each grade level. Teacher education certificates reflect this combination, as teachers obtain their state certifications either for the *Haupt- und Realschule* or for the *Gymnasium.* A teacher qualified to teach in the *Gymnasium* is unwilling to work in a *Haupt- und Realschule,* and a teacher certified only for the *Haupt- und Realschule* is not allowed to teach at a *Gymnasium.* There are several *Realschule* without a *Hauptschule* in the area I live in, but a *Hauptschule* without a *Realschule* attached is quite unusual. People in education seem to acknowledge the fact that there are, in reality, two types of schools ("*Haupt- und Realschule*" and "*Gymnasium*") which lead to three different diplomas.

The idea of a school, which combines all three-school types, was established in West Germany during the 1960's. Experiments and new theories in education were also quite prevalent in West Germany, just like in the USA, and at that time there was also more public money available to fund such projects. The comprehensive school, called *Gesamtschule,* is still viewed as an exception to the rule and something slightly offbeat and alternative. It has not become widespread or as well established as the other forms.

The same concept of *Gesamtschule,* however, is exactly what the East Germans had used in creating their own education system after their country was founded in 1949:

> "East Germany introduced a new educational system after the Second World War which simplified the complicated and elitist three-tiered system of the West. This comprised a common elementary school and common high school designed to remove all social class barriers and 'equalise' the system." [4]

While there were a few special schools set aside to cater to the needs of disabled children or very gifted young people, the vast majority of East German youngsters went through ten years of education together and completed the requirements for the *Polytechnische Oberschule* (POS), a general polytechnic education. Pupils who were going to attend university or who had exemplified very good work at the POS could then continue on at the *Erweitete Oberschule* (EOS), an extended school, which ended after grade twelve with the *Abitur*. Students who showed a lot of promise early on in their POS years were sometimes sent to EOS institutions earlier. There was also the possibility of graduating from the POS and starting an apprenticeship while also pursuing the *Abitur* in conjunction with vocational or professional training.

Putting these two German systems together, or superimposing one upon the other, in 1991 was an act which required adjustments and considerations at every level and which had far-reaching implications for all aspects of school life for teachers, children and parents in eastern Germany. Some changes entailed only a general agreement of what was different and what had to be done to bring the systems together. It was quite easy to agree on a minimum school enrollment age, which only meant shifting the cutoff birth date by a few months so that all German children start school at the same age. There is also a standardized school entrance procedure for children signing up for first grade, involving a physical exam and a simple battery of tests designed to

[4] Das Bildungswesen in der DDR, undated, and Das Bildungswesen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1983, in Hildebrandt, Robert F. Teacher Union Blitz in the Former East Germany. European Journal of Education, Vol.28, No. 1, 1993 p.101.

prove that the child is physically and mentally ready to attend school. Differences and changes like this could be easily understood, accepted, and implemented.

Some other things could not be resolved or changed so quickly, and they provoked heated discussion and debate, even up to the national parliament level. At times it was easier just to disagree and postpone decisions, as was the case with the question of the number of years pupils need to finish the *Abitur*. In the west it was thirteen while in the east it was only twelve years of schooling. A decision was put off until 1994, at which time people still disagreed and divided the issue into state-level fractions.

Other things were argued about and then abandoned due to practical reasons. The subject "religion" is offered in most west German schools and was to have been implemented in the east as well. In the first years there was a pronounced lack of qualified religion teachers in the east, so the subject could only be offered at a few certain schools. Now that more teachers have gone through re-education programs or graduated with qualifications to teach this subject, school officials still do not always see full classrooms. Pupils' parents, themselves the product of the East German socialist system, aren't always enthusiastic about their children attending a class for Catholics or Protestants. They would rather see their children enrolled in alternative courses such as "ethics," "philosophy for children;" or "general religion studies." Some of the newly-qualified "religion" teachers are having to explain to parents that their classes are only basic moral ethics courses, and they as teachers are not setting out to convert schoolchildren to their beliefs. In the west religion classes in public schools are established and accepted; in the east they are subject to skepticism. Friends of mine, whose daughter is entering the fifth grade, are as suspicious of religion in her school as my parents would have been if Scientology had sponsored the local football team. Due to this combination of a lack of teachers and parental disinterest, only 21 percent of all school pupils in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern are enrolled in religion

courses in public schools. [5] The rest of the children attend alternative courses in philosophy or ethics.

Many typical school activities and organizations in the east died a natural death because the system, and the funding, supporting them was no longer there. Whereas before unification teachers and pupils had been engaged in afternoon groups, work circles, and clubs, children in post-unification Germany are no longer automatically occupied after their last class of the day. The responsibility of the school now ends at midday when both pupils and teachers go home for lunch. Younger school children can still attend a *Hort*, a type of day care center, where they are looked after until later on in the afternoon, but pupils in upper grade levels are left on their own: free to pursue their own interests, but also unsupervised.

This new system of education brought with it many questions for teachers, and it required them to re-examine old teaching philosophies and adapt to new ones. In doing this, they were often left as unguided as their pupils are now in the afternoons. As one analyst puts it:

> "In addition to operating within an altered school structure, teachers were ... expected to pursue completely different methodological and ideological guidelines than those they had been charged with carrying out for the past forty years. ... The result was that massive educational and societal changes were ordered from above, with the expectation that Eastern German teachers from below would successfully bring about the transition in the schools...without their involvement in educational decision-making at the political level, and without needing to have their new roles clarified..." [6]

This lack of clarification is confusing and frustrating for the teachers. Although they are doing the

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[5] "Jeder fünfte Schüler nimmt am Religionsunterricht teil" in the Ostseezeitung; Weekend edition, 17/18 July 1999, page 4.

[6] Streitwieser, Bernhard Thomas. Some Thoughts on Post-*Wende* Pedagogical Adjustments. Paper presented at the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies Conference; Cape Town, South Africa, July 12-17. 1998.

same job in the same setting, the rules have changed. They are expected to follow new guidelines, but often without knowing exactly what these guidelines are or how to implement them.

The Subject is Still English

English as a school subject has changed. It is not the content of the school subject that is new, but the packaging it comes in and the meaning it has for learners and teachers. I would argue that the school subject "English" is different than other subjects taught at schools because of the special role it played in the GDR education system and the new function it serves now.

Each system has values and beliefs, sets of interpretations of events, and certain facts they would like to pass on to the next generation. In addition to the family and the church, public or state schools have always been one of the traditional venues for passing on cultural and political information to children in Germany. In East Germany, where the church was suppressed and there was an unusually high percentage of families in which both parents worked, schools played a prominent role in raising and educating the next generation. The East German government recognized the importance of general education, not only to create an educated public, but also to influence children on their way to becoming supportive and productive citizens of their socialist system. When the GDR ceased to exist, the school system had to take on a new role and teachers had to convey new messages. And this had to happen in a very short space of time.

Some subjects and subject areas, such as politics, history, and social studies, obviously do not convey the same messages as before. The content of what the teacher teaches and what the pupils learn has been altered. Pupils in the GDR learned about people like Angela Davis and Gus Hall, whereas most children and adults in the FRG would not have even recognized the name of the leader of the Communist Party in the United States. The questions of German guilt and who was a victim in the Second World War were treated quite differently by teachers in each of the

two Germany states. In the East, communists who died in concentration camps were seen as victims, just like Jews or homosexuals, and the names of famous leaders who had fallen were taught in history classes in the GDR. The "invading" Russians I had learned about in school in West Germany were labeled the "liberating" Russians in the GDR. History teachers in east German schools today often must feel as if they are teaching an entirely different subject, and perhaps they are.

Other subjects, such as chemistry and mathematics, have not gone through such a transition. There are new textbooks, and there may be new classroom tools, props, or laboratories, but the content of the classes is the same. Granted, there are no longer the sorts of politically-loaded math word problems like this one a friend of mine remembers solving: "A capitalist factory leader in England pays his workers only X pounds per week, health insurance costs Y pounds per year. What percentage of his income must the poor worker pay so that he is not threatened with bankruptcy and homelessness in the face of illness?" But despite the new packaging, a physics class is still a physics class and it is still part of the basic school curriculum. The shift from socialism to capitalism has not had much of an effect on the reasons for learning or the ways of teaching these subjects.

Some other subjects are now taught much the same as before with the same basic goals in mind, but teachers claim the classes are different because the pupils have changed. Physical education is no longer offered to create "healthy socialist workers" as in the past, but it is still in the best interests of a united Germany to have healthy children. Sports teachers today lament the decreasing physical activity of their pupils. Kids spend more time in front of televisions and computers and less time playing outside. More families have cars now so people drive (or are driven) stretches they might have walked or cycled earlier. Some art or music teachers claim that their pupils are more motivated by video game heroes than role models from children's books.

Many German teachers are convinced that children today aren't reading as much as they did before and, as a result, their ability to communicate in their native language is deteriorating.

English is a subject that doesn't fit in any of these categories. The language itself is the same, but the meaning it has for learners, teachers, and education experts is not. It has taken on a new role in schools and in public opinion since unification. In the GDR, Russian was the first foreign language taught and it was heavily promoted by the state. English was also taught, but teachers and students had little chance to use the language aside from the classroom. The role English played in schools was academic, similar to Latin, and the uses for it outside the classroom were limited. It was an elective course in the GDR which most pupils took, but it was not seen by educational policy makers as being a high priority like Russian.

English has now become the first and main foreign language taught in school systems, and the open borders have made it not only possible but also necessary to use English. People learning English today will probably not only have the chance use it, they will no longer be able to do without it. They can travel to other countries and there are more foreigners who come here to visit and work, and not all of them are able to speak German. Employers demand better English skills, and it is nearly impossible to listen to the radio, watch television, work with a computer, or buy certain products without understanding at least a little English.

Teachers of English can also travel to countries where the language is spoken, and they finally have the chance to use their language skills in a non-school setting. They no longer have to check their daily lesson plans with the official state teaching plans, although they do follow a basic teaching plan which leads to a semi-standardized test in the last year of school. They are now free to chose from numerous new resources available for English-language instruction in schools. There are dozens of books by different publishers, rather than one book set by the state. There are cassettes and videos, compact discs and computer programs, and language games to

liven up learning. For the first time, exchange student programs can be set up and teachers can hope to see their learners applying their knowledge outside the classroom. English is no longer an abstract language on paper or simply a formal part of the school's curriculum of electives. It has become a school subject which must be taught because pupils will need it when they leave school.

The pupils learning English in schools in eastern Germany today have already adjusted to this change. Today's high school seniors had not even started learning a foreign language when the *Wende* began, and they can not know or recall what role English played in schools before the political and social changes. For them, English is a normal school subject.

During the first few years after unification there was an extreme scarcity of qualified English teachers in the east. The "old" teachers who had been teaching English in the GDR before the *Wende* were not able to cover the increasing number of hours needed to be taught at grade levels 7 through 10 or 12, not to mention covering the need for new classes which now began at grade levels 5 and 6. The government reacted with two plans: they tried to attract English teachers from the west to move east. This proved difficult because most teachers in the west were already well settled in their present jobs and communities, and the standard of living in the east was much lower. At the same time, the government started re-training teaching personnel whose subjects were dying out. Teachers of Russian, socialist studies, and youth leaders were offered the chance to go back to university after work and on weekends in order to become certified English teachers. Although this was certainly not easy for them, many of them stuck it out because they saw it as a way to guarantee their jobs in the future.

It would be interesting to know how these "new" teachers, people from the west and teachers who have switched from other subjects, view teaching English in schools today, but that is a topic for another paper. In this paper I'm interested in looking at how the "old" teachers react

to these changes. They are still teaching the same subject, but they are teaching it in an entirely new context.

In talking with the twelve English teachers in this study, I expected to find similarities in many of their answers to the questions. Despite the difference in their ages and different individual experiences in life, they all have gone through the same experience of having their professional lives and the society they live in change around them. They all taught English in East German schools before the *Wende* and they are now teaching English in a unified Germany under new and different conditions. Because they have been involved in two types of school systems they know first-hand what is different or the same, and what works better for them and what is not working. I set out to find out how these teachers reacted, and are still reacting, to the changes around them. I wanted to know how satisfied they are with their job of "English Teacher" in a unified Germany and how motivated they feel themselves to be in their work.

The responses they gave to the various questions were obviously as diverse and individual as they are, but their answers and observations still related to three basic categories. All the teachers had noticed obvious changes in the new system of education regarding institutional structures and expectations placed upon them as teachers. They also all reported various degrees of altered relations with the people they work with, meaning not only their pupils, but with parents and colleagues as well. Finally, they also all noticed a different regard they have for the language they teach, whether speaking of English as a school subject in the classroom or as a language they use to communicate. Using these three categories as a framework, I will try to examine the questions about whether they are satisfied with what is new and whether they feel motivated by the changes.

CHAPTER 3

THE TEACHERS' REACTIONS TO THE NEW SYSTEM

What is different about schools, the administration, and the education system? In a word: everything. The teachers interviewed all agreed that there have been major changes in the areas of tracking and different school types (three-tiered system), grades and exams, and class trips and extra events. They also all reported significant changes in how they as teachers are seen in society, their daily schedules, their salaries, recognition of their qualifications and certification, and what their futures look like.

Tracking and Division According to Ability

Most surprising was that none of the teachers thought that the new, three-tiered system introduced after unification had brought any improvement at all. If anything, they though it creates problems which far outweigh any benefits it might bring in terms of being able to cater to a specific group of learners. Several of the teachers described the system as "elitist," "counter-productive," or "cumbersome to learning." The *Gymnasium* teachers were less outspoken in their criticism of the new tracking, but many of them admitted that they might feel differently if they had to work in a *Haupt- und Realschule*. Those teachers who tried to justify their feelings on this topic usually did so with the idea of a segregated school system which went against the grain of what "felt right" for them as educators. One English teacher laughed when I asked her to describe her feelings about teaching in a school system which guides pupils into different ability groups:

"Now this is ironic, isn't it? For 26 years I have been teaching pupils in English classes here about the British school system and how the divisions there are unfair and discriminatory, because that is how we in the GDR viewed it, and now, suddenly, we had the exact same thing here! Sort of strange..." [7]

The teachers were of the opinion that tracking and separation of pupils takes place too early (at the end of fourth grade) and that children today no longer have the sense of learning and growing up together because they are separated according to academic ability. One *Gymnasium* teacher said that she feels cheated, in that:

"...I don't have a real classroom, I mean that the learners aren't typical. I suppose I should be glad not to be teaching kids with learning disabilities or that discipline stuff they have at the *Haupt- und Realschule,* but something is missing. There isn't a sense of camaraderie anymore. The kids just work for themselves and their good grades. At the POS we all helped each other out and now it's every person for himself. I think that is not a good classroom situation, even if it is more like what our world is like now." [8]

Another *Gymnasium* teacher mentions how a west German teacher also praised the GDR system and idea of a POS as being a place where all children learn and grow together:

"...and we were talking in, oh it must have been right after the Wall fell, I don't think I had any west money and there wasn't any unification talk yet, it was early on, and this man, a teacher from Hamburg, he said to me that we shouldn't let them take our school system away from us. You see, the old system we had here really had advantages. It really wasn't

[7] Gesamtschule teacher number 1, Interview on 4 November 1998.
[8] Gymnasium teacher number 6, Interview on 5 November 1998.

all bad...Now I think the idea of a *Gymnasium* isn't necessarily bad, but maybe we should wait until about grade nine or so. I think the way it is now is unhealthy." [9]

For these *Gymnasium* teachers, the obvious advantages of placing the gifted, talented, and "quick" children in special schools are offset by what is lost when youngsters are segregated.

Most of the *Haupt- und Realschule* teachers agreed that the children in the *Hauptschule* suffered more discipline problems because of the way they are separated from the mainstream and the lack of expectations placed on them there.

"There are a lot of weak pupils in the *Realschule*, and they stay there because their parents won't allow them to be moved down to the *Hauptschule* where they think they would be bullied. The pupils in the *Hauptschule* are at the bottom: they have no goals, they are working towards nothing.... Some of them have a good will to learn, but are stopped by their behavioral disturbances, dyslexia, or a bad family history. And there aren't any "lead horses" anymore to pull the group along because all of the more dedicated and able learners move up to the higher school levels." [10]

The *Haupt- und Realschule* have lost not only the gifted and talented top ten percent, but they have also lost a good number of their solid "normal" or average ability pupils, as parents are guiding more and more of their offspring to the *Gymnasium*.

The teachers working in the *Gesamtschule* are also confronted with the problem of tracking, as their schools are not merely modern-day versions of the old POS, but are places where all three tracks are offered. One teacher, looking back on her 33 years of experience in different school types, phrased it like this:

[9] Gymnasium teacher number 1, Interview on 14 September 1998.

"My teaching style is different now because I have mixed groups and have to consider everyone. We have to motivate and support the weaker learners while making sure that the top pupils are getting what they need to achieve the Abitur... It is different now, not as unified as before, and I always have to make sure I am giving each pupil what he or she needs to reach these different goals. That is new." [11]

The *Gesamtschule* teachers are faced with the need to offer something for everyone, like they did under the old POS system, while still keeping the end goals and divided structure of the new system in full view.

The teachers in this study all noted that they have quickly altered their teaching styles to adapt to what their type of school demands. Most of them see this as a positive process and as something that happened almost automatically in the past few years, without much effort on their part. A new situation called for them to re-evaluate their actions in the classroom, and they were able and willing to adapt. It was part of the change and growth a teacher is always going through:

"... a continuing process of development, from then when I first started teaching up to now, and probably until I stop working. This was a big change, starting to think in terms of the western system. I can cope with this new divided system, but I don't like they way it makes kids feel. They feel like they are being discriminated against. I had to adjust to it, but that is my own problem. When I teach adult classes at the *Volkshochschule* (community college evening school), I also needed to adapt and expand my teaching style because it is a different learning environment. Here, in schools with the children, things just follow along. This adaptation on my part is always necessary, no matter what classroom I am in." [12]

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[10] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 3, Interview on 9 September 1998.
[11] Gesamtschule teacher number 2, Interview on 4 November 1998.
[12] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 2, Interview on 6 October 1998.

The general tenor seemed to be that a teacher who cares about the pupils will do what is best for them in a given situation. This holds true for teachers and learners in all societies and during all periods of history and is in no way restricted to the twelve teachers in this study. Although the three-tiered, western education system has not been fully accepted by most of these teachers, none of them were surprised at the way in which they had been able to change in order to continue working with children in the new school structure, nor were they overwhelmed by the necessity of having to do so. During some of the interviews I could not help but marvel at the apparent ease with which some of these women had adjusted to working in a new education system; but often they dismissed this with a simple shrug of: "You can't imagine just how different my life is, there are so many things which were so completely new." The revolution which had taken place at work did not seem as excessive when compared with what had happened to society as a whole. The switch from socialism to capitalism is called the "*Wende*" for good reason; it was indeed a "turning" of life as people had known it up to then.

Grades and Evaluation

An area which did demand more effort and attention from the teachers was that of grading and exams. Usually, new grading scales cause even seasoned teachers to slow down and double-check things when they are first introduced in a normal setting, but this time the new requirements and markings came from a system none of the teachers had ever experienced first-hand. They themselves were all products of the GDR education system, and consequently that marking scale was the one they had grown up with and had been using all their lives. There was a great deal of uncertainty reported as to what constituted a "full" or "half" error, and how "good" an essay now had to be in order to receive a mark of 1 (top of the scale from 1 to 6, replacing the old scale from 1 to 5). School districts helped the transition by hosting seminars given by west

German education experts in order to introduce the new marking criteria and make sure local teachers knew what was expected, what was acceptable, and what was no longer adequate. The final major exams of a graduating class were, and still are, spot-checked or re-marked at higher levels to ensure consistent standards and fairness.

Although all the teachers interviewed here said they feel more confident now, many of them could remember the uncertainty they had had in giving out the "new" grades. They were teaching the same subject to the same children, but were now having to evaluate progress and achievement in a new light, and they were not always sure if they were doing it correctly. One teacher mentioned how she often still wonders about these central exam checks; and whether they might also serve as a method of checking up on her teaching and her English skills:

> "I worry about marking something wrong and then it turns out to be an official Americanism or standard of something I don't know about. And then if I don't mark it and it does turn out to be wrong, then maybe people will think I'm not competent in English...You know, I don't really like having to give grades at all." [13]

This teacher is now working in a special, independent *Gesamtschule* where the children are not marked in their daily work. This idea of a school without grades is a new one in eastern Germany and has found several staunch supporters since unification. One of this teacher's colleagues, a teacher of German, explained how freeing this is for learners with an example:

> "When a pupil is failing, and is only getting 30 percent of the answers right, they feel bad. If I work hard with this child, help them in every way I can, and the child gives all his

[13] Gesamtschule teacher number 3, Interview on 8 September 1998.

energy and will to learning and improving, he might someday be able to get 60 percent of the answers right. That would mean he would be doing twice as well as before and would have come a long way, right? But I would still have to fail him because that is what the marking scale tells me I should do. Grades just don't allow us to recognize progress, respect the effort, and share children's pride in what they are able to achieve." [14]

However, another teacher interviewed in this study dismisses this idea of working without grades and the new "alternative" type of schooling with bitter criticism:

"...you mean, like they have in Hamburg (western Germany) with their SPD government? That doesn't knock my socks off at all. They say they don't post pupils' grades so that their poor little children won't be humiliated, which is just silly. I mean, I would never actually slam a weak or insecure learner by reading off his "6" in front of the entire class, but grades...well, grades are like money for kids. Young people need recognition and incentive to do better. They should know their marks because that encourages activity and a sort of competition. Kids want to be pushed, and they want to have a reason to work more. Children in today's school system are being coddled, and we aren't doing them any favors by it." [15]

Outside the Classroom

The final area in which teachers reported major changes in the system was with extra-curricular events, such as class trips and afternoon activities. Low school budgets, canceled activity funds, and disbanding of the GDR youth groups have put a stop to all but the most basic clubs and outings. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the north-easternmost of the German states where this study took place, has an official unemployment rate of between 17 and 20 percent, and the

[14] One of the founding teachers of the Freie Schule Rostock at their open house day, in June 1998
[15] Gymnasium teacher number 5, Interview on 9 October 1998.

unofficial rate is probably much higher. Even where parents have jobs, the regional salary levels are roughly only three-fourths of the average salaries in western Germany, although the cost of living is the same in both parts of the country. As a result, many parents simply cannot afford to contribute to after-school activities such as trips to the movies or outings to a public ice rink or swimming pool. Classes are loathe to leave classmates behind when they go on the traditional *Klassenfahrt* (out-of-town trips lasting several days), so they are now restricting trips to the immediate vicinity or forgoing them altogether. Many teachers mentioned how difficult it is to strike a balance between what is affordable and what would be special or fun for the children. In the GDR, travel to foreign countries had been regulated and severely restricted, and English teachers had never had the chance to take pupils on trips to England. Now such trips are theoretically possible for all children learning English, but they are reserved for children from wealthier families due to financial reasons. In the GDR western travel was restricted to all but the politically elite. Now the socio-economic differences will regulate access to such "extras" and opportunity.

Teachers are also still learning new rules about responsibility and legal ramifications of leaving the school grounds with children. The East German system provided automatic liability insurance and clear-cut rules of individual and state responsibility, which meant that teachers did not have to worry about what would happen if a pupil should fall ill, become lost or injured, lose money or property, or create discipline problems while away from school. For many teachers in the eastern part of Germany, the mass of potential paperwork and worry of "what if" has taken the fun out of school outings. In December 1998 a state court found an elementary teacher guilty of manslaughter after a boy drown in an indoor swimming pool while on a class day trip. Despite the fact that he had been under adult supervision and there had been a licensed lifeguard on duty, the teacher was found to be responsible for the boy's death. The news story was not only shocking

and tragic, but also very unsettling for many teachers and school principals and is making people think twice before suggesting school outings. The new system allows teachers more flexibility and autonomy, but in return it demands that they take more responsibility for the decisions they make.

Other Changes

In addition to these larger areas of reorganization in school structure, marking, and out-of-school events, teachers also commented on adjustment problems in other areas of their work, especially concerning daily schedules, public recognition, salaries, equality with colleagues in western Germany, and their own status as teachers in terms of job security. In these areas, nearly all of the teachers were unanimous in their praise or criticism of the changes that have happened.

Scheduling seems to be less of a problem for English teachers now than ten years ago. They are giving the same number of lessons, but their contact hours are more concentrated and they report more flexibility in going about their work on a daily basis. Courses on Saturday mornings had been the norm until the *Wende*, but neither the teachers nor the pupils seem to miss them now. Schools have greatly reduced the number of lessons and activities outside the core 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. to lunch time slot on weekdays. There had been a number of early morning class slots during the week, which is a rarity today, and there had been extra afternoon classes and required duties. Because English was an elective, it had been scheduled in after the rest of the core courses had already been set, resulting in a high proportion of irregular hours outside of the normal teaching times. Especially for teachers of English, dropping the Saturday lessons and reducing morning and afternoon lesson times has cut back on the wide span of their work week. All of the teachers questioned here are mothers, and many of them remembered the problems of scheduling a family with a job which was more spread out than that of their colleagues, and which

often ran into weekends. Several mentioned feelings of resentment towards colleagues who were teaching "important" classes because those teachers never had to work at odd times. Now English is one of the core courses and has its own set place in the timetable, so these teachers are no longer faced with odd hours.

In the eyes of the general public, school teachers have always had nearly perfect working hours anyway. Because they leave school in the early afternoon when classes end, they are able to decide for themselves when and where they correct papers or prepare lesson plans. Many teachers noted how they often felt that society can not see or appreciate the actual amount of work they do. Several said that they thought the general public regards them as half-time members of the workforce and that their efforts are not always evident. Yet all of them reported working more than the 40 hours a week their contracts require and they still felt like they were not doing enough.

> "I can never leave the office and just go home, like a clerk or salesperson, and feel like I am done working for the day. I am never finished with lesson planning, correction, whatever... there is always more I need to be doing. Maybe in the summer, sometimes then I can feel like I can relax. But even then, then next school year is just weeks away. Sometimes I feel like I never grew up, because going to school never stopped." [16]

Other teachers reported the same sense of never being finished with the work at hand and the goals they have set for themselves. One of the older teachers, close to retirement, confessed occasional bouts of guilt:

[16] Gymnasium teacher number 3, Interview on 24 September 1998.

> "Sometimes I can't get everything done in one evening - and I have a bad conscience the next day. I want to be good, and stay good, and I am afraid that things could get to be routine and I would stop caring. I would rather take the time to look it up or ask someone before talking nonsense in front of the children...and that isn't always possible." [17]

One of the younger teachers working in a new type of school also grinned over her cup of hot chocolate as she tallied her working hours for me:

> "Wow, it does add up, doesn't it? What can I say? I'm happy. I work more hours now than anyone else I know and am earning less than I was before because we're in a start-up phase. I have new age groups to teach and so I have new lesson plans, more preparation and reflection to do. I am in over my head and I love it. Isn't that funny?" [18]

Another aspect of time spent in work-related activities which goes unrecognized by outsiders was the fact that nearly all of these teachers are involved in extensive voluntary "extras" which are unpaid and have no direct positive effect on their careers or futures. Because the school and the government are no longer organizing these activities, many teachers take it upon themselves to do so. Some of the teachers went to considerable time and expense to arrange exchange programs and find outside sponsors for travel, often boxing proposals and budgets through administrations which were not always especially welcoming or supportive. Another teacher leads an English-language theater group, investing hours of her time and creative energy in rehearsals and production. One teacher in a smaller town showed me stacks of photos of class dinners she had hosted at her home, a tradition she started with her Russian classes and has expanded and maintained up to the present:

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[17] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 2, Interview on 6 October 1998
[18] Gesamtschule teacher number 3, Interview on 8 September 1998.

"...we eat typical foods of the country together and all share in the cleanup - you can see how it used to be very crowded in my old apartment, but now I have more space. And the children enjoy feeling special. I pull out my good dishes and we make a big deal of it. The kids think it's very special to be fussed over, and they feel important." [19]

Despite long hours they were all putting in for the "required" aspects of their job and the sense most of them shared of being overworked and never finished, none of these teachers found it odd that they were volunteering to do more. Most saw it either as an unwritten part of the job or a way for them to maintain close contact with their pupils beyond the typical classroom.

A few of the women mentioned that they had no complaints about working times or about compensation for their jobs. "We are very well-paid," was a common statement, reflecting the high rank of teachers on the public salary scale. Not one teacher in this group was of the opinion that her salary was too low or the benefits were not good enough, yet there was often the feeling that they were being treated like second-class citizens.

Since the *Wende*, public service salaries in the eastern part of Germany have been raised several times to bring them up towards the level of people working in the west. At the time of these interviews, teachers in the former GDR were being paid 86.5% of what their western colleagues were earning. This difference includes all teachers in all types of schools who are working with the same teaching degrees, and there is no plan as to when they will be paid the same amount for the same work. The teachers are disturbed by this discrepancy, over which they have no influence. One teacher, also the principal of her school, summed up the common

[19] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 3, Interview on 9 September 1998.

sentiment of her staff:

> "Our salaries are much better, we earn more than the average person on the street, especially when I think of how little we used to earn! No, I can't complain at all. But it is still unfair that we work under worse conditions with fewer resources than our western colleagues, and we are paid less for doing so. That worms some of my staff, and me, too, I suppose...it's been nearly ten years now." [20]

It is not that they are unhappy with their pay, but they are frustrated about being paid differently for the same work.

After unification, teachers in the east had to re-apply for their positions or prove that they were qualified to keep their jobs in a way that many found degrading. The process included having diplomas and certificates "confirmed" and getting their qualifications "recognized" so that they could continue working. For some this was a fairly automatic and painless process which took time and patience with forms to be filled out, while others were required to take classes or re-sit exams in order to obtain a teaching certificate which would be acceptable to the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, their employer.

> "Doctors and engineers didn't go through this sort of mess, they didn't have to prove themselves, so why did I? I'm not any worse, I'm not any more stupid...It was unfair. No one asked the west German teachers to go back and get their certification again."[21]

Another disappointment and source of uncertainty has been the recent state plan to ensure that there will be neither too few nor too many teachers in the years to come. After the

[20] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 1, Interview on 10 September 1998.
[21] Gymnasium teacher number 2, Interview on 23 September 1998.

Wende and unification, birth rates in eastern Germany sank to unheard of lows due to extreme social instability. Women and their partners were forced to make new and difficult choices about having children, how many to have, and how to support their families. Such a decline in birthrates in the eastern part of Germany was an unexpected and unwelcome by-product of German unification, and this dip in population growth will have ramifications for years to come. The demographic results are now becoming apparent as this mini-generation of children enters school and the classrooms are only half-full. Some schools have had to close completely, while others are being combined in order to meet state plans.

Every teacher in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has been asked to sign a proposal ("*Lehrerpersonalkonzept*") stating that they agree to work part-time, thereby taking a cut in pay, if the need arises. The idea is simple: if everyone agrees to work less, there will be enough work for all. In a state with such high unemployment rates, such a plan seems to be fair and beneficial for all. All of the teachers in this study agree with the need for solidarity and sharing, but they objected to the way in which it was carried out.

> "Sure, I signed the thing. I had no choice. People who didn't sign will be the first to be kicked out when things get tough. Or did you really believe the newspaper reports that over 95% of us signed because we were glad to cooperate? We were just scared of losing our jobs, like everyone else here." [22]

This plan guarantees jobs, but does not provide the desired security.

[22] Gymnasium teacher number 6, Interview on 5 November 1998.

> "I don't call 50% of a job a secure job, I call it a type of hidden unemployment. Can I live off of half a salary? I'm divorced now, and it's only my income that I have to live off of. It's a threat, maybe a loss of status. I can only hope I won't be affected by it." [23]

A half-time teaching position also does not mean half of the working hours for half pay. A part-time teacher may have only fifty percent of the normal teaching load hours assigned, but he or she is still expected to be on the school grounds and fill duty slots outside the classroom in the same way a full-time teacher does.

The teachers in this study are at varying stages of adjustment and acceptance of the new school system and the reorganization it has brought to their professional lives. While none of them were fully supportive of or violently against what is different now, they are still in the process of evaluating and learning to cope, and of learning how to make the new system work best for them in their teaching contexts. As a result of the *Wende* and the dissimilar type of education system, teachers have also seen changes in their relationships with the people they work with and with the language they are teaching, and these will be examined in the next two chapters.

[23] Gymnasium teacher number 4, Interview on 5 October 1998.

CHAPTER 4

THE TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE

Germans from the former GDR have witnessed huge changes in society in the past ten years. The total restructuring of people's lives, personal and professional, forced East Germans to alter their relations with one another. Often these differences are seen as a nebulous idea which can not be clearly defined or explained, but is just commonly felt: "*Die Leute sind heute anders*," (people today are different).

Optimists would say that Germans in the east have been forced to become more self-reliant and critical and they are now learning how to take risks and accept the consequences of their actions. Friends of mine here who have done well under capitalism are quick to point out how the new freedom has encouraged creativity and allowed them to challenge themselves in ways which would have been impossible under the old regime. On the other hand, there is often the sentiment that people are colder towards one another. In the rush to succeed and move ahead there is now a willingness to ignore those left behind. The term "*Ellbogengesellschaft*" (society of elbows) is often used to describe how one has to be hard and ruthless to get ahead in life in the post-*Wende* era.

These differences still permeate most domains of daily life where people interact with one another, which is why it is also interesting to look at how these changes in personal relations have altered teachers' work. Teaching, perhaps more so than any other profession, is a people-oriented type of work. Teachers are not just experts who impart wisdom to those who need it, rather they

are people trained in certain subject areas who are able to help others become knowledgeable in these areas. They must be masters of pedagogy, psychology, and group dynamics and be able to work well with all kinds of people. Good personal relationships in the classroom, both among students and between teachers and students, help create a positive learning environment. Good personal relationships outside the immediate classroom, such as those teachers have with colleagues and parents, help support this learning environment.

This is especially true for school teachers, who work with children and teenagers. The relationship between pupils and teacher effects how learning takes place and can also influence how a pupil sees a subject for years to come. How many people can recall "liking" a certain subject in school because the teacher was "good" or "nice," or dreading classes in another subject because that teacher was not a person we could identify with? For me, it was not always the subject matter itself, but the way the instructor made me feel about a subject that determined my attitudes and success or failure. It seems that successful teachers are people who can relate well to their pupils and who are able to inspire trust, respect, and a willingness to learn. Each teacher will have his or her own way of interacting with the learners in the classroom, depending on the type of person he or she is, which explains why there are so many different types of people who go into teaching and who can be effective in many different ways.

School teachers do not work solely with children but also have to deal with adults in their work. In this study, many of them reported that the relations they have with colleagues on the job and the parents of the children are just as important to them as the ties they have with their pupils. If a school teacher is surrounded by supportive colleagues and a good "team" of teachers, she will probably feel comfortable working at that school. An understanding principal, competent and friendly office staff, and a helpful janitor can make the work run smoothly. By the same token, if

a teacher knows that the parents of her pupils understand and agree with what goes on in the classroom, she can be sure of their support as well.

If it is true, as the common saying goes, that "people are different" now, it is worth looking at what is different about personal dynamics and the relations teachers have with people in their classrooms (pupils), and with people outside their classrooms (parents and colleagues). What effect do these changes have on what goes on in the classroom, and are the teachers satisfied with the way things are now? Is there a longing for the "good old days" before the *Wende* changed everyone?

Teachers' Relations with Colleagues

The questions about "personal relationships" I asked the twelve English teachers in this study were more general in nature than the questions on school systems. I was not expecting their answers, from the perspective of teachers of English, to be much different from what teachers of any other subject would say. For the most part I think this is true, and that the answers they gave me are similar to what most school teachers in general would have said. Most of these teachers viewed the changes they have observed in relationships with people as being independent of the subject material they taught.

There were only a few exceptions, and these came from the three teachers who had reported the highest level of dissatisfaction with the old school system. These women felt that they had been at a considerable disadvantage during GDR times because they were teachers of English. They felt that they had been discriminated against by school principals and other officials partly because they were teaching a "western, capitalist" language and they were interested in providing their pupils with access to picture postcards, real newspaper clippings, or even the occasional native speaker. We did not spend an excessive amount of time going into

detail of what problems they had had in the GDR, and none of them seemed to want to wallow in the past. Their reports were more general and focused on their feelings:

> "At one point I was afraid I would actually be fired. It seemed that everything I did was forbidden. ... The *Wende* is the best thing that could have happened for us English teachers." [24]

> "Some of them took advantage of being higher up in the power structure, and they had the ability to make me feel stupid and small." [25]

These three teachers reported a huge change in their dealings with supervisors and officials following the *Wende*, partly because the conflict surrounding the subject matter ceased to exist. They said that they are more confident talking to superiors about their teaching methods and materials now because they no longer worried about getting into trouble, and also because many of the former hard-line socialist school authorities have been replaced by new officials anyway. This was the only possible link mentioned between the subject they teach and the relations to people in higher positions today. None of them thought that this affected relations with colleagues working at the same level, pupils, or parents today.

The other nine teachers in the survey told me that they were sure any other teacher at their school, regardless of what subjects they were teaching, would make similar remarks on the dynamics of relations with pupils and parents and about the positive or negative aspects of the colleagues at their school. In this light, it is interesting to view their answers not just in terms of what is different for English teachers at schools, but what is different at schools in general.

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[24] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 1, Interview on 10 September 1998.

[25] Gesamtschule teacher number 3, Interview on 8 September 1998.

Despite differences in ages and types of schools they work at, the answers they gave to certain parts of the questionnaire were so similar that it was eerie. As much as I tried to conduct each interview as a separate and independent conversation, I found myself coming to expect certain reactions to certain questions. In the first few interviews this similarity surprised me and sent me scurrying back to review what the teacher in the prior conversation had said. Toward the end of the interview list I felt like I could finish their sentences for them. It was difficult for me to keep quiet and not try to lead them into giving answers I was expecting. I am sure that my facial expressions and body language often let on that I was second-guessing their answers, and I can only hope that this did not influence their thinking or the nature of their responses too much.

Perhaps their answers and comments were also indirectly censored by the nature of the interview and the contact they had with me. Most of the teachers I spoke with came to this study through a referral or contact I had at their school. The fact that I, as the "interviewer" asking the questions, knew their colleagues or other people they associated with may have restricted their answers somewhat. At any rate, the answers they gave to questions about their colleagues were positive and optimistic.

Surprising for me was the total absence of any talk of competition for jobs or job security. The past few years have been full of talk of the "*Lehrerpersonalkonzept*" and future plans to cut back on teaching staff because of low birthrates and shrinking school populations. I had expected to find that this pressure had had a negative influence on the way they interact with fellow teachers. But there was no mention of any competition, mobbing, teachers trying to undermine other teachers, etc. It was as if the idea that they might loose their job to a colleague had never occurred to them. Again, this could have been due to the nature of the interview situation and a feeling of not wanting to bad-mouth fellow teachers in front of me; or it could simply be due to the fact that eastern Germany does not have enough qualified English teachers to cover all

teaching hours. The fact that these teachers can teach English as one of their subjects may make them more immune to such worries of becoming unemployed. They had, as mentioned before, said that the *Lehrerpersonalkonzept* worried them, but it did not seem to be changing the way they worked with their colleagues.

A vast majority of the teachers reported that they have satisfactory or very good relations with teaching colleagues, the principals or school directors, and support staff. This is not to say that they were necessarily dissatisfied with these relations before unification (with the exception of the three mentioned earlier), but they had no real complaints about post-*Wende* relationships with colleagues. Nearly all teachers were unanimous in their praise of the circle of colleagues they worked with. A few of them mentioned in passing that there were a few "sour grapes" or difficult people on staff where they worked, but they did not seem overly concerned about this. It is probably normal that a staff of twenty or fifty people is bound to include a few colleagues who are not perfect soul mates. This was seen as normal and nothing the teachers spent much time talking to me about. It is probably also true that the problematic "sour grape" colleague was also there before unification and is not a new, post-*Wende* phenomenon.

The teachers also feel, for the most part, that their decisions and actions are backed by the school they work in and that principals have an open ear for their concerns. In both parts of Germany, both before and after the *Wende*, school principals are not separate administrators, but rather they are teachers themselves who have been elected or appointed by a board to serve as the "*Direktor*" of the school they work at. They teach a reduced load of hours and are therefore still very much in tune with what goes on in a classroom. One of the teachers in this study was also the principal of her school and she said that the feeling was mutual; she was satisfied with the teaching staff at her school and felt that they worked well with her in her position as principal, and they worked well with her as a teacher.

The one difference nine of the teachers mentioned was the way they now work together with other English teachers at their school and at other schools. In the GDR it was necessary for them to stick together and share materials. Because there were basically no extra texts or workbooks other than what the central education ministry had provided, English teachers were always on the lookout for new material to bring into their classrooms. In a land where photocopiers and PCs were virtually non-existent, it was not unusual for a teacher to copy out a new text longhand so that she could bring it back to her classroom and use parts of it later. Pictures, dolls, props and recipes were recycled and passed on between teachers. English language books and newspapers, whether state approved or not, were difficult to obtain, so lovers of the English language had to maintain a good network of friends and colleagues to keep up their supply. Within a few months of the opening of the border this problem had disappeared and now the teachers say they are nearly overwhelmed by the "flood" of materials to choose from.

Seven teachers mentioned that they are no longer as dependent on other colleagues in this respect. In one way this has been freeing, in that each teacher can work for herself and choose what she thinks works best, but it often means that the necessary close contact and exchange of ideas is gone. For the seven teachers who mentioned it, this pre-*Wende* "dependence" had been something positive because it gave them the incentive to find the time to sit down together and exchange ideas. Without this "dependence" it is more difficult to arrange for such collegial exchanges and find time "just to talk" about work. On the whole, however, they reported being happy to be working where they were and most of them, with a few minor exceptions of the occasional "sour grapes" on staff, were very satisfied with their helpful and open colleagues.

Teachers' Relations with Parents

The teachers' relationships with the parents of their pupils are a bit more complicated, which seems to be due to the very different expectations teachers and parents have of each other. In the GDR, the state took responsibility for a large share of educating the next generation. This term "educating" included areas of academics, athletics, social skills, and political ideals. Teachers and youth leaders had great influence on their pupils' lives and, in the words of critics, were often there to "replace" the parents, who were out in the factories working for the good of socialism.

Whether one sees this as a fair critique or not, it is true that the GDR's state institutions cared intensively for children from the first early days of life up until the time they would be grown and have children of their own. Day care was inexpensive and close to home or the place of work, and older school children were well looked after following their last class of the day. All adults were expected to work outside the home, but the GDR also wanted families to have children and therefore tried to support parents wherever they could. Moms and dads were relieved of many of the duties associated with child rearing, and the education system played a substantial role in this process.

As an American, I was always surprised at the apparent ease with which East Germans my age were having children, holding down jobs, paying the rent, and making things work. There was a large number of single mothers, women who had either been separated or divorced or who had never wanted to live with the child's father at all, and large families in which both parents worked and everything seemed to run so smoothly. None of these children were living in poverty, sleeping under bridges, or going without immunizations, as was the case in many areas of my own country. And none of these children seemed particularly deprived because their parents were out working and had placed them in day care. Parents could go about their jobs, secure in the

knowledge that day care, schools, and youth organizations were keeping their offspring safe and sound. But, although the system was helping families raise their children in so many ways, I also wondered if people were missing out on a part of being parents because the government was providing for them so extensively. In some areas, the state's influence on children exceeded that of the home.

No school system, socialist or other, can replace the family unit, and I do not wish to imply here that the GDR tried to do this. The family was honored, respected, and supported by the government and by the school system. Schools also sought to integrate parents into the state education structure. Parent involvement was solicited and encouraged through parent-teacher associations and support groups (the "*Elternbeirat*" and "*Elternaktiven*"), and teachers sought out the parents during several open-house nights during the school year and at individual parent-teacher conferences held at school or in the parents' homes. Schools were an important influence on children's lives, but they were not the only one.

The teachers in this study agree that schools today are not expected to play the same all-inclusive role they did ten years ago. They are not required, or authorized, to be active in all areas of children's lives as they were before. So it is only logical that they, as teachers, now expect parents to fill in the missing parts. Today's parents are not always willing or able to do so. Many are unemployed and going through a rough phase in their lives, feeling unwanted, ineffective, and misused. Parents with low self-esteem are not always able to live up to their job of being a good role model for their children. Other parents who are working have often had to invest more time and energy in their jobs than before unification. Some have had to change professions completely, others have fought to keep from being laid off, and some are busy climbing the career ladder which has developed in front of them. In today's world of getting ahead and working long hours, it is difficult to find time to go through homework assignments or take an active interest in what

goes on in the child's classroom. Besides, they may think, if there were any problems, the school would tell them about it, right?

Teachers see this differently. They are willing to be involved and work closely with today's youth, but they are not willing to do it all alone. Parents, they think, are not taking on enough responsibility, perhaps also because they do not know how to do this. The teachers said they thought many parents, products of the East German system themselves, may just expect the schools to continue doing what they did in the GDR: taking on a large chunk of the task of "educating" the children.

Schools in West Germany were not active to the same extent that schools in East Germany were; and all schools in united Germany are now following the western model. Ten of the twelve teachers in this study had criticism for parents' lack of ability to adapt to the new situation:

> "..they are either working or have fallen down the social ladder and are preoccupied with their own concerns. They know that we don't have the same authority and influence as before -- teachers are no longer God - but they themselves are doing nothing to fill the void." [26]

Some parents are working long hours and investing their energy in jobs, especially as the financial payoffs are higher and more tangible than before. Other parents are unemployed and at home, seemingly with too much time on their hands. But this "extra" time which comes from being laid off from work, does not necessarily benefit the children:

> "One might think that a higher rate of unemployment, with parents forced to stay home, would result in more time for kids, but forget it! The parents are too concerned with their

[26] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 1, Interview on 10 September 1998.

own worries, and not with their children's. Also, I think lots of east German women were not raised to be stay-at-home parents. Now society expects them to retreat to the kitchen and spend their unemployment time focused on their children. But it hasn't happened." [27]

A recent article in the local paper echoed these statements. In comparing children in the east and west after unification, the report found that the children were remarkably similar and no longer defined themselves according to west or east. The parents, on the other hand, were still going through a transition. An elementary school teacher was quoted as saying that responsibility of raising and educating children is often quickly passed on to a third party. [28] The author of the article also put forward the idea that:

"Women in the east, who are unemployed now against their will, have not always been able to cope with this new situation." [29]

Many women in eastern Germany have lost their jobs and, with them, a large part of their identity. With official unemployment rates of over twenty percent in some areas (the "unofficial" rates much higher because they include people in training programs and those who have dropped out of the unemployment benefit network) their chances of finding new jobs are slim. These chances are made smaller by the fact that they have children. Like in the USA during the years following World War II, where returning soldiers squeezed women out of their factory jobs and sent them back to suburbia, post-*Wende* society in Germany is very accepting of the stay-at-home wife and mother. The problem is that many of these eastern German women would rather be

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[27] Gesamtschule teacher number 2, Interview on 4 November 1998.
[28] OZ 27. and 28 March 1999 page 4 section "weekend" "Mit Dorothee kann man gut spielen." By Heidrun Lange
[29] ibid.

working than staying at home caring for the house, baking cookies, and helping their offspring with homework. Just because they are at home without paid employment does not mean that they devote their "extra" time to reviewing school assignments.

Especially at the *Gymnasium* where classes are faster paced, however, children could benefit from extra time spent going over assignments. The teachers do not see it as their job to spend time with kids who need extra help; they are there to teach, not to tutor. Even at the *Haupt- und Realschule,* teachers decidedly feel that they cannot be made solely responsible for the success or failure of pupils. In the GDR, if a child was falling behind academically, the state expected its teachers to "keep the group together" and offer any help necessary to the one lagging behind. This group thinking disappeared with the implementation of the three-tiered system and the competition that came with it. If a child can't keep up, he obviously is at the wrong type of school and should be sent down. If a child is floundering, the teachers expect the parents to help out by working through homework and going through readings with them after school:

> "Sometimes parents call up and they are frustrated and angry about a bad grade or something, but these are the parents who don't ever help their children or show they are interested, and therefore they don't recognize the work we do here...I once spent a week giving free afternoon tutoring to two girls who had to repeat their final exam. If they had failed the second exam then they would not have gotten the *Realschule* certificate. We worked every day for that entire week and they passed in the end. Some people might think that's what I am there for and there was no need to thank me for it, but those girls' parents appreciated it and said so. That made it better for me." [30]

[30] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 2, Interview on 6 October 1998.

These teachers are also divided as to how far they see their responsibility reaching into non-academic areas of their pupils' lives. The six *Gymnasium* teachers were pretty unanimous in their separation of school and home:

> "I think this ideas of a "*Ganztagsschule*" (an all-day school) is not good for families. If kids are here until five in the evening then the parents won't have any influence on them at all, it would be just teachers and peers. Besides, free time activities are not our job. The school can be open as a resource, sure, but we aren't a second home. I went to university and did my training because I wanted to work as a teacher, and not a youth group leader." [31]

> "I am a mom, and I am a school teacher. I don't expect my colleagues here at school to teach my daughter morals, hold her hand through homework assignments, or worry about her diet or clothes. Likewise, I refuse to take on the task of being a replacement mom to someone else's kids. Those days are past, and people need to realize that they have to be there for their children and pay attention to where they are in life. People shouldn't expect me to do that for them." [32]

Parents expect "a school" to serve a certain function and teachers there to play certain roles. These expectations are based on the old GDR system and on what they experienced as children themselves. These old definitions of what "a school" and its teachers are no longer fit in with what the teachers' definition of "a school" should be today, especially if the school in question is a *Gymnasium*.

These *Gymnasium* teachers reported a lower rate of parents "butting in" with their teaching methods. Parents may ask them about grades and results, but rarely question the teacher's

[31] Gymnasium teacher number 2, Interview on 23 September 1998.
[32] Gymnasium teacher number 6, Interview on 5 November 1998.

methods. One *Gymnasium* teacher, however, did mention that she has some pushy parents to deal with:

> "They want to tell me how to design an exam and then how to mark it. As if they knew what they were talking about. I don't tell a plumber how to attach a pipe in my bathroom, so I wish parents would leave classroom details to me." [33]

The six *Haupt- und Realschule* and *Gesamtschule* teachers said that this is more of an issue for them, and that parents do question why their children are learning something or why they must be examined in a certain way.

> "We're a new alternative school and it's incredible how much parent involvement there is, but we solicit it, so I suppose that is why...and when you work with alternative teaching methods there is bound to be some discussion. But it was the same in my last school. People think that they know what school is like because they went there themselves. And that makes them experts on teaching?" [34]

In the GDR, parents did not question or criticize the teachers at school very much. East German schools were an official part of the socialist state, imparting knowledge and policy at a certain level, and not many people went out of their way to butt heads with state organs. Schools in a unified Germany are also an official part of the state, more so than what I am used to from the United States, but there is also room to challenge, question, and try to influence things. Parents take advantage of this new freedom when they want to help their children. But, in the teachers' eyes, the parents are not taking up the responsibilities that go along with the new system.

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[33] Gymnasium teacher number 5, Interview on 9 October 1998.
[34] Gesamtschule teacher number 3, Interview on 8 September 1998.

All the teachers interviewed here see the need for parents and teachers to work together as a team in educating children today, but they have differing views on what the role of each member of this team should be. Some teachers welcome all the parental input that comes their way. They would favor a return to the actively solicited work of the old "*Elternbeirat*" and "*Elternaktiven*" and they would like to have more regular parent conferences. Other teachers would prefer that parents spend less time questioning methods and more time working with their children at home. Ideally, because teachers and parents are supposed to be working toward the same goal - healthy, well-adjusted, and educated children - there should be a mixture of both. Parents and teachers should support and supplement each other's efforts. But, what was clear in this study, was that the teachers are feeling that too much is being left to the education system and not enough is being done by the parents:

> "It's easy to look at today's youth problems, the crime and truancy, the lack of respect, and say the schools are guilty of not doing their job. It's very simple to blame the teacher, blame the education system, and not look for the reasons why. You'd think they (parents) would work more with their kids, but they don't. They say they have too little time. That's inexcusable." [35]

> "Schools are there to prepare you for life, and I work toward this goal. Some might think we are able to correct the mistakes of society. This is not realistic or fair to anyone; not to me, to the parents, and least of all to the children." [36]

These feelings of conflict between parents and teachers are not felt only by the twelve teachers in this study and do not seem to be restricted only to eastern Germany. The summer issue

[35] Gesamtschule teacher number 1, Interview on 4 November 1998.
[36] Gymnasium teacher number 3, Interview on 24 September 1998.

of the German Teachers' Union magazine published a special section devoted to different expectations and lack of communication. There were several editorials and articles, written by educators and by parents with interesting titles such as: "Suddenly we are the Bad Guys," or "Expectations from all Sides." The most provocative piece was written by an education expert who recalled his son's first day at school: "Parents and Teachers - Natural Enemies?" [37] Perhaps a closer examination of these "special" problems in eastern Germany would also be of interest to the western Germans?

Teachers' Relations with Pupils

Psychologists, sociologists, education experts, and the man on the street will be able to argue for many years to come about how the *Wende* affected the way people interact with each other. The teachers in this study, however, were very clear and articulate about what they thought has changed about the children in their schools. Although the teachers had slightly different answers to questions on their relations with the adults (colleagues and parents) in their profession, they were unanimous in their comments on what was going on with the children.

It was in covering this part of my questionnaire that I had the strongest feeling of listening to the same response in 12 different interviews. My questions centered on what has changed in student-teacher relations in the past ten years and where differences come from. Are all changes purely a result of the new school system or the *Wende*? As the teachers here see it, the children are very different today, and the differences are a result of the social upheaval that came with the *Wende* and unification.

Of course, most children in today's classrooms were not there before the *Wende*. It is only

[37] Erziehung und Wissenschaft, Zeitschrift der Bildungsgewerkschaft GEW. 7-8, 1999, pages 2-15.

the upper grade levels where pupils may have memories of their experiences in GDR elementary schools. Today's eighth graders were still in kindergarten when the Wall came down, so the children in schools now are a different generation. They can't recall what "things used to be like" ten years ago because they did not experience it. They have heard their parents' tales, but can really have no real conception of what life in a divided Germany was like. For them, the GDR is as far away as my own grandmother's stories of a one-room schoolhouse or my mother's poodle skirts are for me.

But, to hear the teachers talk, the differences in relationships between learners and teachers are not due to a new school system or to teachers - they rest with the children and the world they are growing up in now. "Children can't listen anymore," or "they don't know how to concentrate" were common complaints.

One reason for this, nearly all agreed, was television. Eleven of the twelve teachers criticized the amount of television and types of programs children watch today - and the only teacher who did not mention it has no television at her home. In the GDR there was only one state channel. People did have access to a few of the western stations, but there was not the flood of cable and satellite choices there is nowadays. Children in east Germany, according to the teachers, spent more time listening to the radio or records, doing sports or hobbies, or reading books.

Half of the teachers in this study also teach German, and they have all noticed a decline in the children's language skills in their native tongue. The younger pupils, grades five to seven, are having troubles writing essays of more than a few sentences of coherent thought:

> "They can't speak their own language anymore, they can't sit still, nothing seems to penetrate their heads. You know, learning is not always easy and fun, and sometimes it is

work. They aren't willing to work. They spend their time watching all this TV, and they don't read in their own language anymore." [38]

Older pupils are not producing the same quality of work as their predecessors did. One of the *Gesamtschule* teachers who works exclusively with seventh to tenth graders noted that this may also be due to the instruction and evaluation methods used:

"They do less reading in German now and are loosing the skills they need to communicate. These texts followed by true/false questions are all receptive comprehension. There is no active production or criticism going on. They don't have to interact with the text, so they don't." [39]

One of the questions I asked on pupils' motivation levels to learn English was dismissed by the teachers as being simply irrelevant. Back in 1991 or 1992 there was a mild surge forward as kids were tempted by the possibility of student exchanges or transcribing Michael Jackson lyrics in class. Back then, they told me, such a question might have been justified. Today, though, reality has set in and English is just a normal subject which everyone is required to take. It would make more sense, the teachers told me, to ask about the pupils' motivation to learn in general, which was low.

For many kids, especially at the *Haupt- und Realschule*, there really is no obvious reason to exert themselves at their studies. Good grades do not automatically guarantee an apprenticeship, so why bother? School graduates with good report cards, marks of one and two, are on waiting lists for training programs, so it is understandable that a child who is now making

[38] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 3, Interview on 9 September 1998.
[39] Gesamtschule teacher number 1, Interview on 4 November 1998.

low threes and fours is unwilling to spend more time working at school. Even if he managed to pull himself up to a solid three, his chances are still low. And even if he did get an apprenticeship in the field he wants, there is no reason to think he will have a job when he finishes. Pupils at the *Gymnasium* are more motivated, and the teachers there report that their learners seem to be more energetic. But often the goal is to get a high mark rather than true comprehension of the material or challenging themselves to do more.

Teachers are fighting an uphill battle, which cannot be won with pleas of learning for the sake of learning itself. The one teacher who is also serving as the principal of her *Haupt- und Realschule* and elementary school regrets this loss:

> "This whole thing that we hear about, how to teach in a more modern way, and that children need to have *Freude am Lernen* (joy of learning) has led them to think that learning is bad.... Our children have learned how to protest when we push them, and now teachers are lowering their expectations in order to avoid conflict. Many people don't realize that the average exam results are continually going down, even though the exams themselves are getting easier." [40]

Another teacher, working at Rostock's prestigious Goethe *Gymnasium*, summed up the results of the political and social changes on today's learners:

> "Freedom also allows people to work less, or not to work at all, if they chose. This option is now there, but people also know the consequences. Some people are afraid to take responsibility for their own work." [41]

[40] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 1, Interview on 10 September 1998.
[41] Gymnasium teacher number 4, Interview on 5 October 1998.

Are There Any "People Problems"?

People in eastern Germany are still, ten years after the protest marches and opening of the Wall, going through a period of change and adjustment. They will probably continue to do so for years to come. Teachers, who work with people, need to be sensitive to these changes. In order for them to do their jobs well and for them to feel good about the work they do, it is necessary that they get along well with the people they work with. The twelve teachers in this study are also still going through a period of change themselves, which in turn also influences their dealings with people around them. They all enjoy their work and the contact they have with people, and they had years of experience to look back on, which offers support and guidance.

The period of adjustment and change is not over yet: teachers and the school systems they work in are still settling into the new routine and adjusting to the new structures, which puts pressure on the people working there. The new school system has not yet been fully internalized by those who work in it, and this will take more time. Parents are going through changes in their personal and professional lives, which in turn influence their dealings with their children and the way they are preparing their children for adulthood. And the pupils, children who never attended a GDR school, are being educated by adults who are still in a state of flux.

As an American, I often wonder how people in my own home culture and society would have dealt with something as big and tumultuous as the *Wende*. Would we see an increase in street riots and mass shootings? Or how the western Germans would behave if they had been the ones "adopted" by the east? Despite the problems and some of the frustrations the teachers mentioned, they seem to be doing very well. I marvel at their calmness and the way they are able to accept things which their training and work experience never prepared them for. Is there actually a longing for the "good old days" before the *Wende* changed everyone? Hard to say.

In terms of relationships with colleagues, some teachers miss the close interaction and cozy or positive "dependence" they had on one another. The teachers have had to find and will have to find other ways of fostering cooperation. In terms of their relationships with parents of their pupils, the teachers are still looking for alternatives to what they knew before. The teachers who have the easiest time of it are those who still actively seek out parental input, hoping to engage parents in the education process, and who are not disappointed too much when there is no participation forthcoming.

In terms of teachers' relationships with the learners, it is difficult to say what will happen. Luckily all these teachers enjoy their work and love working with children. This was one of the reasons they chose to go into education, as will be discussed in the next section, and it is one of the reasons they are still there now. They often see pupils today as being less motivated, or motivated for the wrong reasons, and this discourages them. On the other hand, the "problems" they describe as coming with TV, the seeming disappearance of parental attention, and the lack of later job perspectives for young people are not unique to eastern Germany. They may seem overwhelming because the changes have come about at such a fast rate, but they are not unusual. It seems that time will show what can be done, both here and elsewhere.

CHAPTER 5

THE TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS TO ENGLISH

Teachers in and around Rostock today are doing a slightly different job than they did ten years ago. The new school structure and enormous changes in society have made them re-evaluate and sometimes change the way they work. The profession of "teacher" is, at least in their minds, not necessarily better or worse than what it was ten years ago, but it is different now. For teachers of the subject English, the *Wende* brought changes which were more far-reaching. I have already mentioned how accessibility to teaching materials and authentic language was difficult before unification, and how English teachers often had to work harder than teachers of other subjects, both in terms of scheduling and in access to teaching materials. Today the school subject English is a "main" subject and it is now recognized as a skill children must acquire. It is the first foreign language offered and it is a standard requirement of all school pupils. Thus, English has a higher priority in schools and those who teach it are in higher demand. Indeed, there are often not enough teachers of English to cover all classes in our area.

The changes brought on by German unification go beyond the idea of status and new demand, though. These changes reach into the private lives of English teachers as well. English teachers are not only working with a language which is seen differently by society now, but they work with a language which may have taken on a new place in their own lives. English, and the teaching of the English language, is not merely a way of earning a living for most of these women. In the interviews it came across pretty clearly that they see themselves not only as

teachers, but also at least partly as *Anglisten*, people schooled in the language, literature, culture, and values of a culture different than their own. They enjoy speaking English, reading books or magazines in English, and using the language outside of the classroom as well. These women, although they might hesitate to label themselves as bilingual or "fluent" in English, certainly see the language as something other than an academic subject with which they earn their paychecks. They teach a subject which, for them, is also a hobby, passion, or fun pastime.

Becoming a Teacher

In order to determine how these teachers' own relationship to the language has changed, I thought it would be useful to examine first their reasons for becoming English teachers in the first place, and why they chose to teach English instead of something else.

For many, the decision to teach at the school level was easy and natural. Most of them recalled their desire to work with children as a guiding reason to become teachers. Of the twelve, three of them came from families where a parent or another close relative had been a school teacher. The rest of them remembered how they had been inspired by excellent teachers when they went to school. Reflecting on their time at school as pupils, they recalled how they had been "good" pupils, earning high marks and praise, which is a significant part of the reason they were allowed to go to university and become teachers themselves. Ten of twelve of them reported having the full support of teachers and parents as they were making their choices to attend university and what subjects they wanted to study. Five of them remembered how they had played "school" when they were young, and how they had always wanted to act the teacher role.

In terms of choosing English over other subjects, their responses were more varied. All but three of them had always been "good" at language learning themselves, and reported that they had been taught by dedicated and talented language teachers when they were children. Learning

English had been "fun" or "easy" and their success motivated them to do more. Four of them confessed to being real "English freaks" who were simply in love with the language itself. Studying English was a way to pursue their favorite subject, and being a teacher was secondary. Most open spots for English studies at GDR universities were reserved for future teachers. Therefore, most university students enrolled as English majors were automatically teachers in training. One woman remembered how she would have loved to have been an interpreter or professional translator, listening to and speaking English all day long, but she didn't feel her language skills and political connections would have been good enough to land her a university spot for this. She "settled" for teaching instead, which allowed her to study the language she loved and also work with children. Another woman always knew English was fun and important to her, but she had decided to study medicine. By some freak chance she missed the enrollment deadline for medical school and decided to fill in the time by starting to study English. She never went back to medical school and told me she no longer wastes time wondering about what might have been, as teaching is her true calling now.

For two of these teachers, English was a decided second or third choice. All teachers in Germany (both east and west) were, and still are, trained in two separate subjects. At some universities, scheduling and administrative restrictions limit the combination possibilities, forcing people to settle for something less than their two favorite subjects. One woman had planned to study Slavic languages and literature, but was told that they didn't need Slavic experts and linguistic researchers that year; they needed Russian teachers. By deciding to study Russian for a teaching degree, she was then basically required to combine it with English, as no other combinations were offered the semester she enrolled. One of the twelve teachers had not ever planned to study English at all. She had already been working as a lower certified German/Russian teacher for over 15 years when she was offered the chance to move up to a

higher certification level by adding on a third subject. So, approaching 40 years of age, she returned to university and extended her teaching degree with a new language, long before others did so after the *Wende*.

Teachers as "*Anglisten*"

What was interesting for me was that even these two teachers who said that teaching English was not their top career choice said that they still view English as an important part of their lives. My assumption was that the "English freaks" would be more dedicated to their work, while the teachers who had come to English as a second or third choice, or who had stumbled into it by default, would be less enthusiastic about their work. Based on the responses these twelve teachers gave me, this is not true. They all reported enjoying English as a language to teach and to use away from work. Perhaps it was the fact that they were speaking to me, an American, which tinged their answers toward the positive?

English teachers in the GDR were denied the opportunity to form a close "bond" with the language they taught. Future teachers of Russian were nearly always required to spend a semester or academic year in the USSR, which often resulted in long-lasting friendships with native speakers, and sometimes even in marriages with one of those native speakers. English teachers in training had to settle for an annual language weekend near Berlin with one or two invited native speakers who led special seminars for the groups. This is not to say that many of them did not have ties to British or Americans before the *Wende*, but these were not supported by the state nor given the same encouragement as ties to Russia. Often, it must be said, pen pals or summer visitors from England brought more problems and state repercussions for the teacher than benefits.

This is a fact which is easy to forget when looking at language teachers today. Now there

are teacher exchange programs and plenty of opportunities to travel or invite guests to visit. University students studying to become English teachers have almost always been to England or the United States even before they start their first semester of studies. When I was teaching at the university here we actually put a fair amount of pressure on students to go abroad. But in the GDR such opportunities were unheard of for students and teachers of English. It seems absurd that English teachers in East Germany were never allowed to hear or practice the language in a non-classroom or university-arranged situation. It is amazing that their language skills are so good, given the severe restrictions they were under.

For those teachers who did not have the private connections with native speakers or suppliers of original magazines or picture postcards, such a lack often brought about feelings of inadequacy or injustice. They never had the chance to improve their English outside of standard university classes and extended education seminars, so they feel as if they are lacking in something because of reasons which were beyond their control. No matter how hard they worked at improving their spoken English and expanding their vocabulary range, they would never gain the fluency and control over the language which west German teachers had. It would be unusual, perhaps unheard of, for an English teacher trained in the FRG not to have spent a certain amount of time in an English-speaking country. For teachers trained in the GDR, such a chance was granted to one in hundreds. They had all seen pictures of Big Ben and the World Trade Center, but were teaching the language of countries they had never experienced first hand.

The opening of the Wall changed this. All of the teachers in this study have made at least one private trip abroad or accompanied their pupils on exchange visits to Sweden, Poland, or Denmark, where English was used as the common language. Many of them have made connections with other teachers of English in these countries or have hosted exchange students in their homes. They watch CNN, NBC, and Sky News on cable TV and they subscribe to English-

language magazines. They are, it seems, making up for lost time with a vengeance. What is sad, is that many of them - especially the nine teachers who are forty years old or older - see these opportunities as coming too late for them. They are *"Anglisten,"* and they are enjoying the chance to expand their knowledge of English, but somehow see themselves as being too old to learn the language with the same control and fluency as a young person. This is not to say that they are not enjoying the opportunities they now have, but they regret that it could not have all come about a few years earlier.

Confidence in Their English Skills

The interview conversations and all other contact I had with these twelve teachers were done in German. I am sure one or two of them might have preferred to "practice" speaking English with me, but I deliberately kept the language to German. There were two reasons for this. The first was that I was interested in their honest and candid answers to questions which were not simple or trivial, and I did not want anything to be clouded or altered by going through a linguistic transformation. The second reason, perhaps more important, was that eastern Germans on the whole are usually very insecure about their English skills. They feel that they are not as fluent or as elegant when speaking English as western Germans are, and for this reason they tend to clam up in shame. For teachers of English, this burden is even heavier. They are expected, as teachers, to know everything and to be masters of their subject matter; and in the classroom with children they usually are in total control. But it could be embarrassing to speak English in a non-school situation where their language skills might turn out to be less than adequate. These feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence with the language are wide-spread among teachers of English in the former GDR, and they go beyond the simple language connections east Germans had or could not have. They probably come from a combination of factors and have their roots in

the two different cultures which developed in the separate German states after the war.

Although many people would like to deny it, there were not only two separate political states for those forty years, there were also two separate ways of rearing children and teaching acceptable behavior, and there were different mentalities which could be linked to each side. Remnants of this cultural and mental division did not disappear overnight, and it is unlikely that they will ever fully be erased in the minds of those Germans who experienced the division. Now, ten years after the tearing down of the Wall, people still speak of "the wall in our heads" and quietly stereotype people from the other side. The east Germans are seen as complainers who cannot think for themselves or act without guidance, who expect the west to feed them with money and correct all the ills of the past regime while they sit there passively looking on. The west Germans are seen as money-hungry sharks, pushy and arrogant, just out to make a fast mark. The press and "nice" society avoid such expressions, but the normal man on the street still speaks of "mecker-Ossis" and "besser-Wessis" (complaining easterners and know-it-all westerners).

Another snide expression runs: "Der Ossi schweigt und stellt sich dumm. Der Wessi macht es anders 'rum" (the easterner is silent and pretends to be dumb, the westerner does things the other way around). While this can be seen as another unfair jibe at the stereotypical west German, it does reflect some of the values people on both sides were raised with. In the FRG, like in most parts of the United States, children are taught to speak up and defend their position, to be confident, to meet new situations with their heads held high, and to come out swinging. In the GDR, children were encouraged to think of the group, to be more restrained, and to discourage excessive braggarts and egoistic behavior. It would be wrong to say that the east Germans never learned how to assert themselves and that the GDR was an egalitarian society, fully devoid of competition. It would also be wrong to think that all west Germans were masters of assertive behavior and only out to win. But the differences were there and they had a large part

of their start in daycare and schools, where children were preparing themselves for the outside world.

Now, in order to succeed in this new life, the stereotypical quiet *Ossi* must learn how to assert himself and blow his own horn. Children in their final years of school have had to become adept at writing effective cover letters and designing an eye-catching curriculum vitae so they have a chance at landing a job. Adults in the job market, or trying to gain access to the market, have learned the art of self-presentation and that it is not necessarily a bad thing to put themselves in a positive light. Again, it is the people in the east who must adapt and catch up with those in the west. It is the western style which is important and valued, and it is up to the east Germans to learn this and to change. This process has, in my opinion, gone very fast. In certain areas of public life, such as marketing, it is nearly impossible to tell the difference between a salesman who grew up in the east and one who was raised in the west. The learning process is finished, the necessary skills have either been intentionally learned or acquired out of necessity.

Quite a few of the teachers in this study commented on how these differences made them feel less-than competent in their work following unification. The west German teacher trainers and guides who came over in 1991 to help teachers in the east adjust to the new system were professional, outspoken, upbeat, and confident. They tried, for the most part, to reach out to their colleagues in the east and to help prepare them for the changes to come. Looking back, the teachers in this study recall their reactions to this "help" as it was offered to them:

> "We had a weekly course with some Herr Doktor from Hamburg. It was sponsored by the state institute for schools and he showed us these new books from the Cornelson publishing house and I had to look things up all over again in new books, which were organized differently than ours were, so that took longer. There was nothing new, it was just structured in a different way. He was nice and supportive, but it took me a while to

realize that they weren't giving me anything. You know the expression, they just cook with plain water themselves? That was it? I was expecting more, especially because he was so dynamic." [42]

"She had a nice suit on, really chic. Not a hair out of place, you know? I really am sure she wanted to help us feel more comfortable with exams and the workbooks. But I didn't feel comfortable. I keep wondering if she dressed like that when she went into school in the morning.... She was one of those superwomen who didn't talk about making mistakes or what to do if something went wrong with an exercise, because she never makes mistakes, and in her classrooms, nothing ever went wrong. I am not superwoman, and I know I could never be like her, no matter how many training sessions of hers I went to." [43]

Clothing, self-assured style in front of a group, and a confidence in dealing with fancy new teaching materials are things many eastern teachers have since learned to imitate, but back in 1990 these subtle differences were enough to put a distance between trainers and teachers. This distance often resulted in the messages being tuned out or rejected, or in the teachers feeling despair at being able to catch up. One the other hand, many teachers were able to look beyond the presentation and rejected the messages because they felt the content was lacking:

"...he had all these fancy names for new activities and classroom games. It was so polished and colorful in the books, so it looked interesting. And you know what? I had done every single one of them before in my classroom, just using different names for them. There was nothing new or magic he showed me." [44]

[42] Gymnasium teacher number 1, Interview on 14 September 1998.
[43] Gymnasium teacher number 6, Interview on 5 November 1998.
[44] Gesamtschule teacher number 1, Interview on 4 November 1998.

Often, what had been advertised as the cure-all to a classroom issue was something they had already known for themselves. The presentation and packaging of these teaching ideas, as colorful as it seemed at first, turned out to be "more smoke than fire" in the end. The eight teachers who commented on this said that this realization eventually helped to raise their level of confidence. They knew, after seeing some of these presentations, that they were not as far behind as they had feared.

This idea of new terminology for the same methodology came up in most interviews. The teachers had been generally satisfied with their teacher training at university and they reported a fairly high level of self-confidence in how to teach English to children. Although some of them said that their pedagogy and methodology training had taught them how to "preach" rules instead of teach pupils how to speak, most of them agreed that they had been trained to be effective classroom teachers, and that they were past the pitfalls beginning teachers face. (Remember, each of the teachers in this group had an average of more than 24 years of classroom experience.) Their problems, or insecurities, did not rest in how to present material or proceed from one step to the next when in front of a classroom, yet this was a large part of most post-*Wende* continuing education programs.

> "There's a flood of material to chose from and people telling you how to teach with it,....but I was more worried about speaking English with other people, either native speakers or non-native, I felt inhibited. So I forced myself to learn a few new vocabulary words each day as a start. That sort of helped me feel more confident." [45]

Perhaps, instead of investing so much energy in showing these experienced English teachers how

[45] Gesamtschule teacher number 2, Interview on 4 November 1998.

to teach English and run a classroom, the publishers and state education boards could have helped them find ways to practice and strengthen their language skills or made it more affordable for them to travel abroad. These teachers I spoke with are slowly gaining confidence in their languages skills, but they are doing it on their own, without the support of textbook writers or education officials.

The Task of Teaching English

The teachers in this study, like educators everywhere in the world, had no clear-cut group opinion on today's textbooks and what is important in a language learning book or program. They all agreed that GDR education materials were constructed differently and that, due to centralized education, there was more teaching according to the textbook before the *Wende*. But they were divided on what they liked and disliked about the new textbooks. Several of them criticized the glossy colors, saying they thought it a pity that children had to be lured into looking at the books with "cheap tricks," while other teachers praised the illustrations and photos for "bringing life" into the language classroom. A few of the younger colleagues mentioned that they can no longer imagine teaching without the videos and posters, or even use of CD-ROMs and Internet, offered by the larger publishing houses. Other teachers scorned such fun and games and said it was all too distracting for young learners, and it only added to the media mayhem children face everywhere now.

Nearly all of them had at least one comment on the adjustment they had gone through when facing new teaching materials and new exams. Several of them were frustrated at having to reorganize their plans and could not appreciate the new structures of the textbooks. For years the passive had been introduced in the same way at the same grade level with the same examples. Now the new books were bringing it in earlier but without an explanation, and the children were

confused. The teachers also did not have the benefit of knowing which vocabulary words learners would have at a specific stage of their schooling. Cornelsen books lead learners to a different set of knowledge than Klett books do, so pupils switching schools could not automatically always join in the group without finding themselves ahead or behind on some points. (This is true not only for English, but also for other school subjects which use new textbooks.)

So, although access to and recognition of the language they love is better now, teaching this language has not necessarily become any easier. And, although they welcome the flexibility they have in running their classrooms, they often mourn the loss of the stable central teaching plan which guided their work. On the whole, though, the teachers were in agreement that the importance of the English language has grown and this, in turn, has helped make their job as teachers easier. A unified Germany means that their pupils are going to be living in a unified Europe, making English a lingua franca and cross-cultural awareness more important.

The question now comes up as to which form this importance takes. Some of the teachers, especially those teaching at the *Haupt- und Realschule* level, hesitated to state that English, or any specific subject matter, was of vital importance for life after school. In their eyes, English is part of a well-rounded curriculum but it is hardly necessary for pupils to speak it fluently or master more than basic grammar.

> "You see a few of these kids and know that they will have happy and productive lives being very good hairdressers or car mechanics, and that's fine, too. If they just take the basics and leave school with passing marks, they will do well in life. English and reading Shakespeare are no pre-requisites for where they want to go, so it makes no sense to force a form which they don't need." [46]

[46] Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 3, Interview on 8 September 1998.

Other teachers, especially the ones who are at *Gymnasium* schools, point out that each child has favorite subject areas where he or she can excel, and that English is not always one of the top on the list. In contrast to other school systems, the *Gymnasium* is supposed to be preparing academically stronger pupils for a different kind of future. University graduates and business managers will need more than "just the basics" and the teachers want to make sure they meet the strict criteria of the final *Abitur* exam. For these pupils, the importance of the subject English is different; more traditional in the classroom sense and more wide-reaching after graduation.

All teachers agreed, which came as no real surprise, that teaching the subject English at school is different than using English themselves outside of school. The level of most classroom instruction is far below what they used when studying the language at university, and is often miles away from what they experience on exchange programs and holiday trips. This is frustrating for some of them because, although they are dedicated teachers, they can see their language skills "deteriorating" the more time they spend in the classroom. There is not always time for them to adequately pursue their "hobby" of English and still do service to their "job" of English.

This confused me, until we looked more closely at their daily and yearly schedules. It takes time and energy to teach 27 and more hours per week. Class sizes were large in the GDR and still are today. The school population at grade levels five and higher has not yet been reduced by the demographic changes which hit east Germany after the *Wende*, and marking homework and exams for a class of 30 or more pupils takes time. Unlike in the USA, Germany does not have a volunteer mentality for public schools, so there are no classroom aids or senior citizen "partners" to help out with the workload. Also different from the American system is the fact that teachers do not have their own classrooms. In the breaks between classes, the pupils stay seated and the teachers move from room to room, carting their books and materials, cassette recorders, record

and attendance books, and sometimes even basic necessities such as chalk with them.

Summer break is only about 6 weeks, leaving the teachers little time to pursue their own interests. The idea of "never being finished," a common teacher lament in most societies, usually drives them to sit down with a grammar teaching book during the holidays rather than reading an English-language novel or writing to pen pals. Although they are motivated to do more to develop their language skills, going above and beyond normal school level, this would be time taken away from the classroom.

For the twelve teachers I spoke with, any time taken from the classroom is somewhat wasted time. I do not know if this was an especially dedicated group or if this is representative of all teachers in our area, but I found no evidence of a "nine-to-five" mentality. There were no jokes made about getting paid whether the kids learn or not, there was no talk of "filling" class time with play work sheets or games which did not lend themselves to learning. These twelve teachers take their work seriously. They like English, they like the children they work with, and they all had a desire to see the two - English and the pupils - unite and work together.

CHAPTER 6

IN CLOSING

Teaching English in Germany's public schools is a demanding and sometimes draining job, emotionally and physically. It is also, as working with children in almost any educational setting can be, both challenging and rewarding. The teachers in this study are no different than teachers of biology or history, or than all other teachers in west Germany, in that they have an important job to do and they are carrying out their duties contentiously and creatively. What makes them different is the past they share and the changes they have witnessed during the course of their productive working years.

Education systems change over time to reflect new needs and interests of a society. Power relationships and emotional ties to learners, parents, and school members can reflect these changes and be altered as well. Finally, no normal teacher of any subject is ever fully a master of his or her field and is able to proceed without doubts and second thoughts. Yet the scope and intensity of changes these teachers of English have gone through over the past ten years is unique. They saw the move from a socialist education system (which they themselves had known as children) to a western one; they were forced to measure themselves and prove themselves worthy of teaching in this new system. Today's teachers in west Germany have not had to go through this same process, and teachers in other "reformed" eastern bloc nations of Europe did not have an immediate "big brother" with which they were unified seemingly overnight. It is amazing what these teachers have gone through and how they have adjusted so well. I respect the

difficulty of the rocky road they have been down so far and can also see that there is still a way to go before the "*Wende*" is truly over. Perhaps, for these teachers, it never will be. They are working in a new system with new rules. Although they have adjusted well and are doing just fine, there will always be a memory and trace of influence from the old system. After all, they experienced the old system not only as teachers, but as pupils as well.

In terms of their changing relations with the people around them, I think educators in the west would do well to pay more attention to what is going on here. All too often problems with parents and pupils are dismissed as "eastern" problems which will work themselves out over time and with the new generations. But if a western observer is willing to look closely, he or she is sure to find aspects here which are not all that different from his or her own system. Americans and west Germans should not be so quick to detach themselves from what is being talked about here.

As far as the teachers' relation to English, it truly pleases me that these women have the opportunity to travel and take full advantage of all resources around them now. Knowing some of the restrictions and frustrations of the past, I am happy that they now have new chances. I only hope that they use them and enjoy them without regret for what "might have been" had the *Wende* come earlier, and without wasting time on more feelings of inadequacy.

I would like to thank these twelve women for taking the time to talk with me and for the hospitality they showed. I also want to express my admiration for their mastering what was an unprecedented and difficult process and to wish them all the best for their futures.

APPENDIX

A: The Questionnaire used in Individual Interviews with the Twelve Teachers

I. Information about you

1. Name, age, city/town you live in; are you married? Do you have any children?
2. Where you now teach/type of school (Haupt-, Real-, Gymnasium, other)?
3. Which subjects other than English? Are you also a homeroom teacher?
4. How many children are in a typical size classroom at your school?
5. How long have you been teaching English? Always at this type of school?
6. Did you have any other jobs before becoming a teacher?
7. Where did you do your studies and practical training/student teaching?

II. Your teaching day

1. How many hours a week do you work? How many of these are in the school building, how many at home or other venues?
2. How much of your time (in hours or percentage of work time) do you spend on the following (indicate for separately English and for other subjects if necessary):

   Classroom teaching:

   Preparation:

   Evaluating, correcting papers:

Meeting with parents:

Administrative work:

Conferences, meetings:

Continuing education:

Other (please specify):

III. Becoming a teacher/teaching pre-Wende

1. How did you get into teaching?
2. Why did you chose English as one of your subjects (or were you offered a choice)? What were your other subjects at university?
3. What were your expectations of being an English teacher? What was different about the job that you didn't expect?
4. Do you think your education and practical training prepared you well to be a teacher?
5. What did you like and dislike about teaching English in regard to:
   a) the language: what was good about being able to speak and teach English? Was being an English teacher the same as being a teacher for Russian, Spanish, mathematics, etc.? What was bad or negative about it?
   b) the people: what was positive or negative in your relationship with your students? With their parents? With other teachers at your school, with other English teachers? With the administration (your principal/director, education officials)?
   c) the school system: what aspects of the GDR education system made your job satisfying, fun, or enjoyable? What made teaching difficult? What made teaching English difficult?

IV. Your job during the Wende

1) Did you expect any changes in your job with regard to working hours? Pay? Job security? Social status or public recognition? Your own professional development?
2) What about teaching English were you looking forward to after the "Wende" and unification?
3) Were there any things you were particularly worried about or were not looking forward to?
4) Can you describe the atmosphere in your school 1989-1990?
5) Can you describe the atmosphere in your school 1990-1991?

V. Your job post-Wende

1) Since then, what changes (if any) have you observed in:
   a) Student motivation to learn English? To learn in other subjects? To attend school in general?
   b) Parent-teacher relationships?
   c) English language teaching materials and outside resources?
   d) Your school's administration?
   e) Your style of teaching?
   f) Your ability to speak English?
2) How is being a teacher different today? Are all of these differences a result of the "Wende" or are there other reasons involved?
3) What about being a teacher in the post-"Wende" period has been hardest for you to adjust to? Why? What disappointed you most? Why?

4) What has helped you most? Why? What is the most positive aspect the "Wende" had on being a teacher? On being a teacher of English?

5) What are the most positive and most negative changes you have seen in yourself as an English teacher?

VI. Your job today and tomorrow

1) Have you traveled to Britain or another English-speaking country? Do you plan to? Did/do you go alone or travel with family/friends/colleagues? With your students? Why do/did you go?

2) How would you describe contacts/relationships with your colleagues? Your Direktor? With English teachers at other schools?

3) Who do you talk with about success or problems in your work? Where do you look for support/understanding?

4) In which areas/realms do you feel you can make changes, make decisions? In which areas do you not have this feeling?

5) How happy are you with your job? How happy do you think others are?

6) How long will you continue to teach?

7) There has been a lot of public discussion recently about the education system – your reaction? Which ideas do you agree with, which do you reject?

B: Background Information on the Twelve Teachers in this Study:

REFERENCE TO TEACHER IN FOOTNOTES	TYPE OF SCHOOL/ LOCATION	AGE	YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE (HOW MANY ENGLISH)	OTHER SUBJECTS	DATE AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW
Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 1	Haupt- und Realschule with an elementary school/small village on the outskirts of Rostock	48	26 years (26)	Music, Biology, History, Mathematics (also at the elementary school level)	Thurs., 10 Sept. 1998, 4:00 p.m.; her home
Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 2	Haupt- und Realschule/ small town	50	27 years (27)	Russian, Social Studies	Tues., 06 Oct. 1998, 3:00 p.m.; her home
Haupt- und Realschule teacher number 3	Haupt- und Realschule/ small town	59	35 years (26)	German, Russian	Wed., 09 Sept. 1998, 5:00 p.m.; her home
Gesamtschule teacher number 1	Gesamtschule/ in Rostock	50	27 years (27)	Russian (hasn't taught it since 1992)	Wed., 04 Nov. 1998, 1:45 p.m.; at school
Gesamtschule teacher number 2	Gesamtschule/ in Rostock	57	33 years (33)	German	Wed., 04 Nov. 1998, 11:30 a.m.; at school
Gesamtschule teacher number 3	"Free School" (a new type of Gesamtschule/in Rostock which identifies itself with new forms of education)	35	12 years (12) (taught university level for a few years in between)	German, Art	Tues., 08 Sept. 1998, 3:00 p.m.; café

REFERENCE TO TEACHER IN FOOTNOTES	TYPE OF SCHOOL/ LOCATION	AGE	YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE (HOW MANY ENGLISH)	OTHER SUBJECTS	DATE AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW
Gymnasium teacher number 1	Gymnasium/ large town near Rostock	35	10 years (10)	Russian, Theater	Mon., 14 Sept. 1998, 1:45 p.m.; at school
Gymnasium teacher number 2	Gymnasium/ large town near Rostock	37	15 years (15)	German	Wed., 23 Sept. 1998, 2:00p.m.; at school
Gymnasium teacher number 3	Gymnasium/ in Rostock	49	26 years (26)	Russian (doesn't teach anymore), Children' Philosophy (new subject)	Thurs., 24 Sept. 1998, 4:00 p.m.; her home
Gymnasium teacher number 4	Gymnasium/ in Rostock	53	30 years (30) (taught university level for several years in between)	Russian	Mon., 05 Oct. 1998, 3:00 p.m.; her home
Gymnasium teacher number 5	Gymnasium/ town 60 miles away from Rostock	53	30 years (30)	German (hasn't taught it for 26 years)	Fri., 09 Oct. 1998, 3:00 p.m.; her home
Gymnasium teacher number 6	Gymnasium/ near Rostock	45	22 years (22)	Russian (still teaching some)	Thurs., 05 Nov. 1998, 5:00 p.m.; her home

C: Common German Terms used in this Paper

Abitur: the highest diploma level a secondary school graduate can obtain. Similar to the Baccalauréat in France or the A-levels in Britain.

alte Länder: the federal states of the FRG, the region of what used to be West Germany.

Anglist/Anglisten: a person who has studied the English language, literature, and history and culture of countries where English is spoken.

Bildungsgewerkschaft GEW: the largest teachers' union in Germany.

Cornelson: one of the leading western German publishers of school textbooks. See also "Klett".

Direktor: the principal or head of a school.

Ellbogengesellschaft: a "society of elbows". A term describing how one has to be hard and ruthless to get ahead in life, using your elbows to push other people out of your way.

Elternbeirat/Elternaktiven: parent-teacher councils, associations and support groups.

EOS (Erweitete Oberschule): an extension of the POS with grades through 12 leading to the German Abitur.

Freude am Lernen: the "joy of learning".

FRG: Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany.

fünf neue Länder: the "five new states" of the former GDR which joined the FRG on 3 October 1990, the area which used to be East Germany.

GDR: German Democratic Republic, or East Germany.

Gesamtschule: a fourth kind of school in the three-tiered system which seeks to combine the Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium.

Goethe Gymnasium: one of Rostock's most prestigious schools, located in the city center.

Grundgesetz: the constitutional law of West Germany, now the constitution of unified Germany.

Gymnasium: the equivalent of a university preparatory high school for gifted, talented, or academically able pupils. Leads to the Abitur at the end of grade 12 or 13.

Hauptschule: the lowest school form of the three-tiered education system. Characterized by smaller classes, slower curriculum plans, and a grades 5 to 9 span.

Herr Doktor: a man with a doctoral title, someone who has done a Ph.D.

Hort: a type of day care center for school children in grades 1-4. They supervise the elementary school children from the end of classes into the afternoon, around 4:00 p.m.

Klassenfahrt: the "class trip". It usually lasts several days and the teacher and pupils travel to a new setting. There are no regular courses, but free time activities and hikes are planned.

Klett: one of the leading western German publishers of school textbooks. See also "Cornelson".

Lehrerpersonalkonzept: the plans of the state government to cut back on the number of school teachers if the need arises without having to fire anyone. The teachers agree to work part-time, taking a salary cut which corresponds to the number of hours they do not teach.

Mecklenburg-Vorpommen: the north-easternmost federal state in Germany. It is the most sparsely populated and has a high rate of unemployment and poverty. Its largest city is Rostock (population ca. 220,000), the capital city is Schwerin (population ca. 100,000).

Ossi: a degrading term referring to east Germans.

POS (Polytechnische Oberschule): a comprehensive school consisting of grades 5-10 in the GDR

Realschule: the middle or average school form of the three-tiered education system. Standard curriculum plans geared to the "normal" pupil and a grades 5 to 10 span.

Stasi: the secret state police of the GDR. Responsible for reporting on activities of East Germans who were suspected of anti-socialist ideas or actions.

Trabant: the standard East German cars. They were expensive, small, and rather unreliable.

verbundene Haupt- und Realschule: a school consisting of both a Hauptschule and a Realschule.

Volkshochschule: a community college offering evening classes, extended education, languages, crafts and other activities primarily to adults. The fees are subsidized by the government and the courses are also offered in rural areas. This type of school existed in both East and West Germany and continues to flourish in Germany following unification.

Wende: a "turning" or "bend". The term is used to describe the political and social changes particular to Germany, which started in late summer of 1989 and ended with the unification of Germany in October 1990. The period after unification is also called "post-Wende".

Wessi: a degrading term referring to west Germans.

Wilhelm-Pieck: the first president of the GDR. The University of Rostock bore his name for many years in East Germany, but dropped the name shortly after unification.

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