



Prof. Dr. Petra Stanat leads the Institute for Educational Quality Improvement at the Humboldt University of Berlin and she is a Fulbright alumna.

## Diversity in education

We interviewed Petra Stanat about some of the educational challenges facing us today. Dr. Petra Stanat spent the 1992/93 academic year studying psychology on a Fulbright at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. During her time in the U.S., she was struck by both the high quality of education students received as well as the way in which diversity was treated within the educational system. Today, she leads the Institute for Educational Quality Improvement (IQB) at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

### What kind of support do teachers need to meet the complex challenges posed by diversity, inclusion and integration?

The student body is becoming more and more diverse. If, as a teacher, I want to provide the best support I can to my students, I need to be aware of where each and every one is in their learning journey. Teachers need better training than that which they are being offered. We also need to adopt a greater awareness of cultural diversity, as well as the skills with which to deal with it effectively. What this means is appreciating and accepting differences while not letting them dominate the conversation. This is not to say that conflicts should be swept under the rug. Ultimately, we're teaching individuals and not group representatives. Getting the balance right is a big challenge, and that's where teachers really need support.

### What might that support look like?

I think the potential for conflict is being underplayed. Teachers should be prepared for the fact that dealing with diversity can be difficult. One thing that helps is having a strong school culture

in place where differences are valued and there's an atmosphere of respect. Everybody needs to participate. Providing support shouldn't fall to individual teachers but to teaching institutions as a whole, which is why school leadership plays a crucial role.

### Do you think having a more internationally-minded teacher training system would help better prepare educators for the range of tasks their jobs involve?

Everyone would benefit from living or studying abroad, but I'd be particularly keen to see more teachers stepping out of their comfort zones. Many leave school and start teacher training straight away, and when they've finished, they return to school as teachers. International experiences allow us to question assumptions and the things we take for granted, which in turn strengthens self-reflection—something that's essential for teachers. Why do we do things in a certain way? Is our teaching in line with the most up-to-date pedagogical theories? This way of thinking about teaching practices can be reinforced by gaining insights into a different educational system.

### What could we learn from schools in the U.S. in terms of cultural diversity in the education system?

Diversity is a matter of course in the U.S. In Germany, on the other hand, we long refused the idea of being an immigration country. While we're turning things around, we're still not as open as we could be. This can be seen, for example, in such vital areas as language support: with English as a second language, the U.S. have provided systematic language acquisition for a long time. That's definitely one aspect in which the German education system could do better.

**The phrase »equal opportunity« comes to mind. For years, Fulbright Germany has been advocating for more young**



Fulbright Germany's seminar program »Diversity and Integration in the Classroom« takes German teacher students to Lincoln, Nebraska, where they learn about the implementation of educational policies in the US school system.

### academics with a migration background to study abroad. In your opinion, which barriers are yet to be overcome?

Students with migration backgrounds are underrepresented in German universities. The fact that they're also less likely to study abroad, however, isn't necessarily linked to their migration background; it could also have socioeconomic reasons. I come from a working-class family, and my parents couldn't afford to send me abroad. My Fulbright grant helped, but as it was a partial scholarship, it didn't cover all the costs. Funding the rest was a big challenge. Especially for people from families who can't necessarily afford international travel, the long-term benefits of going abroad should be made accessible with even more funding.

### On a personal note, are there any experiences you had as a Fulbright scholar in Amherst that left a particularly deep impression?

There were two things in particular I took away with me: first, there were the classes, which were both inspiring and efficient. I ended up learning a lot in a short amount of time and enjoying the whole process. Secondly, I was so impressed by the fact that having a diverse student body was a given. I remember sitting with friends from Amherst one night and looking around at our group. There was me—a German—a computer scientist from India, an artist couple from Massachusetts and a literary scholar from Puerto Rico. I remember thinking how homogenous my group of friends in Berlin was in comparison.

For the German version of this interview, download **Fulbright Germany's annual report 2017/18** at [www.fulbright.de](http://www.fulbright.de)