

RENE KOGLBAUER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Rosie Goldsmith:

Rene Koglbauer is a passionate and highly respected teacher.

He has taught at schools and universities all over Europe – in Germany, Austria, England, Russia, Slovakia and Hungary.

Today he's a university lecturer and education academic at Newcastle University. And as a champion of language learning in the UK, he works closely with key language bodies round the country and abroad.

Rene was born in Austria in 1977, attended Vienna then Keele Universities, studied education and languages and moved to England in 1999, so is ideally placed to contrast and evaluate education systems in Germany and Britain and how they compare with the rest of Europe.

Rene, in the decade and a half since you've lived here in the UK what have been the main changes in education?

Rene Koglbauer:

I think there have been a lot of changes, but one of the key changes, I think, is the kind of variety of schools, types of schools that have now been established, such as free schools, academies, the academy movement, and various different academy movements from different governments. There is more and more disparate system in the sense of: there is a Welsh system and there is an English system.

Rosie Goldsmith:

Let's look at English education system, what's good, what's bad?

Rene Koglbauer:

The one element that I am really concerned is the amount of change and also the question of: are we giving ourselves enough time to actually embed the changes in our system? Is it enough to basically say: if we bring an initiative, we give ourselves a year's time and at the end of the year we will basically tick it off and move over to the next initiative? We know from research that, we would say, an initiative is embedded in the system if it has been developed over seven years. So therefore sometimes the question is: if the government makes a change, have we got enough time to embed it and to evaluate it. But there are certain schools that have not got this flexibility, because they are under much more scrutiny than other schools. Outstanding schools will be less under scrutiny than possibly schools that have to improve. And I think that was for me something completely new – that schools are judged and that they are ranked according to their performance. I couldn't tell you in the last 4 to 5 years in Austria and Germany any kind of school ranking or how good a school is. I think that is a completely different approach to education therefore, because that is also coming into parental choice.

Rosie Goldsmith:

We were talking about what's good and bad in English education system. Have you got any more points...?

Rene Koglbauer:

I think I'd like to raise a few positive points, and for me it's the pastoral system...

Rosie Goldsmith:

...the pastoral system?

Rene Koglbauer:

Yes, it's basically that lots of schools, all schools have got form tutors, head of years – so there is an additional structure that German and Austrian schools don't have. The time every morning, the joined assemblies with year group, and this feeling of being part of a group, being supported, having some support in the school, I think is a very positive aspect of the English system.

Rosie Goldsmith:

Any other positives?

Rene Koglbauer:

I'm always asked by people when they travel in German-speaking countries: what would you introduce if you came back? And one element immediately I would be introducing would be drama as a subject.

Rosie Goldsmith: Drama?**Rene Koglbauer:**

Yes, I think drama gives the students an additional skill, not just to cope and go through the education system and through schooling in terms of presentation skills, in terms of thinking about how they come across when they talk to people, but also in terms of their future job opportunities. I think they would be better at interviews, I think they would be thinking much more strategically how they are going to be presenting themselves in different situations. So that's an element that I'd like to see German and Austrian schools to adopt into their – kind of – key curriculum.

Rosie Goldsmith:

There seem to have been a lot of complaints about too much learning by rote, too much chalk and talk...is that what you see?

Rene Koglbauer:

I think we need to be slightly careful when we are talking about pen and paper and all those elements... I think over the last ten years, I think, schools have put an enormous amount of money towards technology. And I completely endorse that. I think if you compare it to some German and Austrian schools, they always when they come over, are quite jealous about how many projectors, how many whiteboards we have got in classrooms.

But the question is for me, have we actually developed pedagogy around how are we going to work with those new technological devices? I've recently been invited by a head-teacher who was really proud of having given all his classes iPads and wanted to show off his innovation. But the only thing that happened was that all the resources that pupils would normally have as textbooks or hand-outs were basically uploaded on their iPads? Is that what the technology devices should be for? Or could we actually use it for much more creative stuff?

Rosie Goldsmith:

You have free schools, academies, private schools...is this good for education, in this country?

Rene Koglbauer:

I mean, one argument could be that having all these new types of schools emerging that therefore there is much more parental choice, but I do agree with you in terms of the kind of a question of, if there is parental choice, how much choice also have head-teachers of the new types of schools of actually taking certain types of students and not taking certain types of students. We had at the beginning of academy movement...there were number of stories about head-teachers who very quickly got rid of badly behaved students. And the question is where would they be ending up in the system? We do have still a high proportion of children, particularly after 14, who are not in education or training. And I think when we look at Germany, when we look at Austria, these are the key elements where Austria and Germany have really

shown stability and therefore have also ensured that those students who might not be as academic are set up for a secure and prosperous future.

Rosie Goldsmith:

Education is always a political football. Do you think there is too much political interference?

Rene Koglbauer:

Yes. I think one of the reasons I moved from Austria in the beginning was because there is quite a lot of political involvement in Austria, in terms of, I'll just give you one example. If you want to be appointed as a head-teacher, you have to be linked to a political party. Otherwise you won't have a chance to become a head-teacher. I think this party-political influence is – from my perspective – dangerous and not helpful. I'm not saying there shouldn't be very clear visionary ideas about education in politics, but I see it much more as a kind of societal challenge. I personally think it is not a surprise that Finland has been seen in the last five years as one of the leading systems in Europe. Because they approached school improvement and school system improvement considerably differently. When they realised the crisis in the 1960s they said: OK, we need to tackle that, but not within one government, we need to see it as a societal challenge. And they've now, 40-45 years later, become the top system within Europe. Sometimes we are working, partly because of this culture of inspecting schools, failing schools, wanting them to improve within the year and what is happening is a lot of quick fixes. And the big question is: how sustainable are those quick fixes?

Rosie Goldsmith:

If you think back to the classrooms you taught in, there you are walking into a classroom, what is a 'good' English classroom, what makes this classroom special for you?

Rene Koglbauer:

I think there is a fundamental difference between the relationship of teachers in German-speaking countries and in England. And I think it has to do with the fact that the German and Austrian teachers are given the end grade. They decide, through their final year grade, whether a child is moving on or having to repeat a year. In the English system I've always found that there is somehow this relationship of this "we are working together to get you through this exam".

Rosie Goldsmith:

Would you call an English classroom a relatively happy place, jolly?

Rene Koglbauer:

I think English schools work on a very strict, disciplinary model. So you would find concepts such as three warnings, then a conduct card, which leads to possibly a letter to the parents or a phone call to the parents or detentions, even to the elements of daily exclusions, fixed terms exclusions or permanent exclusions...something that I was completely surprised by, because it doesn't exist in the German or Austrian system.

Rosie Goldsmith:

How have you been accepted by the English education system? As a foreigner?

Rene Koglbauer:

I think I've been accepted, I've been welcomed in all the schools that I worked at, I've been accepted and not ignored when it came to promotions.

Rosie Goldsmith:

You have done very well, actually. You have been promoted a lot!

Rene Koglbauer:

I think that is a credit to this system.

Rosie Goldsmith:

Language learning. This is an area very close to your heart, very close to my heart. Language learning was no longer compulsory after the year 2003 - 2004 in this country. Should there be compulsory language learning? And how are we recovering from this deficit?

Rene Koglbauer:

I'm not sure that we are really recovering. And there are number of reasons for that. I think one of the reasons why we might struggle for some years is because now these student cohorts that were not made to do a language at the GCSE level are coming through to universities. So therefore the numbers at universities that study languages are reduced. Therefore if we've got less language graduates coming out, we are going to have less potential teachers in the future.

Rosie Goldsmith:

So the detrimental effects of that policy are happening now?

Rene Koglbauer:

They are happening now. Also that is going to threaten, I think, one of the other initiatives the new government is trying to bring in, and that is making languages compulsory from 2014 in primary schools. Because if we haven't got primary teachers coming through with language skills, how will they be able to teach their children?

Rosie Goldsmith:

Is there enough international exchange between schools? And are we learning enough from each other?

Rene Koglbauer:

There have been initiatives over the last ten years, where it has been made quite difficult in certain schools to actually get out and for teachers to organise trips abroad. And I think that is something we need to be really, really thinking very carefully about, because if we really want our students or our own learners in Britain to be European citizens, global citizens, we need to ensure that they get the experience of going abroad. In my experience, at the school I've been working at, the German exchanges have been running for over 35 years now and it's still going with the same school and the partnership and the exchange between teachers about their pedagogy, their approach to learning is as vital as the kind of experience that learners have, whether in Germany or over here.

Rosie Goldsmith:

Rene, you've lived and worked here for quite a few years now...do you think you're going to stay or will you go back?

Rene Koglbauer:

There have been once or twice in my career moments when I was thinking of moving back, but I think the decision has been made that I will be staying.

Rosie Goldsmith:

And why?

Rene Koglbauer:

In the last few years I focused much more on the leadership element and also leadership for learning. And I think one of the very interesting elements that England has developed over the years is the system to actually train middle leaders, senior leaders, head-teachers, which I think is one of the kind of strongest

element within Europe in terms of the quality of training head-teachers. For me the exciting element now is: we've done it for over 10-15 years, what is the impact? And for me personally I want to see what impact is not just on the school, but also in the classroom and the learning? What is happening in the English classroom because of head-teachers' decisions? So, for the moment, I'm definitely going to stay!

Rosie Goldsmith:

Rene Koglbauer, thank you very much indeed.

Rene Koglbauer:

Thank you so much.