



International Network for School Social Work

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The Organization of School Social Work (*Schulsozialarbeit*) in Germany

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Education in Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany consists of 16 federal states (*Länder*) and has a population of about 81 million inhabitants. The education system is divided into early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing education. According to the principle of federalism of the basic law (*Grundgesetz*), the states are responsible to form and implement educational policy (cultural sovereignty - *Kulturhoheit*). Parents can choose to send their child to early childhood education (*frühkindliche Bildung*). Free and compulsory schooling begins at the age of six, when children start primary school (*Grundschule*) to learn basic knowledge and skills. Children with special educational needs attend a special school (*Förderschule*), although there is a move toward an inclusive educational model. There are different types of special schools, which focus on vision, hearing, speech, learning, emotional and social development, mental development, physical and motor development and instruction for sick children. The children then move on to lower secondary school, which may be a *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Gymnasium*, *Förderschule* or a combination type of school until they have completed compulsory education of either 9 or 10 years (depending on the state). The type of school attended is decided in consultation between the parents and the school. Upper secondary school is full-time general education (*Gymnasium*), vocational school (*Berufsschule*) or part-time *Berufsschulpflicht*. Tertiary education includes institutions of higher education, e.g. universities (*Universitäten*) or universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). Private organisations or folk high schools (*Volkshochschulen*), offer continuing education.

Child and Youth Welfare (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*)

In contrast to the educational system, which is formed and implemented by the federal states, the Child and Youth Welfare Services are organised by counties or cities that are independent of counties to fulfil the requirements of the Child and Youth Services Social Code, which include cooperating with schools and school authorities.

Nation-wide Diversity of School Social Work

School social work is the most intensive form of cooperation between Child and Youth Welfare and the school system. However, different terms are used to describe this collaboration in

the different states. Besides the commonly used title *Schulsozialarbeit* (school social work), there are various terms being used to describe the cooperation between the two systems. Thus, for example, the term “youth social work at schools” is used in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Berlin, “social work at schools” in Brandenburg and *Schoolworker* in Saarland.

School social work in Germany is characterized by different approaches and forms of cooperation and derives from §11 SGB VIII (youth work) or §13 SGB VIII (youth social work). These titles sound similar, but the roles have different functions. As a result, there is a nation-wide debate about whether school social work is responsible for all children (youth work) or only for socially disadvantaged children and those with individual problems (youth social work).

School social workers are employed by public or private providers of Child and Youth Welfare Services or by school authorities. The provider has a significant influence on the role and the working conditions of school social workers. Those who are employed by school authorities are subjected to the school hierarchy, where the headmaster of the school provides supervision (*Dienst- und Fachaufsicht*). Although school social worker and school personnel have to work together to ensure the best possible services for children, in reality conflicts often occur due to different understandings of roles, a lack of knowledge about the other profession, boundary crossings by school personnel or matters of professional discretion. This can lead to problems when the headmaster is also the school social worker’s supervisor. In order to provide professional social work supervision and independence it is usually considered preferable to employ school social workers via providers of Youth Welfare Services.

School Social Work Practice

School social workers are aware of how societal changes affect children and young people. They are easily accessible through their presence at the school. They use classic social work methods to help children who need support to succeed in school, in educational and vocational training, and in their ultimate integration into the labor market and society. They apply methods such as individual casework, crisis intervention, family work and social group work. Parents can contact the professionals if they are worried about their child or have questions concerning the children’s upbringing. Social group work includes a broad range of activities that aim for an improvement of social competencies, self-confidence and conflict management. Furthermore, school social workers refer children and their relatives to specialized social agencies.

Child Protection

In addition to their role in providing help for school-related problems, they have a mandate for involvement in child protection (*Schutzauftrag*). They must deal with child neglect (e.g. bad hygienic living conditions, inadequate clothing in winter), sexual abuse (e.g. inappropriate sexual knowledge for their age), physical maltreatment (e.g. injuries that cannot be plausibly explained) and psychological maltreatment. If they have credible information that the welfare of a child is in danger they have to assess the risk in cooperation with specialist personnel. This part of the school social work role can also lead to complications in the relationship between social worker and school and social worker and family.

More information

School social work is a rising field of work for social workers in Germany and more jobs are yet to come. Since this article is just a short introduction to the topic of how school social work is organized in Germany, you can contact me for more information at Kathrin_Bach@web.de