

PREVENTION OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING
REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION

Interviews in Germany

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INTERVIEW with the deputy head master of the Special School Emotional and Social Development in Cologne: H. Saueressig-Hahn

INTERVIEW OUTCOME

There are no drop outs because of the fact that everyone who leaves that school before finishing compulsory education will be given over to another school so no one will get lost from the school system. Since it is a special school with special conditions and concepts for the prevention of drop out, the situation is better than in other school in the region.

The drop out rates are documented once a year.

There is a close contact between teachers, pupils and parents and a direct reaction towards truancy (telephone call at the same day).

The most common reasons for truancy is from her point of view the lacking support from the parents, personal problems like psychological disturbances or drug addiction as well as the inability of the regular school system to reply to those problems adequately. She is convinced that our school system plays an important role with regard to the drop out rate because it tends to push problematic pupils "downwards".

By intensive conversations of the teachers pupils at risk are identified early.

This school tries to combat school dropout by special projects, practical trainings, focussing behavior orientied alternatives, and a close companionship by social educators and social workers. They also try to support the pupils individually according to their problem and learning behaviour.

As very important she points out the psychological hygiene of the colleagues, team supervision and further education. The evaluation of the activities and strategies carried out by one to one and group interviews with colleagues as well as the monthly check of the actual state of the pupils.

At the moment they are applying for grants from the Ministry of School and Further Education and the Agency for Work in order to implement new ideas (f.e., cooperation with partners in industry).

As one other relevant project she names the "Rather Modell" in Düsseldorf

(<http://www.rather-modell.de/>).

The school is very effective in getting drop outs back to school and getting a degree. Very important are the behaviour oriented projects, the cooperation between all colleagues as well as the promotion of personal competences, the stabilization of personality, and the development of perspectives for the pupils. It is a long process to win the confidence of pupils without motivation and illusion by continuous support, help and reliability.

INTERVIEW with a public education authority:

Sabine Franz (School Psychological Service of the Education Authority for Darmstadt-Dieburg and Darmstadt)

(Carried out by Margit Simon, KOMMM Beratungsstelle, CJD Darmstadt.)

INTERVIEW OUTCOME

The School Psychological Service has no systematic information about the truancy rate because schools do not always report every single case.

Ms Franz names the following main reasons for school drop out:

- Pupils who have given up school as learning environment because of bad achievement;
- Pupils who don't come to school because of psychological impairments;
- Pupils who don't have enough support from their family with regard to work techniques and behaviour strategies for a successful school attendance.

There is no systematic strategy to identify pupils at risk. They do counselling with schools in need and work on the development of changing strategies.

The School Psychological Service is planning a symposium in cooperation with children's clinics to inform schools about the subject.

They do not have information about local, national, or European differences in school drop out rates.

Local organisations supporting pupils to stay in school / go back to school:

- KOMM Beratungsstelle, CJD
- School social work
- Youth welfare
- Special classes
- Further education and training for teachers offered by the Education Authority

**SUMMARY of an interview with a public education authority:
Mr. Ritter (Head of the supervisory school authority Lower Saxony)**
(Carried out by Gertrud Plasse, school psychologist, Hannover.)

INTERVIEW OUTCOME

- The school drop outs are being counted by the Ministry of Education and documented once a year. The statistics do not differentiate between kinds of school or regions.
- Approximately 1,5% of all pupils are estimated to play truant. There is no systematic documentation, though. Every school has her own system.
- A federal study about handling school absenteeism initiated by the Ministry of Education showed that schools often did not react to truancy. The practical consequences of the study are that schools are now instructed to react immediately to absenteeism and call the parents the same day and if necessary notify the municipal department for public order. Most schools participated at the study and since then the status quo regarding absenteeism could be improved. Many schools took over the dealing with absenteeism in their school program. Some schools closed contracts with the pupils, many schools developed prevention strategies (f.e., mediation, social learning).
- In case of drop out and the prevention of drop out, there are a few projects and cooperation partners in Hannover - f.e., Station Glashütte; Drop-out; projects of the German Youth Institute; school psychologists; youth psychological service; social community service; school social workers; special education teachers; KIK; Buddy-project; qualifying programs for pupils: "Stärken stärken" ("Strengthening Strengths"); establishment of networks promoting pupils with special competences that enable head masters to act more flexibly and individually leading to more humanity.
- The municipal prevention council discusses violence prevention and absenteeism regularly.
- Many pupils cannot meet the challenges of school. There is always a bundle of causes and no automatism. The most common reasons for dropping out are seen in over and under challenge, lacking self-worth (when teachers embarrass pupils and put them under pressure instead of promoting their strengths), delinquency, drug addiction, and peer groups that keep pupils away from school. Also parental failure, family crises or a migration background can play an important role.
- To meet the problem every school needs to get information about the pupils and talk to them and their parents constantly. In some schools a constant exchange between parents and teachers take place. Some schools carry out surveys to find out how the pupils are dealing with the situation at school. One warning signal is increasing failure and lower achievement. Another one is deviant behaviour in class. When teachers are alert and find out dramatic circumstances in the family (f.e. by visiting the family) they can support the pupil better. It helps when pupils have trust that they can go to a teacher with their sorrows. Talking is much more important than punishment.
- One problem for teachers is the lack of time. When a teacher is teaching six hours a day not much time is left for the exchange with parents. Also they need further education, f.e. with regard to conversation strategies because this is not part of their educational training.
- In order to prevent school drop out, pupils must be supported; school must have a pupil promotion concept that is promoted by the staff; every pupil must become responsible for his own learning and therefore needs adequate learning strategies; schools must transport to the students why it is necessary and makes sense to learn and what learning is good and important for; schools are responsible for pupils to get a wide knowledge base on which they can specialize later on.
- Strategies to reduce the drop out rate are special promotion concepts, reducing the number of pupils in class, passionate teachers with a variety of learning strategies.
- One central problem is the lack of being competent in German language. Pupils who have problems here will have problems in any other area. The Ministry of Education started quite a few initiatives to combat this problem.
- A further project is the promotion of the quality of education. A lot can be done and is being done to qualify teachers with regard to methods and contents in order to take off pressure from pupils and work on the relationship between teachers and pupils (f.e. by supervision or further education in school).
- The Ministry of Education is planning a wider range of changes to improve the school system (f.e. purging the curriculum; leadership of staff and classes; motivation; further education of head masters).
- One big problem is the shortening of the secondary education from 13 to 12 years. Teachers are afraid they will have even less time for the individual person which causes stress.
- Very important is furthermore the subject "burnout" in teachers. For various reasons, an increasing number of teachers is not able to deal with the stressful school life adequately, developing psychosomatic distress and diseases. Many of them do not reach retirement age healthy. Many of them are under stress and practically waiting for retirement. The reasons: Some of them became

teachers “without heart”. Some of them expect too much from themselves and their pupils. Some of them are not qualified enough. It would be useful to talk openly to students who do not seem to be eligible very early in the seminars. This is difficult, though, because the quality of the educational training is questioned thereby. An elaborated concept of further education should be developed not only for the different subjects but also in developmental psychology, leadership etc. There is much to be done. In Lower Saxony there is not even an obligation for teachers to get involved in further education.

Links and literature referred to within the interview:

http://cdl.niedersachsen.de/blob/images/C1538970_L20.pdf
<http://www.awo-hannover.de/awo-site/kin/4.php>
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