

How School Psychology can Help the School-System and thus Societal Transformation

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Our task and challenge: "Meeting Individual and Community Needs!" - What can our science and professional experience contribute to education in nowadays rapidly changing society? Here a look from the perspective of a practitioner, over viewing more than 25 years of work in the German School System, also relying on some own experience from research and teaching in less developed countries and enriched by exchange with colleagues from many parts of the world, thanks to our dedicated Professional Association of International School Psychology (ISPA)¹. The recently published handbooks of German² and International School Psychology³, over viewing more than 50 years development of our profession, allow to make some conclusions on basic principles, influential structural conditions, directions and examples of good practice. From this perspective some fundamental challenges for the contribution of our profession to societal change are discussed.

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Last summer the International Psychology Association (ISPA), held its annual Colloquium in Finland, the country praised for the excellence of its educational system, its outstanding results in achievement and social behaviour and its well developed school psychology. The theme of our conference was: "*Meeting individual and community needs*" - with this message our Finish colleagues named and explained their success: "care for quality of education" and "let no child behind". The role of school psychologists in the words of the Colloquium Organiser: "help the teacher ... meet all the children's basic needs of safety and belonging ...help headmasters cope with their teachers to create a safe and friendly school for all, where learning and social and emotional needs are fully answered ... enable each child to feel he/she has a place in his/her particular class, school, community

and world."

So, "*Meeting individual and community needs*", *the key to success in education!* - We all know the hydra-headed blessings of modernity, globalisation, consumption, exploitation ... With Jerome Bruner⁴ in mind "*Human psychology must be meaning-making*", I agree, that this must be *the way to societal transformation: "Help create a learning environment, where all can participate and needs of all are dealt with in a responsible way."*

50 Years of Counselling Individuals and Schools in Germany

In Germany after World War II parents, social services, teachers were searching for psychological help: the first *child guidance centres* were established. At the same time *training in psychology* developed and also became part of teacher training programmes

and schools started to demand more support from psychology. School psychologists focused mainly on one of 2 approaches (1) problems of individuals by applying clinical psychology or (2) problems of teaching, managing classrooms, tackling youth problems by using different specifics of psychology. Organisational psychology was not yet well developed. In 1970 the *request for support*, the growing group of professionals, their increasing influence on educational politics, finally recommendations from UNESCO resulted in the *political decision* to establish countrywide, school-psychological services in state responsibility. The declared target was to gradually raise the ratio of school psychologist per student towards 1/10,000 and of counselling teachers to 1/500. Concrete actions followed up to about a half-way realisation, until at least every district had one school psychologist.

Luckily we were two in our large district with nearly 200 schools, 45 000 students and responsibility for a quantity of tasks to be fulfilled on the state level. - In my state were about 40 districts with 80 colleagues, who had a diploma in general psychology plus several years of practice. We had specialists with different psychotherapeutic training. Thanks to an excellent promoter on the ministerial level, a psychologist and former head of a special school, we were allowed to build a network and cooperate state-wide and bring our experience together. This was an optimal use of resources and an excellent chance for professional development. We developed training-programs for counselling-teachers, tutors, headmasters, administrators, school-teams. We often worked in multi-professional teams. Our themes were: organisation development, motivating women for leadership, mental health, prevention, school climate etc.

Teaching, training, working with groups became my major activity also on the *local level* - pure economy in our large area.

Besides I was engaged in some long-term-research: We had whole-school-projects to prevent failure among students at risk; we were running pilot classes on inclusive education and we took part in the development of a 4-year-mental-health-education-program for primary school-children and their parents. But as my knowledge derives mainly from psychological counselling of individuals, my focus is the well-being of the individual child, so I want to bring in some case examples.

Beginnings: When I started with my profession, the predominant expectation of teachers was to send students, to have them cured. The third day in my office: an upset father with his wife dropped in, sent by the teacher, with their 7-year-old boy, blaming his hyper-activity, his inability to concentrate on homework, his disobedience and poor achievement. I didn't use tests, but observed him doing his homework in my office. I saw: he was nervous to not make mistakes and he was afraid that his handwriting would be criticised by the teacher. The writing was fairly good, in spite of a crippled arm. When he visited me a second time, to show what he liked to do after school, he brought a box, scissors, glue and in half an hour of highest concentration, kneeling, drawing overhead, he built a puppet-theatre into the box. A puppet-performance on this stage at the family's next visit greatly helped me to open parent-child-communication towards tolerating his fears and giving chance to his creativity and to advise a better homework-procedure. Two more hours were necessary to observe in class and win the teacher's support, stopping her to create fear of failure in her class. Two later evaluative contacts showed that the life of this boy had changed completely. Accidentally I met him, 12 years later, climbing a high leader to repair the electricity in my office. The teacher's pushing competition, caused conflicts with other parents several times later, she still had to

work on it. - *Fear of failure, fed by the tendency of schools to punish mistakes, is one of the main barriers for teachers to seek support from psychologists.*

Developments. - Just as I sit, writing this paper, one of my former teachers is calling me. She reports about a 10-year-old-boy, who blames her having beaten him. It looks like a show, he gave to divert from the fact, that he violated the rule to not use a mobile in class. We discuss probable motives, her feelings, his feelings and ways to deal with the conflict, the role of his mother, classmates, tutor, headmaster, and the actual lesson. My next thought: Some years ago, we were running a project on social behaviour for all newcomers of this school. Should it be repeated, also to support the new unassertive headmaster? - In this case the teacher is seeking support, it shows, how the expectations on school psychology have changed. But also the type of problem changed - in the 70th a 10-year-old wouldn't have behaved like that. Be aware: counselling in school does not necessarily find a change-motivated subject. To get this boy to cooperate is the challenge. - *To me the task in school- counselling is: Look for the strengths of the person, identify barriers to use them and give support to combine inner resources with reality in cooperative and constructive ways.*

A systemic perspective in counselling students and teachers aims at the improvement of the institution for the benefit of all. Counselling a group or whole school or its environment can be a challenging hard work, more still conflict-management, coaching or organisation development. - It is always a highlight, when school teams decide on whole-school training. Whereas formerly schools would have asked for a lecture f. ex. on "students' aggressiveness", today the agreement on a theme or problem of relevance may be the first step into a change process with targets like "ways to improve

school" or "strengthen co-operation and respect". Such training may include casework, role-play, and changing inefficient habits, sometimes students and parents participate. - One day the headmaster of a big high school asked me to lead a training with all tutors of the school entrance classes - no lecturing, but looking at everyday realities and problems, students, disappointments, ideals. This later was developed to become a state-wide training-program for tutors, called "communication, interaction, cooperation". It is offered since to 100 teachers yearly. Here a research-summary⁵ showing the importance of our main target school climate: (1) "school climate" has a strong positive influence on achievement, motivation, school-contentment, self-concept and the reduction of anxiety, stress and misbehaviour. (2) The major stress for teachers is their relationship with students, which tends to become worse across school-life. (3) Many teachers have poor awareness and capability to influence social factors in education. - *What a misery and what a challenge for teachers and psychologists: the ultimate task is, to open ways for creative social development of our educational system.*

International School Psychology

ISPA published last year the "Handbook of International School Psychology", with reports on school psychology from 44 countries. It's a resourceful survey, usable like a strategic cook-book. - I'll bring in this knowledge-base, concentrating on 5 of its topics together with my own experience from International Colloquia and from teaching, visiting and exchanging with colleagues from quite a few other countries - in order to look at our profession, conditions of its development and its contribution to societal transformation.

1. Context promoting or hindering the development of our profession:

Clearly: most favourable is a *highly developed, legally mandated education system*, guaranteeing education for all and caring for special needs, but also the availability of good health services.

- Decisive are on the *political level* efficient structures like a qualified board or commission of education that responds to needs and cares for improvement of public institutions by allocating finances, supporting research and specialists, who help establish standards for education and prepare legislation and the implementation of support services.

- Challenging are *demographic characteristics*: size and heterogeneity of country and population - like multicultural, multilingual settings, imbalance in infrastructure, high speed of urbanisation, chaotic political situation.

- One of the most limiting factors is a weak economy without long-term planning.

2. Needs and motives that create impulses for the development of School Psychology:

In early 20th century psychologists, responding to different needs and demands from the educational field, developed mainly two approaches in offering their services:

- individual measurement-supported counselling and guidance and

- system-oriented support for schools and teachers.

Certainly the system-approach is more economical and change-oriented and a necessity, when resources are poor, but it's also a quality characteristic of a well-developed educational system to combine both approaches. Most developments are connected to one of these two, but some countries started or concentrated on priorities as below:

- measurement for school exams and

connected curriculum development,

- diagnosing and dealing with Special Education Needs,

- diagnosis, prevention and intervention in critical phases like school-entrance, early childhood, transition- and final examinations,

- vocational guidance and preparation for university,

- solve community problems, run programs of intercultural learning, crisis intervention,

- prevention and intervention of youth problems like addiction, criminality, suicide, AIDS ...

- supervision and coaching for personal, beginning teachers or headmasters.

3. Comment on Roles and Functions involved in delivering these services:

- The needs and possible answers are so many, that specialisation may be advisable. - Colleagues are often overburdened, as too many expectations cannot be fulfilled. Creating an infrastructure of teamwork, networking, good resource management integrating lay- and other services, use of mass-media, phone- and internet-counselling may reduce work-load and stress.

- Psychological work needs support systems like team-work and supervision, for in everyday-work colleagues are often confronted with heavy emotional load.

4. Professional Infrastructure, decisive for Development:

The following three are the stronghold of development, when cooperating by effectively:

- A *higher education institution* of well-trained, recognised professionals, who can provide relevant theory, research and technology to meet social needs and develop programs to prepare practitioners;

- Educated *practitioners*, who want to use their knowledge and serve the public;

- A *strong National Professional Association*: Many members give power, but more important are persons, capable of taking leadership and getting influence on educational policy. These are important goals: (1) provide exchange on good practice and quality of training; (2) develop concepts and establish standards, which can later be used for legalisation, that will establish the professional structure and allow employment; (3) develop statutes, a code of ethics for their services and build a credentialing and licensing system; (4) support cooperation with other professional groups and institutions, who have related goals, (5) edit journals, books, tests and other materials, (6) support professional and public events like conferences, (7) lobbyism and care for public relations.

- Support from *NGO's and other associations* - professional and welfare, also international ones - can be helpful, but need to be integrated carefully. - *ISPA* and some of its members gave decisive help in some countries by organising Colloquia, supporting research, giving advice and promoting exchange.

5. Impacts, and Challenges for school psychological Services:

Instead of giving a list of deficits - it would be long -, I'll follow the Handbook authors' *creative recommendation: Let us rely on our "inner resources", our professional knowledge and identity!* Here two of its summarising quotations: (1)"The initial and continued acceptance of psychology and school psychology depends, in part, on practitioners' ability to communicate their relevance in meeting important national needs." (The Editors, p. 506)

(2) "As soon as psychologists assume the role of improving social comprehension in schools and communities, school

psychologists' will be empowered to take responsibility in ensuring Children's Rights and to implement preventive models of interventions. Only then will some of the big challenges - consolidating the profession and transforming reality - be met." (Brazilian colleagues, p.34)

The authors' recommendations for the development of School Psychology: a broadening of traditional roles towards more consultative and preventive services; activities on all levels - institutional, regional and national; combining Western Psychology with concepts and knowledge from local culture; developing of awareness for student differences and taking responsibility for all, thereby responding to societal needs and problems.

Responding to societal problems - prerequisite for societal transformation

School psychologists can contribute and take a lead in societal change, if they take an active, conscious part in their reactions to societal needs. - Here some of the most urgent ones will be discussed:

Poverty - is creating so much misery and not only to those who are directly affected. - I took part in building-up an NGO on implementing Children's Rights in my country, our target is to create public awareness for children's poverty, open debates with politicians etc. We have a dense public social security-net, so children are not hungry or left without medical care or schooling, but it's a scandal that a high percentage of families with only one parent or with many children are underprivileged and excluded from full cultural participation, thereby creating a familial heritage of marginalisation for generations. - Poverty does not only mean "deficit on a material level" but in consciousness, it creates helplessness, loss of control and confidence. We have to care for both types of poverty. A child may lack means of learning, have poor

education before coming to main stream class, may be pre-occupied to care for their basic needs. All these disadvantages can be ameliorated. But special attention has to be given to a damaged self-concept and lack of self-acceptance, especially in a group of children with quite different experiences, when f. ex. some are using consumption or luxury articles to symbolize exclusiveness. - Schools that have a mixture of this students, need to care for targets that help to create identity apart from goals, that can only be reached by those, who have money or better previous education. - May the Voices of Nobel Prize (Amartya Sen, R. Pachauri, M. Yunus,) and Right Livelihood Award winners (P. K. Raveendran, Vandana Shiva) a.o. from your continent be heard, their examples spread to motivate colleagues. - Let's walk their talk: "Strive together for global responsibility", "no economy without justice", "protection of natural resources", "education for all" - these are goals that help to create meaning and identity and thus societal transformation.

"Training of intercultural competences" means prevention of conflicts and peace education in environments with cultural differences deriving from ethnicity, immigration, settlement, urbanisation and other factors. In some of our classes, we have a majority of children from non-German background. Our government realised only late (1) that these children and also their parents need language training and (2) that multicultural environments need planning for social integration. Psychological theories on communication, counselling, organisation and systems change a. o. deliver useful concepts and training-programs. They must be adapted to real situations, start from self-reflection and be embedded in a group or institutional process with the target to make all groups and individuals feel accepted and respected members. Building up school and class as a participative society, in which each person's voice is heard, and 'nobody left behind' is a helpful frame.

Gender-sensitive education needs awareness all around the world. - Germany: in early years girls outrange boys in achievement and adaptability. Adversely, the percentage of boys referred to a psychologist, running into behaviour problems or later becoming criminal is much higher. In spite of their success in education, you find fewer women in well-paid jobs and higher careers. - We have a law - like you - guaranteeing gender-equality, demanding representatives in all state institutions to work for it. But differences and discriminations are subtle. - Roles and expectations are learned at an early age and have their roots in traditions. The way to restructure them is, to become aware of differences, to do away with discriminations and unfair advantages and make decisions towards more justice. - Female discrimination world-wide is a violation of human rights, what a waste of human potential, what a poor concept of manliness! In words from UNESCO: education of females is the most rewarding investment for development.

Responsibility for Children that need special education or are at risk: Much of the basic knowledge on special needs and risks has been developed by specialists in our profession, but also by those responsible for special education, for daily care and healing. Two Rights of children with educational needs tend to be violated: 1) to get best quality special aid and (2) social inclusion - Our task may be to coordinate, bring need and aid together and keep a close look on reality! For what is thought of as special help, is sometimes causing segregation and what is thought of as inclusion, may cause damage, especially when in a highly competitive school system, children with learning difficulties are torn to fit to preset norms. I was grateful, that in our pilot classes, we were running in the 90th, the children to be included in main-stream classes, were mentally and not mildly learning

handicapped - so we had to adapt teaching and not children. - In Western countries the risks to fail or not complete their school career are highest for children from the fringe of society. Today in a high quality school means, teachers are regularly checking the learning and social-emotional situation of each child, devising and planning remedial interventions to prevent failure. - School psychology can provide high quality to this educational support.

Risks in our “modern” consumption and Media society! - We had to realise that modern life is connected with a loss of basic knowledge on environment and traditional ways of coping and production and that it creates risks like running away, addiction, excessive media-use a.o. Good schools create environments for active learning like school-farms, forest-learning-paths, historical sites, they plan actions to protect nature, cooperate with museums and cultural institutions, care for social learning, stimulate social responsibility, f. ex. by partnerships with social institutions or schools abroad. - I

close by referring to the “Credo” of my highly honoured teacher and supervisor, Dr. Erika Landau, Tel Aviv⁶, expert on promoting creativity in children: *“prepare for each learner - be it student, teacher, psychologist - to win an attitude of “what can I do” and get experience and encouragement to bring in intellect, fantasy and emotion on real life problems and social needs”.*

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