



Further Training for Clinic and Home School Teachers

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In Hamburg, sick children are taught by teachers from the “Schule für Haus- und Krankenhausunterricht” (HuK) either at home, in hospitals or in the schoolrooms in the central HuK location.

The individual areas covered by the HuK include home schooling and tuition in hospital in the paediatric and child and adolescent psychology units. The staff volume has increased steeply during the last few years and currently consists of 62 teachers covering 45.5 full-time positions. In addition to the above listed departments, an Autism advisory service is in the process of being established as a new area.

The various fields of activity entail extremely different working conditions:

- hospital teachers (child and adolescent psychiatric unit) who work in the four clinic schools at the child and adolescent psychiatric units and a social-paediatric centre. Within these settings, individual tuition is available in individual cases and/or at certain times, but lessons are for the most part conducted in groups: the structure of these groups can also differ widely. A single group can for example consist of pre-school children, primary school children and pupils of years 5 – 7 who also come from different school types (school for special needs, primary school, elementary and middle schools, comprehensive schools and grammar schools).
- hospital teachers (paediatric unit) teach at a variety of locations in five paediatric clinics in Hamburg and an emergency hospital with a variety of special areas (diseases of the locomotive organs, paraplegic patients, burn victims, dialysis and cancer patients, etc.). Here the children are for the most part taught individually. Hospital teachers must be able to adapt constantly to pupils' widely differing learning levels and also the substantially fluctuating learning capacity of their pupils. Numerous colleagues from the paediatric clinic school also teach patients at home in the afternoons.
- home school teachers who teach sick children at home or at a nearby location and therefore have close contact with the family. These pupils are for the most part taught individually. Home school teachers frequently have to cover the entire range of subjects: they also encounter widely fluctuating age groups, class levels and school types during the course of a single teaching day. Around two-thirds of pupils with psychological illnesses are now no longer taught at home, but in our own schoolrooms. Over and above normal lessons, a substantial amount of time is here devoted to so-called “case work” to permit re-integration in the pupil's home schools.



All teachers cultivate an intense contact to the regular schools of their pupils. There is also cooperation with the relevant doctors, therapists, supervisors, families of the pupil, regional advisory services and support groups (ReBUS), with other public authorities in Hamburg (youth welfare, employment office) and youth support services.

The teaching of children with serious, long-term chronic illnesses presents a completely different task from teaching in regular schools. Teachers of sick children are confronted with a wide spectrum of demands which go far beyond the “normal” aspects of teaching, for example:

- How can I teach sitting in the hospital ward if a child is confined to bed over a longer period of time?
- How can I make allowance for the weakness of a child suffering from cancer? How can I cope with the death of a pupil?
- How can I fulfil my teaching requirements in the case of pupils suffering from chronic illnesses such as rheumatism, asthma and diabetes?
- How can I motivate pupils suffering from depression or who have not attended school for months?
- How do I cope with pupils with emotional disorders who display aggressive and impulsive behaviour? How can I help them to return to reasonable behaviour within a class group?
- How do I prepare lesson material for pupils in a heterogenic group consisting of different ages, classes and school forms? How can I encourage individual pupils within mixed groups?

The above questions highlight the fact that teachers at special schools also have to fulfil a number of special functions. Alongside the naturally assumed acquirement of specialised subject knowledge, clinic teachers and home school teachers must also acquire knowledge of illnesses and their effects on the learning ability of affected pupils under their supervision. Only once the teacher has formed a detailed picture of the health and performance level of the pupil, is it possible to develop an appropriate manner of interaction with this sick pupil.

Here team cooperation and consultation with other persons involved with the pupil are also essential elements. This demands a high degree of flexibility which for home school teachers also entails the ready acceptance of constantly changing learning locations. In short, there are numerous reasons for the necessity on the part of teachers of sick children to adapt themselves extensively to individual working relationships with pupils, frequently in extreme teaching situations and unorthodox “classrooms”. One of the preparations for successful teaching is continuing advanced training focused on working conditions, as special teachers require special advanced training. To sum up, in the light of the above, particular reasons for special advanced training courses include:



- the differing special characteristics of the pupils and their situations
- tuition in widely heterogenic groups
- the broad spectrum of subjects, school forms and class levels
- special teaching forms (team teaching and working within a network)
- wide variety of teaching locations
- flexible teaching and working hours
- close cooperation with a large number of different professional groups

In the HuK, it became increasingly evident that the accomplishment of this type of teaching not only required expertise and didactic skills, but also support to enable the teachers to engage with particular pupils with enhanced conviction, sensitivity and resourcefulness while retaining a degree of flexibility. The mainstream courses offered by the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development in Hamburg only fulfilled the special criteria required by the teachers of sick children to a certain extent.

This prompted the head of the HuK, Ms Mona Meister, to develop a specialised advanced training concept for these teachers.

A working group “further training” was instigated in 2006 which has continued up to the present to plan and implement a widely varied series of training courses for their colleagues which harmonise with the broad spectrum of requirements and working methods of the clinic teachers and home school teachers in Hamburg. These supplementary courses had to be integrated into the already substantial timetables of these teachers (including regular conferences, team meetings and concept days); this has produced a conference structure at the HuK with the following form:

All members of teaching staff meet regularly (6 annual general conferences), and further sub-conferences are additionally held for home school teachers (ca. 9), teachers operating in child and adolescent psychiatric units (ca. 5) and clinic teachers (ca. 5). The colleagues of the clinic school additionally also hold regular meetings in their individual locations. Once a year, all teachers come together for a two-day concept conference held outside Hamburg. This form of close intercommunication provides numerous opportunities for integrating advanced training elements.

The following criteria should be considered in the selection and planning of advanced training courses:

- Suitable location and convenient timing. These training phases should entail a minimum of additional burdens for teaching staff. For this reason, it makes sense to utilise conference periods either centrally for all members of staff or at different locations for individual teams.
- Particularities of our pupils. Special training must focus on both the clinical pictures and also subject-related aspects and special educational requirements. Examples: effects of cancer therapy



on learning behaviour; pronounced abnormal behaviour.

- Special teaching forms, e.g. team teaching or working within networks also involving other professional groups. Here special forms of close consultation and professional exchanges of experience are essential.
- Knowledge of different subjects; numerous teachers have to teach a wide variety of subjects on different levels and for different school forms.
- Educational and special educational demands, e.g. knowledge of group dynamic processes, learning difficulties etc...

What is the actual content of advanced training sessions in the HuK? What programmes and events have been developed for the teachers during the past few years?

1. The advanced training group first of all provides information on special training courses generally available for teachers in Hamburg and nationwide congresses. The vital factor here is that individuals are spared the search through the wide spectrum of highly varied seminars on offer and are instead presented with a targeted selection of options. This includes courses offered by the "State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development" (abbreviation: LI. Seminars devoted to common school subjects and additionally interdisciplinary courses and special topics such as ADHS etc.).

The Hamburg Consultation Centre for Integration (BZI) offers suitable courses within the area of special educational needs (assessment of special needs and educational plans, special forms of team teaching). The Addiction Prevention Centre (SPZ) is an additional pillar in the advanced training landscape in Hamburg offering courses on media consumption, smoking etc, but also within the field of self-esteem stabilisation ("Fit and strong").

Teaching colleagues also frequently require advice concerning pupils who are in danger of dropping out of the normal educational system or have already done so. This task is undertaken by the School Information Centre (SIZ).

Major advanced training events include conferences on a variety of topics such as ADHS or truancy from school offered by the organisation SchuPs-Nord (school and psychiatry for the North German area) aimed at teachers in child and adolescent psychiatric units.

Finally, conferences offered by the organisation for special educational needs Verband Sonderpädagogik (vds), the German Child Protection League and the organisation HOPE (Hospital Organisation of Pedagogues in Europe) in Germany and also in Europe also deserve a mention



2. The group organises advanced training which takes place within the framework of teacher conferences involving the entire school staff. This includes for example: the utilisation of computers in lessons for pupils confined to hospital beds. The School Information Centre (SIZ) was invited to provide concepts for advice on the educational career of individual pupils.

3. Events devoted to special topics which take place within the framework of so-called partial conferences are also an important aspect of further training. Home school and hospital teachers for example visited the children's hospice "Sternenbrücke" and devoted themselves intensively to the issue "when a pupil dies". It is also vital to invite medical specialists to give lectures on particular illnesses: a gastro-enterologist for example gave a talk on the topic "chronic abdominal pain", a child and adolescent psychiatrist covered the subject "anxiety illnesses" and an oncologist discussed the physical effects of chemotherapy.

Cooperation with other professional groups is a further important factor for the teachers of sick children. For this reason, teachers also participate in advanced training courses for clinic staff, for example on the topic of "self-harming behaviour". The chief consultant of a child and psychiatric unit explained what criteria were decisive in establishing whether a pupil should be treated in hospital or in a day clinic and what factors influence the duration of treatment.

4. A minimum of one team session takes place per week within the clinic school teams. The colleagues discuss the pupils, lesson situations and tasks with which they have been most involved. This regular exchange of information provides relief for the teachers, and colleagues are able to make constructive suggestions to alleviate any problems which have cropped up.

5. Regular supervision is also offered: success in the mastering the wide variety of demands (interaction with seriously ill or dying pupils, the treatment of difficult pupils and their families etc.) frequently requires an external view of the problem. Teachers experiencing these types of extraordinary burdens have a right to receive supervision; all teachers and/or clinic school teams are able to request supervision which is carried out by members of the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development (LI).

In the clinics, teachers also participate with the staff of the child and psychiatric units in case supervision which provides them with an insight into the psychological development and social background of their pupils.

6. A further important aspect of advanced training in Hamburg is "advanced training among colleagues". Numerous clinic teachers and home school teachers possess specialised knowledge which has great significance for the other teaching staff members. Competence lists were compiled with the following information: which colleague possesses special knowledge in which field and can communicate this knowledge to his or her other colleagues. This enabled subject topics within the fields of Mathematics, Art,



English and Music and individual clinical pictures (Morbus Crohn, autism, ADHS, cancer etc.) to be offered. The teachers gave reports on their highly personal experiences during their work (experiences with children with cancer or pupils who were in the process of dying), were able to utilise their competences in advisory discussions and meetings and other possibilities to be offered included concrete lesson ideas such as fantasy journeys, massage for children and producing a newspaper with children. These talks and information are sometimes offered as brief units within a conference or adopted in the programme of our annual concept conference in Ratzeburg.

7. Once a year, all HuK colleagues meet up for a two-day concept conference beyond the confines of Hamburg. Our decentralised structure means that these conferences have proved to be an essential platform for exchange of experiences among colleagues and also for advanced training and further conceptual development of the HuK. The conferences are prepared by a group of colleagues and the heads of the school and led by an external moderator.

8. Interested colleagues from the pupils' home schools are also invited to the advanced training conferences to encourage transparency and cohesion in cooperation. Teachers can increase their understanding of a particular illness – for example autism – and acquire knowledge to help them in their everyday experiences in school. When a pupil returns to his or her former class after a stay in hospital or a longer period of home schooling, the transition period is more successful if the pupil encounters informed teachers with a greater understanding of the situation.

9. The advanced training working group is also on a constant search for new sources of information which could help teachers during their daily work. The utilisation of the internet is an important factor here: abundant useful information on clinical pictures is available online. Targeted information for teachers can also be found on the internet, for example the numerous extremely helpful handouts on topics such as Asperger autism, ADHS etc. Lesson material with work sheets can also be found under a wide range of internet addresses: examples include the federal state educational servers, search engines for children such as www.blinde-kuh.de, and www.hamsterkiste.de, and special teachers' sites such as www.schule.at, www.educa.ch, www.vsmaterial.wegerer.at and many more.

The following points make suggestions relating to the organisation of further training opportunities for home school teachers and clinic teachers:

- The possibility of meeting up at least once a year for an intensive exchange of experiences (concept days).
- The establishment of a working group which can find out what special training courses teaching staff would be particularly interested in, provide the teachers with information on advanced training opportunities and plan and coordinate advanced training courses in consultation with the school administration.



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- Advanced training courses must be oriented to specific topics which particularly concern teaching staff. Here it is extremely important to integrate further training into the working day wherever possible to avoid additional strain for colleagues.
- A substantial proportion of training courses should be held locally at the clinic schools if possible, for example within the framework of supervision and the weekly team sessions.

Summary:

Our experiences of the past few years have showed that numerous colleagues have profited substantially from this type of further training. Conferences form an essential element of the working day alongside the exchange of information among colleagues. The augmentation of the conference periods through specifically targeted events greatly enhances these sessions. A certain number of conferences are planned specifically as further training conferences; in other conferences and meetings, smaller training elements are integrated which are however specifically tailored to daily issues and topics cropping up during lesson time. In the majority of cases, the teaching colleagues expressed great satisfaction with the topics and content covered within this special form of training.

Lively discussion and examples from the teachers' own daily experiences and helpful suggestions are frequently of great interest. Reciprocal exchange of information and help from colleagues can additionally save time-consuming searches for specific information: a frequent occurrence in the everyday activities of teachers. To sum up, this form of advanced training for teachers creates a high degree of professional satisfaction and provides motivation for the often highly demanding work with sick children.