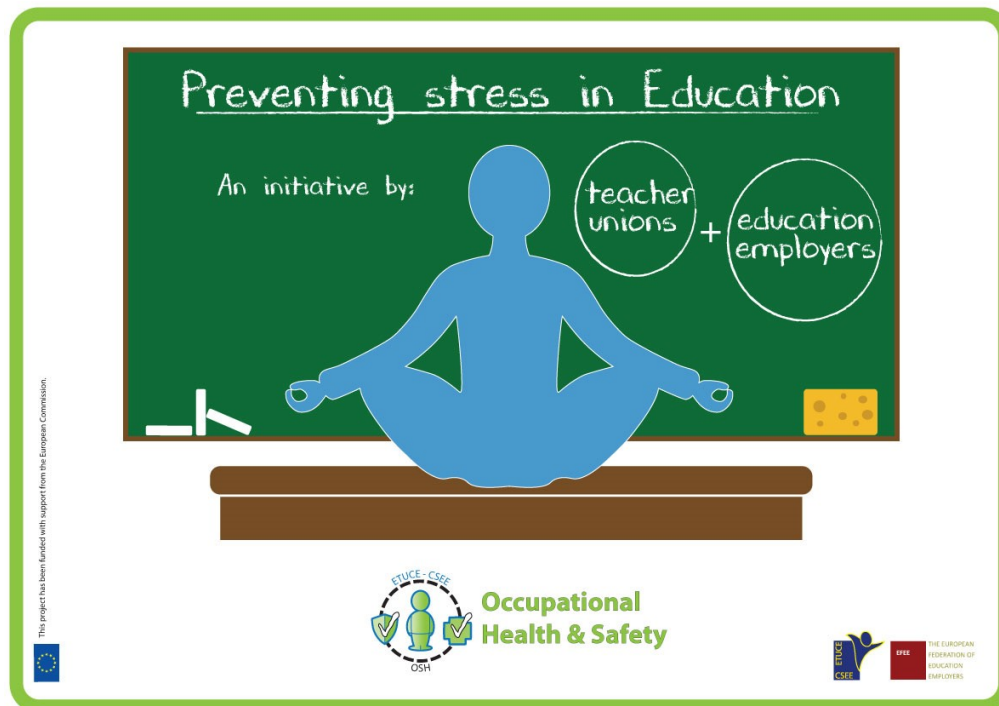


Research project on joint initiatives on stress prevention
Social Partners Promoting Decent Workplaces in the Education Sector for a Healthier Working Life
This project is carried out with the financial support of the European Commission. Grant Agreement number: VS/2015/0030.

PREVENTING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND WORK-RELATED STRESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Case study report: GERMANY

November 2015



The Project is scientifically supported by FFAW (Freiburg research centre for occupational sciences) and ISTAS (Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud.)



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The ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education) – EFEE (European Federation of Education Employers) project advisory group wishes to thank the local study delegation members and all the people interviewed in Germany for their time and hospitality.



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1. FIELDWORK NOTES

From 1 to 4 November 2015, the study delegation visited two different schools.

The “Städtische Gemeinschaftsgrundschule Richterich” is located in the outer area of Aachen. It has 230 students (108 female and 122 male) aged 5-10 years in 9 classes that are taught by 14 teachers (13 female and 1 male). The school does not receive any special funding to prevent work-related stress, but the individual teachers receive training. The school is fully funded by the state and families’ socio-economic status in the area is generally high. Here the school leader, deputy school leader and three teachers were interviewed

The “Ganztageshauptschule Kogelshäuserstraße” is a lower secondary school in Stolberg. The school has 258 students (105 female and 153 male) aged 13-18 years in 11 classes, taught by 24 teachers (12 female and 12 male). This school is located in a small town, in an area of low and medium socio-economic status. It is fully funded by the state and provides training for teachers to educate students with special needs and especially to promote health and work-life-balance. The school has developed a specific stress-prevention policy and provides teachers with suitable trainings. Here the school leader, deputy school leader, five teachers and one social worker were interviewed.

In addition to leaders and teachers from two schools in North Rhine-Westphalia, the ETUCE/EFEE study delegation had the opportunity to interview representatives from the teachers’ union Verband Bildung und Erziehung (VBE) as well as a delegation from the Ministry for Schools and Education of North Rhine-Westphalia and some representatives from local authorities.

A researcher conducted semi-structured group interviews and at the end of each interview the members of the study delegation were able to ask more questions, following the guidelines agreed at advisory group meetings. All interviews took place in a constructive manner and in an informal environment, to allow for the achievement of the case study goals i.e. to study the background of the German education system and to document and learn about good practice for preventing psychosocial risks and combating work-related stress in schools.

2. COUNTRY BACKGROUND

Germany is a federation of sixteen states (“Länder”). As these Länder, i.e. their ministers of education and cultural affairs, are autonomous in educational matters, school structures in Germany may vary largely, and pupil outcomes and teacher training qualifications may not all be of an equal standard. **North Rhine-Westphalia, where the interviews took place, is the country’s most populous state, with more than 18 million inhabitants.**

Since the PISA 2000 tests, the original three-tier school system has undergone significant changes. The system of having a lower secondary school (Hauptschule) offering vocational training entrance qualifications, an intermediate secondary school (Realschule) offering a secondary school leaving certificate (mittlere Reife) and a Gymnasium offering university entrance qualifications (Abitur) – has become a focus of school policy. As the majority of parents today want their children to sit the Abitur (Year 12/13), or at least obtain a secondary school leaving certificate (mittlere Reife after Year 10), very few opt for lower secondary education. **Therefore, in most Landers a two-tier system has emerged, although North Rhine-Westphalia still offers**



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lower secondary education. There is also a system of special needs schools. In the area states, some are under the threat of being broken up or gradually closed. This is the case, for instance, in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Since 2010, all trainee teachers have been required to obtain a degree from a university. A Master's degree with 300 credits must be acquired for a teaching post. The study period is followed by an obligatory placement for all types of schools (12-18 months). Afterwards there are both individual courses on key topics like learning in mixed ability groups, digital learning, etc. and in-school training courses on school specific themes. However, there is a tendency to scale down advanced training programmes for budgetary reasons.

In North Rhine-Westphalia there are 156,625 teaching staff, 71 per cent are female. 58,187 teachers work part-time, among them there are 87 per cent female. The average age of teaching staff is among the highest in Europe. **One in two teachers are 50 or older, while less than 10 per cent are under 30 years old.** Currently, more teachers retire each year than can be replaced. There is also a lack of staff who teach mathematics and science in particular, as well as for art, music, sport and religious education.

Most teaching staff are civil servants. With this employment status, teachers do not have to fear becoming unemployed. Teachers' salaries vary a lot, for instance, teaching staff in primary schools are paid much less than those in secondary education. Primary school staff and staff in lower secondary schools also have the highest number of lessons: 28 per week (one lesson here means 45 minutes). In the other schools of secondary education, there are 24-26 hours of compulsory teaching and at the Gymnasium 23-24 hours. Teachers have to prepare and follow up classes, mark exams, liaise with parents, carry out development work, assess students, provide statistics, etc. In total, they therefore work as many hours as any employee in the public sector, i.e. 39-41 hours per week (hours of 60 minutes).

School leaders are also required to teach, although their hours can be reduced to provide time for managerial work. When school leaders retire, it is often difficult to find successors as the additional managerial demands seem relatively high in comparison to additional rewards like higher salary.

3. STRESSORS

Since the PISA 2000 tests, many school reforms have been agreed through a top-down approach. Examples are the expansion of all-day schools, development of school-specific profiles, introduction of centralised performance comparisons, abandonment of written grades in favour of verbal certification, an increase in diagnostic responsibilities, and the internal and external evaluation of schools. As the number of contracted hours has remained the same, new initiatives such as these have to be executed and duties have to be fulfilled within some 'notional' timeframe or have to be done outside contracted hours. **This leads to increasing quantitative demands with too little "time to teach" and for many teachers, even greater work life balance conflicts.**

There are decreasing numbers of school students in Germany due to demographic change. In North Rhine-Westphalia student numbers are falling in many rural regions especially but rising in urban areas. The number of students from a migrant background is increasing steadily. In some schools, the proportion of students from a migrant background is close to 80 percent. As primary



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school catchment areas have been relaxed in the last years, higher-earning families are sending their children to primaries with fewer children from migrant or difficult social backgrounds. This trend continues into the lower secondary schools and the middle/secondary schools. It means that teachers have to cope increasingly with different cultures and religions in some schools and many and very difficult students in one place. This kind of segregation is mirrored by parents being either over- or under-committed to school life. The situation is compounded by inclusive schooling, i.e. teaching children with and without disabilities in the same class. While inclusive schooling affects an increasing number of teachers, it is only the younger generation of teachers who are trained to deal with mixed-ability classes. As in-service training is inadequate, there are many teachers who try to perform a multitude of roles in the lesson. **This can lead to role conflicts, high emotional and professional demands, which can be made worse by poorly equipped school buildings.**

The increasing diversity of students calls for sustained co-operation between the teaching staff, social workers, special needs teachers and school psychologists. Not all schools have additional workers such as these and if they are there, it is often only for a few hours. In many small schools, particularly at primary school level, there is no secretary or full-time secretary. Janitor posts may be amalgamated for cost reasons, with schools ordering janitor services only on special request. As a result, members of the teaching staff attempt to plug the gaps themselves. But many teachers are not used to asking for help or talking about their problems openly, so **weak social support, too little contact with colleagues, a lack of regular feedback and a low sense of community can be found in schools.**

In 2008 the Ministry for Education and Cultural affairs in Baden-Wurttemberg (another area state), in cooperation with teachers' unions VBE, Gewerkschaft für Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW), Philologenverband (phv) and Berufsschullehrerverband (BLV) launched a risk research survey in 4,200 schools. Carried out by the Freiburg research centre for occupational sciences (FFAW) and based on the Copenhagen psychosocial questionnaire (COPSOQ), it was one of the world's largest surveys on teachers' health (55,000 teachers surveyed, with a response rate above 50 per cent). Compared to an overall sample of professions, teaching was associated with strong emotional strains. However, influence and development possibilities had remarkable positive values. Regression models such as the 2008 survey can highlight damaging factors as well as protective factors that correlate with health. These may even be compensatory to each other: e.g. teachers tend to maintain a relatively high job satisfaction but do suffer from symptoms of burnout and cognitive stress at the same time. The five most important factors for cognitive stress symptoms were: **high levels of work-life balance conflict, poor behaviour in the classroom, noise and voice strain, and relatively low levels of role clarity and meaning of work.** Of course, besides the general view, these findings differ due to underlying factors such as the type of school, e.g. noise and voice strain is highest at secondary schools but lowest at primary and vocational schools. As a consequence, it is important to have an individual risk assessment for every single school, as it is here, where possible measures to improve teachers' health could be introduced.

4. GOOD PRACTICES

Risk assessments based on the COPSOQ are currently carried out by FFAW in North Rhine-Westphalia. VBE and GEW (the two major teaching unions in Germany) have called on the Ministry for School and Education to **focus on the psychosocial challenges facing the teaching**



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profession through a joint initiative. They aim to help schools develop measures for tackling psychosocial issues, professionally supported by external psychologists and occupational health physicians of BAD Gesundheitsvorsorge und Sicherheitstechnik (GmbH).

In addition, the **VBE has developed different concepts to give support to teachers at behavioural and organizational levels.** For instance, there is an online diary which teaching staff can use in order to monitor work stress in cooperation with the University of Luneburg, a psychological service implemented via training in cooperation with several universities (including Potsdam and Bremen), and “teachers health days” are offered to help deal with stress etc. There are also many training seminars approved as advanced training courses by the state ministry. One of these is a time-management seminar that not only aims to help the individual teacher organise their time but also to organise the school’s schedule as a whole.

The **Ministry of Schools and Education in North Rhine-Westphalia has conducted a programme to look at Education and Health “Bildung und Gesundheit” (BuG)** in collaboration with an accident insurance fund and health insurance funds. This programme focuses on teachers, parents and students as a group and aims to give them guidance so that schools can become ‘healthy schools’. One aspect is to provide money, the other is to organise special training, but in any case the individual school’s needs must be reflected. As the programme requires high quality standards, participating schools can be seen as part of a good practice network.

At the local level there were many examples of good practice reported by the interviewees, intended to reduce teachers’ stress which derives in more or less direct ways from the developments in working conditions that are described above.

Teacher/Teaching oriented leadership: The school leader interprets their role as coach rather than inspectors. Thus, they are easy for staff members to contact, i.e. their doors are open for teachers to walk in if there is an issue that requires immediate support. Following up teachers’ requests sincerely and giving clear feedback creates an atmosphere of trust and justice. This culture of transparency is helpful to uncover possible structural problems and favourite topics for training days to develop the individual teachers’ and staff competencies in a holistic way. The school leader also tends to intervene actively when teachers and parents are in conflict. This shows support to their staff on the one hand and can also help all involved parties to get along (again) in a more constructive manner on the other hand.

School leader: “I see my own role as a supporter of the teachers to help them develop new skills and improve their work due to an effective working environment.”

Teachers: “We had difficult talks with parents about education. The school leader’s moderation gives us the feeling that we are not left on their own and encourages us to stand by our opinions.”

Team building/participation/corporate identity: School leaders may be allowed to choose teaching staff themselves to build ‘their’ team. But this can also refer to teacher participation, e.g. discussing difficulties with all staff to see how experiences can be shared and who can contribute to improve things. Teachers are also encouraged to visit each other’s lessons (peer learning). In a technical sense this ensures that teachers teach the same content, e.g. by producing class tests of comparable difficulty levels. Establishing common educational rules makes sure that schools are identified as a corporate setting and not a mixture of teachers’ personal preferences. Students can find it easier to know what behaviour is expected of them and respect is given to teachers as members of a larger unit.



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School leader: "As teachers are used to working highly autonomously, we addressed the pressures related to this by demonstrating not only that they can share problems, but that they can find solutions together."

Teacher: "After some hesitation we learned that when we follow rules that we've established as a team, not only will others pay more respect to us, but also our self-esteem and social support rises."

Distribution of work/role precision/new offers: Here, everyday administrative work previously undertaken by teachers, e.g. chasing up absent students, was given to secretaries to allow teachers to concentrate on teaching. Engaging a social worker serves the same purpose: they deal with conflicts between students, teachers and/or parents when they cannot be solved by the teachers on their own, for instance if the teacher/s are involved in the conflict or if there are difficult social backgrounds in the families of the pupils. They also work together with the youth welfare office. It is important for the school to decide who is needed, whether to recruit more teaching staff or a social worker instead. Support may also be provided from external sources, e.g. persons who are contracted by the schools and their special budgets for these issues. In a rather medical sense of health, a physiotherapist can be engaged to train students and teachers as well (for example, this may be paid for by the BuG programme, see above).

School leader: "Additional non-teaching staff give teachers the chance to concentrate on their main task, which is teaching students"

Teachers: "We were sceptical at first, if a social worker could do better than us, but then we saw, he is taking stress away as he does things that were really too much or out of reach for us."

New time-arrangements: Effective time management in schools should effectively combine teachers' wishes and organisational needs. In one school visited, the deputy school leader had a special qualification on this topic. She was also a trainer for teachers herself on behalf of the VBE (see above). She and the school leader would meet weekly to update the school's timetable. At the beginning of the school year teachers could indicate preferred working times. To maintain a work-life balance for staff and to prevent exhaustion, the time regime was strict, e.g. staff meetings were kept short and were not planned at the end of long working days. In the other school, the time schedule of the school had been significantly changed: it was decided by the school leader and staff to start work later, have lunch earlier and have longer breaks.

Deputy school leader: "We saw that events were badly timed, like never ending meetings and unclear plans. Clear time-tables and schedules are a sign of respect for others' activities."

Teacher: "We were working against our and the students' inner needs. After reorganising school times, they now fit better with our physical needs and make balancing work-life easier."

Investing in buildings/equipment: One school that is to be closed will be transformed into another type of school. This was a good opportunity for the local administration to refurbish and acquire new equipment on the basis of current teachers' experiences. Furthermore, the school applied for funding from the BuG programme (see above) to adapt rooms for contemplation, sports, social needs, physiotherapist hours and undisturbed work. As funding from this programme also required staff to take part in regular self-evaluation-surveys, the positive effects of these measures were documented.

School leader: "Having separate and nicely decorated rooms for teachers helps them to calm down and relax from the very high noise level in classrooms."



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Teachers: “Still there is much work to be done at home, but home is no longer the place where the conflict between the wish to relax and the demands of work has to be carried out.”

5. CONCLUSIONS

The measures to reduce stress and improve health are diverse and often described as ‘only small steps’ by the interviewees. From a wider perspective, many of these steps can be seen as movements that form part of a cultural shift of the teachers’ role at school from individual all-rounder to member-of-team-teacher. This is demonstrated, when a school leader says, that they “always think of what could be done to give my teachers a working environment that enables them to do a good job”. Teachers’ responses to this approach were, for example, that “it was of course unusual to visit a colleague’s class, but we learned our work would be easier when we reflected on our role together.”

Apart from such attitudes and principal willingness to make changes, there are some structural conditions that make successful interventions more likely: the opportunity to build up an effective team e.g. by school leader’s selection; advanced training strategies of and for school leaders and teachers (empowerment); clear pictures of who is responsible, and who should be responsible, for what (distribution of work); sufficient time for training and funding for equipment (be it the union’s, employer’s or a joint initiative); professional networks to learn from other schools (good practice).

Lastly, an important source of improvement should be mentioned. The basis of almost any measure – whether money is required or not - is the staff’s interest in their own state of health. This interest could arise reactively, when suffering symptoms and sickness absence (bad way) or from systematic and preventive risk research (a much better way).

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6. ANNEX

Annex 1: Study delegation

Ute Foit VBE, Germany (ETUCE)

Sarah Lyons NUT, United Kingdom (ETUCE)

Stéphane Vanoirbeck SEGEC, Belgium (EFEE)

Sarah Kik, EFEE

Susan Flocken, ETUCE

Katharina Lenuck, ETUCE

Clara Llorens, ISTAS (researcher)

Wouter Massink and Otilia Babara, Massink Media (film team)

Annex 2: Programme of the visit

Case study in Germany: Agenda, key actors and informants		
DAY	HOUR	ACTIVITY
02.11. 2015	9:00 - 9:30	Visit to Primary School Richterich, Grünenthaler Str. 2, 52072 Aachen, www.ggs-richterich.de
	9:30 - 11:00	Interview with the school leader Mr. Funk and vice-principal Ms. Engel
	11:30 - 13:00	Interview with teachers
	15:00 - 17:00	Welcome words from Ms. Marga Bourceau, VBE-chair of Städteregion Aachen and talk on the basis of the German background information with Mr. Udo Beckmann (Federal Chairman VBE)
	18:00 - 19:00	Session - Conclusion of the day
03.11. 2015	9:00 - 9:30	Visit to Ganztagschule Kogelshäuserstr. 45, 52222 Stolberg, www.kogelschule.de
	9:30 - 11:00	Interview with school leader Ms. Zilligen and member of extended school leading-team Mr. Einars
	11:00 - 11:30	Talk to school board director Mr. Müllejans and head of the department for regional development, education, youth and culture, Mr. Terodde, mayor of Aachen, Mr. Grüttemeier and Head of School Administration Stolberg Ms. Jansen
	11:30 - 13:00	Talk to secretary of state of the ministry for school and training North Rhein Westphalia Mr. Hecke and presentation of the ministry's programme Bildung und Gesundheit (BuG) by Dr. Reinink
	14:00 - 15:30	Interview with elected teachers
	17:00 - 18:00	Session - Conclusion of the day and the German Case Study