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Research and Management of School Absenteeism in Germany: Educational Perspectives

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Abstract

School absenteeism outlined as a technical term is all behavioral patterns of students staying away from school without acceptable permission. Many studies discovered that it cannot be understood as a homogenous phenomenon and identified different forms: the fundamental patterns are truancy (aversion based), school refusal (anxiety based) and parental condoned absences (withdrawal). One important educational target is to support a better understanding of the processes behind the behavior and consequently create better environments, which endorse participation in school especially with regards to disadvantaged students. In an interactional perspective, school absenteeism is a result of a development of imbalanced relations between child, family, school, and at a community level. Recent research shows a variety of options to support participation of students in school.

I.   Introduction

Regular school attendance is essential for school success – frequent absences result in different school problems. Absenteeism often leads to third-graders not reading correctly, sixth graders not passing subjects and ninth graders dropping out of school completely. However, consequences of school absenteeism are not confined to the school sector, but rather show considerable long-term effects, including a low scores or non-graduation, more complicated occupational integration, limited income potential and a higher risk for delinquency (Kearney 2016; Ricking & Schulze 2012; Sutphen, Ford & Flaherty 2010). School absenteeism outlined as a technical term covers all behavioral patterns of students staying away from school without acceptable permission. Thereby, legally the compulsory school attendance is infringed and on an individual level the students obstruct their own learning progress and mar their future prospects. The particular relevance of this issue emerges from the consequences for the future life of the persons concerned (Stamm, Ruckdäschel, Templer & Niederhauser 2009).

In a broader sense school absenteeism should be seen in the context of participation of children and adolescents in the educational system. Although school education is not only about economic utilization, considerable consequential costs for public budgets arise out of the aggravated occupational integration, which are the results of missing earnings in terms of low taxes on wages or on unemployment insurance and additional expenditures for employee benefits (Allmendinger, Giesecke & Oberschachtsiek 2011). Whereas for truants who are regularly absent a future with many barriers becomes apparent. For a school a high absenteeism rate often means, that the pedagogic-didactic work reached the target group only partially and thus the school cannot fulfil its remit. Ongoing school absenteeism is not only a matter of course-setting aside for young people, but also a barrier for the functionality of schools and a socio-economic expensive undertaking (Sälzer 2010).

In this respect, the prevention and the reduction of absenteeism is of top priority in pedagogical and educational practice. Every failure to attend school should be taken seriously – whether excused or not.

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II.   Legal Framework

In Germany, the compulsory school attendance is anchored in state constitutions or education acts and claims both, regular attendance in lessons and attendance in school events (e.g. internships, excursions). It is an obligation to attend a public or state-approved school for 12 years from the age of six: often nine years general compulsory education plus three years general or occupational compulsory education as part of vocational training (part-time) or one year full-time at a vocational school (e.g. § 67 School Act of Lower Saxony [NSchG]). Compulsory school attendance entitles every child to get free education, but also forces all children and young people to attend a public or state-approved school on a regular basis (Avenarius 2010). Illicit absence from class is in breach of the law and social norms (Dunkake 2010; Ricking 2006, 2014). Compulsory school attendance is not only the general framework for literacy and qualification for society within a "minimum political-ethical consensus" but determines a concrete framework of action for organizing the educational cooperation between family and school. This should serve the child's well-being, i.e. a positive development of the child into a responsible citizen (Reuter 2012, 159).

The parental right in article 6 in the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (GG) does not allow parents/legal guardians to displace school teaching to other locations or let it be carried out by other persons. Therefore, for parents it is legally not possible to withdraw their children from school. In comparison, in most other countries there is a duty of education, which can also be fulfilled outside the school (Grewe 2005). From this point of view defiance of compulsory school attendance endangers the school system and legal coercive measures, such as education and disciplinary measures, can be introduced (Ehmann & Rademacker 2003; Böhm 2011). This could be in the form of fines, school attendance enforced by the police and – in serious cases – short term arrests.

III.   Characteristics and Terminology

School absenteeism is a multifaceted phenomenon with many possible causes, developmental processes, frequencies and consequences. Three basic manifestations can be distinguished from each other: (1) school aversive truancy, (2) anxiety-related school refusal, (3) parental-condoned absences/withdrawal, in which the absence is caused or tolerated by parents.

It can be defined as follows:

School absenteeism comprises of various behavioral patterns of illegitimate times absent of multi-causal and long-term origin with influencing factors in family, school, peers, the environment and the individual, which are accom-
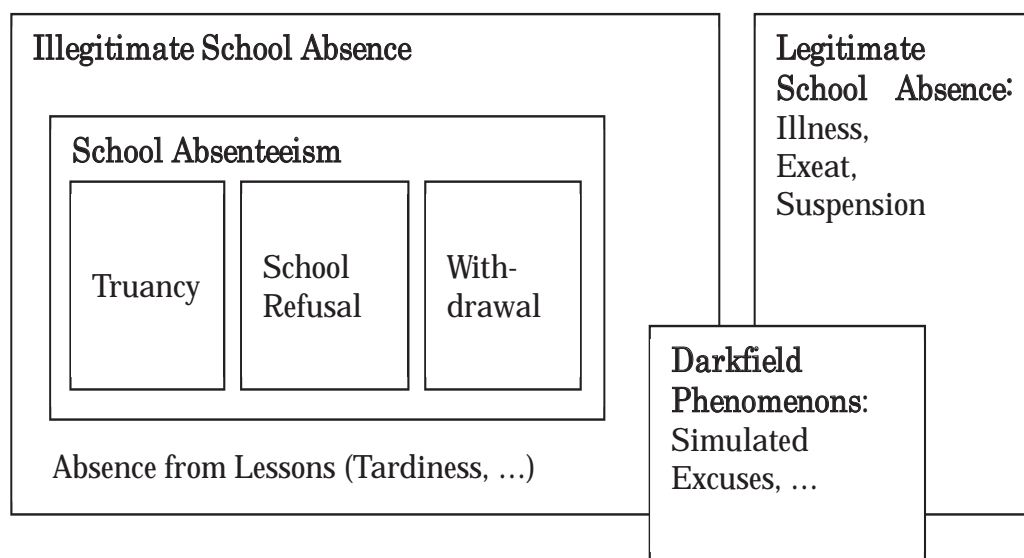

Figure 1: Synoptic View of Manifestations

(Ricking 2006, 2014)

panied by further emotional and social developmental risks, low participation in education and more difficult occu-
pational and social integration and which require interdisciplinary prevention and intervention (Ricking, Albers &
Dunkake 2017, 147; Ricking & Hagen 2016, 18)

In the following an overview of the main characteristics of different forms of school absenteeism is given:

Truancy

Truancy is a pattern of behavior in which pupils disapprove of school as a whole, lessons or teachers with a negative attitude and regularly make this clear for example by absenteeism or late arrival (Ricking 2003). During the morning, they often pursue a more attractive occupation outside their parents' home. Avoiding the unwanted situation at school and switching to more satisfactory behavior outside school emphasizes the underlying (double) motivation. Family risk factors include poverty, low educational ambitions, inadequate educational supervision and little support for school matters from parents/legal guardians in general (Dunkake 2007). Truancy frequently occurs over-randomly with dissocial behavior patterns (especially juvenile delinquency, aggressive conflict resolution and drug abuse), which exacerbates the problem and can be observed in the context of school-aversive cliques (Frings 2007). In school terms, the correlation between truancy and school failure is very clear, especially regarding pupils with high absentee rates (Baier 2012). Regular performance failures, which are reflected in poor grades or class repetitions, lead in the end to a lack of motivation to learn, strained pedagogical relationships and avoidance behavior. Many pupils concerned feel frustrated and over challenged by school demands and develop behavioral tendencies to avoid them (Oehme 2007). Ricking & Dunkake (2017, 97-98) summarize the risk factors of hourly and daily truancy based on the Krefeld study:

- Poor school performance (e.g. in the form of school grades or a descending change of school)
- Permanent or temporary separation from both natural parents (e.g. foster family, divorce of parents, stay in a care home)
- Low socio-economic status of parents (e.g. unemployment)
- Family education: high quantity of criticism and rejection by parents, violence in the family, little support
- Low cultural capital in the family
- Intensive time in front of the TV/computer
- Connection to a (deviant) clique (usually outside the class)
- An indifferent educational style of the class teacher perceived by the students
- Deviant behavior of pupils

School Refusal

Anxiety can be described as a negative emotional state that is attributed to a situation experienced as threatening and often leads to avoidance behavior (Schneider 2004). Some school-age children have immense difficulties attending classes because of their anxiety and a strong need for safety. Therefore, school refusal describes the avoidance of imminent school attendance, often accompanied by internalizing symptoms (King & Bernstein 2001; Knollmann, Al-Mouhtasseb & Hebebrand 2009; Lehmkuhl et al. 2003). So students often complain about symptoms of illness (including headaches, abdominal pain, sleep disturbances), which can sometimes be attributed to emotional problems. A distinction is made between *school fear* and *school phobia*:

School fear is due to the field of school and refers to social or performance-related problems. With the latter aspect, the fear of failing in exams or having to present something in the classroom is intensified to such an extent that these situations are specifically avoided. In addition, social anxiety can have similar consequences, such as bullying (Kindler 2009). Bullying is a form of systematic violence and increasingly taking place on social networking platforms (so-called cyberbullying). Victims who are threatened, exposed, harassed or tortured over a longer period avoid school to protect themselves. In the study by Ricking & Dunkake (2017), it becomes clear that school anxiety differs in many areas from other forms of absenteeism. While there is no connection between the background of gen-

der and migration for all other forms of absenteeism, it is noted that especially girls and adolescents with a migration background are affected by school fear. Young people with school fear are less likely to belong to a clique and suffer from low self-confidence as well as examination anxiety. Within the network analyses, it shows that classes, in which a poor class climate prevails, have an increased proportion of pupils with school fear. Ultimately, 23.0% of students say they suffer from it very often (Ricking & Dunkake 2017).

School phobia is an emotional disorder with separation anxiety (ICD-10 F93.0). Separation anxiety exists, when the child cannot separate from the main caregiver (mostly the mother) and thus develops a refusal attitude towards school. The central motive of the child, often from a deep emotional uncertainty, is, for example, that something serious could happen to the mother during her absence (Kaiser 1983). It is generally assumed that the child's behavior is strongly influenced by the behavior of the parents, who often act as fearful social models themselves within an overprotective educational style. The outside world is predominantly experienced as threatening and security as endangered. Effects on the child are considerable: The development of social skills as well as independence is limited and emotional disorders arise (Schneider 2004). In other medically relevant cases, the refusal is due to adaptation disorders, depressive disorders or social phobias (Egger, Costello & Angold 2003). Koppe und Ranke (2012) instance disturbance patterns that may be associated with school-refusing behavior: depressive disorder, neurotic depression, depressive episode (F32, F33, F34.1), social phobia (F40.1), panic disorder (F41), generalized anxiety disorder (F41.1), mixed anxiety and depressive disorder (F41.2), obsessive-compulsive disorder – predominantly obsessional thoughts or ruminations (F42.0) and predominantly compulsive acts (obsessional rituals) (F.42.1), personality disorder (e.g. F60.3, F60.6).

Parental-Condoned Absences/Withdrawal

The definition of parental-condoned absences/withdrawal as a category of school absenteeism is still insufficiently clarified in professional discourse. The terms used in the scientific discourse reveal both, the diversity of the phenomenon and the low level of research activity. Consensus consists in the fact that it often concerns a conscious breach of the compulsory school attendance by the legal guardians (Albers & Ricking 2018; Schulze & Wittrock 2005). Sander (1979, 27) defines: *"One may speak of withdrawal if a child is kept away from school against his or her will or without being questioned by a parent or legal guardian"* (translation by the authors). Causes and motives that lead legal guardians to initiate, tolerate or condone failures to attend school are extremely diverse (Albers & Ricking 2018):

- *Problems of educational influence*: Parents who experience educational overload are often not able to ensure that their children attend school (Goodmann & Scott 2016).
- *Attitude towards school*: Indifference towards school and the child's school education on the part of the parents can be seen in the position of school attendance in the family value system (Ehmann & Rademacker 2003; Schreiber-Kittl & Schröpfer 2002; Reid 1999/2014).
- *Economic support for the family (jobs)*: Students must contribute to the financial stability of the family so that they no longer meet school requirements (Kearney 2016; Schulze & Wittrock 2000).
- *Mental illnesses of the legal guardians* (Knollmann, Al-Mouhtasseb & Hebebrand 2009; Reid 1999, 2014; Koppe & Ranke 2012): The school attendance of their own children can often not be supported by the parents concerned. Problems in parenting, which can be explained by the symptoms of the disease, result from a lack of parental care and attention (Mattejat & Remschmidt 2008).
- *Neglect, abuse*: Living and educational conditions in the context of neglect are often characterized by inadequate supervision, permissiveness of parents towards truancy, delinquency or alcohol as well as a delayed development and a lack of social skills (Galm, Hees & Kindler 2010; Thyen 2008).
- *Culturally or religiously conditioned criticism or rejection of compulsory school attendance or curricular content by parents* repeatedly leads to failure to attend school. Individual cases show conflicts, which are often delivered to courts. Religious beliefs are incompatible with the curricular structure of everyday school life (e.g. religious, sports, swimming, biology or sex education classes), so that parents keep their

school-age children away from school (Achilles 2004).

- *Caring children and adolescents*: Children and young people who regularly take over nursing activities within the family are referred to as young carers (Schulze & Kaiser, 2017). It is to be assumed that they are frequently assigned tasks and responsibilities that are inappropriate for their age (Becker 2000; Kaiser & Schulze 2014; Kaiser, Schulze & Leu 2018).

The term of caring children and young people "derives from the term of general informal care by relatives [...], whose basic understanding is based on unpaid work, reciprocity and mostly family relationships" (Nagl-Cupal et al. 2012,16). In German-speaking countries the terms *children and adolescents as caring relatives* (*Kinder und Jugendliche als pflegende Angehörige)* or *caring children and adolescents (pflegende Kinder und Jugendliche)*, internationally *Young Carers* (GB) or *Young Caregivers* (US) are used. Caring children and young people are characterized by being under 18 years old, therefore dependent on adults and taking on significant care activities for a sick or impaired family member which are inappropriate for their age and normally associated with and carried out by adults (Dearden & Becker 2002, 1; Becker 2000). Quantitative data on the prevalence of children and adolescents who take over caring activities are currently available for the following countries:

- Austria – 3.5% of children and young people between the ages of five and 18 (Nagl-Cupal, Daniel, Kainbacher, Koller & Mayer 2012),
- Australia – 3.5% of children and young people under the age of 18 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003),
- USA – 3.2% of children and young people between the ages of eight and 18 (Hunt, Levine & Naiditch 2005),
- as well as in the UK – 1.5% of all children and young people under the age of 18 (Dearden & Becker 2004).

Nagl-Cupal et al. (2012, 17) see the difficulty of collecting meaningful data primarily in "the methodological challenges in access to and identification of caring children and adolescents". Quantitative data for Germany is currently being collected; a transferability of international results is not easily possible, whereas Metzing-Blau and Schnepp (2008) note that, if the British data would be transferred, more than 200,000 children and young people would be regarded as carers. From a gender perspective, most studies show a slightly higher proportion of girls. In the international average children and adolescents are 12 years old; in the UK 57% of caring children and adolescents are between 11 and 15 years old (Dearden & Becker 2004, 5ff; Nagl-Cupal et al. 2012, 43). In most studies, it becomes clear that predominantly mothers receive care, but caring activities also take place for fathers, grandparents or siblings. The type of illness or impairment is mainly in the physical area, such as multiple sclerosis, cancer, HIV/AIDS and their sequelae, or in the psychological area, such as depression, but also alcohol and drug abuse. Further impairments can be attributed to the sensory area or to learning disabilities (Dearden & Becker 2004; Nagl-Cupal et al. 2012).

It becomes clear that the behavior of legal guardians, against the backdrop of a continuum, plays an active-reserved, via a reactive-approving to a rather passive role. The legal guardians thus leave the children free to decide whether attending school, tacitly tolerate the unwillingness of the child to attend school (rather passively), encourage the child to miss school or, although the child wants to go to school, hold it back (rather actively). In this respect, the term of withdrawal can be understood as a contraction term that attempts to grasp the plurality of this category (Schulze & Wittrock 2005, 2008; Ricking & Hagen 2016).

Prevalence

The data available shows that school absenteeism does not affect all groups of pupils to the same extent:

- School absenteeism is in the action repertoire of a large part of the student body in secondary education (30 - 50%), but the clear majority deals with it responsibly (Schreiber-Kittl & Schröpfer 2002; Ricking & Dunkake 2017; Weiß 2007).

- Absenteeism rates increase significantly from grades 5/6 upwards with highs mostly in year 8 or 9 (Weiß 2007; Ricking & Dunkake 2017).
- There is a roughly equal ratio between the sexes or slightly higher proportions of female pupils in school failures (Rat für Kriminalitätsverhütung in Schleswig-Holstein 2007).
- More massive forms of habitual school absenteeism show about 3-5% of the students, boys are over-represented in this group (Stamm 2007; Baier 2012).

Although illegitimate failures occur in all schools, high absenteeism rates can usually be seen in schools with rather low academic requirements. Regional differences also exist: In the new federal states of the former GDR, for example, there are significantly fewer pupils missing, which is explained by a higher frequency of control and reaction in the schools there: "The lower rate in eastern Germany can be explained, for example, by the greater control of school attendance by teachers and a higher probability of sanctions. Here truant students are thus discovered more frequently, and to truancy it is reacted to more frequently with reactions such as conversations, punitive work, etc." (Baier 2012, p. 52, translation by the authors).

IV.   Person-Environment Analysis based on the Field Theory

The cause of school absenteeism can be explained by the person – environment analysis (Schulze 2002, 2008). Based on the concept of "Man in his living space", Lewin's field theory (1982) which had its starting point in Germany and developed in the USA, has an impact on many branches of science – it is one of the foundations of current socio-ecological thinking. Lewin's field theory forms the framework in which various phenomena can be theoretically recorded and interpreted (Lück 1996, p. 2). "There is nothing as practical as a good theory" was one of Lewin's guiding principles (Marrow 1977, p. 9). Lewin developed his findings through a specific approach to psychological processes and proved them in his field-theoretical approach. However, due to its complexity and extraordinary scope, the field theory in this article can only be presented abridged (Schönpflug 1992, Stützle-Hebel et al. 2017). The concept unites the holistic character and the dynamic connection of perception, experience and behavior. In the field-theoretical approach, the person in his or her living space becomes the focus of analytical observation. Relationships between the person and the environment can be described as follows using a "universal behavioral equation": B=F (P,E) and B=F (LSp).

In this sense behavior (B) is a function (F) of the person (P) and of his environment (E), person and environment constitute the living space (LSp). In field theory, the currently visible behavior is to be understood as the last link in a chain of behavior episodes in whose structure different components have their share (Lewin 1982). Lewin's approach was based on the existence of psychological tensions that occur in adjacent spheres of activity and are interrelated in different ways. Striving to discharge the tension provides energy and is a stimulus for activity. From the broad spectrum of the field-theoretical approach, the model of the living space with its effect factors is to be emphasized for the clarification of pedagogical problem situations. In this context, the visual representation of the psychological construct "living space" is of particular importance (Schulze 2002, 2008; Kaiser & Schulze 2018). To be able to look at psychological processes specifically, Lewin developed the construct of the living space. A person's living space consists of all factors that directly affect his behavior. It includes the person and regions of his environment with positive or negative valences. Regions with a positive valence cause the person to strive for them as target regions and to avoid regions with negative valences. The stimulative nature of a region is determined by various factors, including the way in which it is accessible, and can change over time.

In the following, the field-theoretical construct of the living space is presented in visualized form to illustrate circumstances and the resulting behavior patterns of pupils as a basis for a child-environment analysis.

In this context, the field-theoretical approach is adapted for the development of a structured analysis strategy. Therefore, in the consideration of the living space the field-theoretical area of conflicts and, if necessary, barriers must also be taken into account. Based on a person-environment analysis (PEA), structured according to a person's regions of activity and the conflicts existing there, problem situations can be presented, and development processes

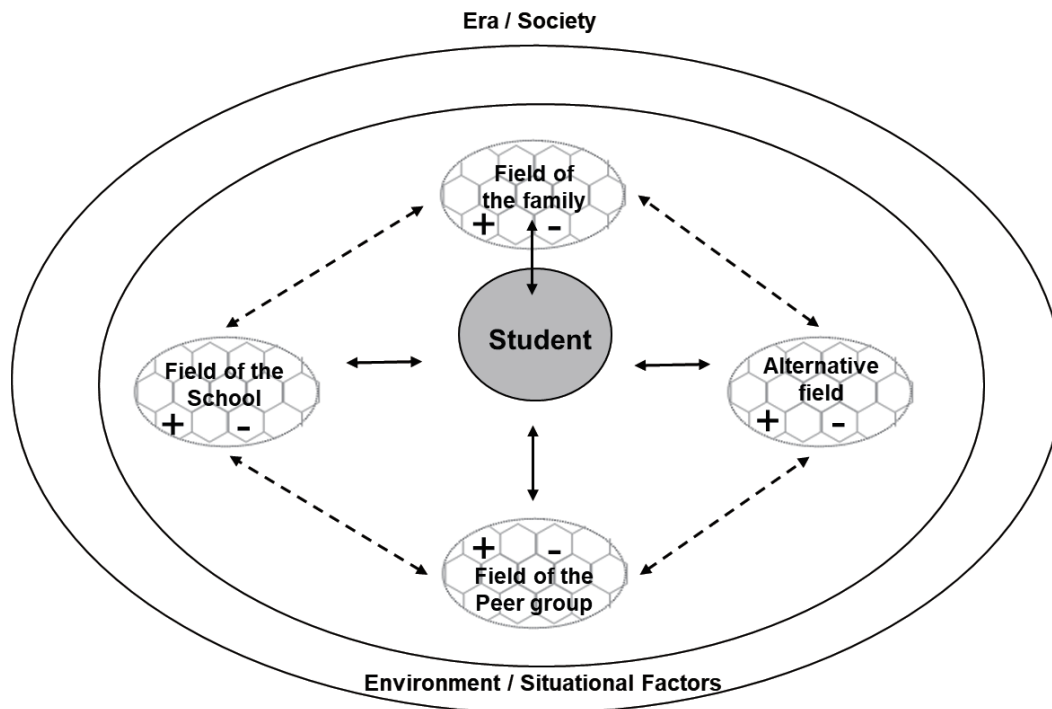**Figure 2:** structured according to the Field Theory
(Schulze 2003)

Legend:
Affiliation   +   vs.   - Isolation
Attractive   +   vs.   - Aversive
                            Interactions
                            Forces

+ Region with a positive valence
– Region with a negative valence

can be shown. It succeeds in focusing special circumstances on site, but also interests, abilities and skills within the framework of a process dynamic; an approach that is quite favorable for clarification of phenomena and intervention development in case of a specific educational as well as special educational needs.

Based on the field-theoretical assumption that barriers lie in the run-up to conflicts, the reduction or overcoming of corresponding barriers is a possibility for the development of preventive or early interventive measures. In field theory, barriers can take shape both, physically, e.g. in the form of confinement, and psychologically, e.g. in the form of formulating prohibitions. If a goal with a challenging character cannot be reached directly but must first overcome negative valences in the living space, a detour problem exists, caused by barriers. Usually people defend themselves against barriers or look for ways out or detours or they leave the field. If actions are made massively more difficult by barriers, conflicts can develop progressively when specific circumstances come in additionally. According to Lewin, there are three types of conflicts (plus-plus conflict, minus-minus conflict, plus-minus conflict). The plus-minus conflict is illustrated and briefly explained in the following case example (Schulze 2002).

The student Tim faces a situation with both positive and negative aspects (see fig. 3). He learns without problems, finds lessons interesting and enjoyed going to his old school. The family's move was accompanied by a change of school. After the summer holidays, he was placed in a class in the new school with established group structures. Throughout the school year he fails to bond with his new classmates and makes no friends.

He is excluded from joint activities in class. Tim feels misunderstood. His only joy seems to be computer games, available for him in large electronics store not far away. In the fifth hour, after repeated low social contact in the new class, the psychological pressure is so big that he leaves school during the break and goes to the technical department. He is increasingly drifting out of the school sphere towards the alternative sphere; the substitution action is "computer games".

Examples illustrate that a field-theoretical presentation of conflicts in a pupil's living space can show various

factors of effect. On the basis of a structured approach, supported by a visual clarification of the situation in a specific living space, a targeted student-living space analysis can take place within the framework of special educational team counselling, which enables a clarification of the problem situation and a problem-oriented derivation of appropriate intervention measures and promotion strategies.
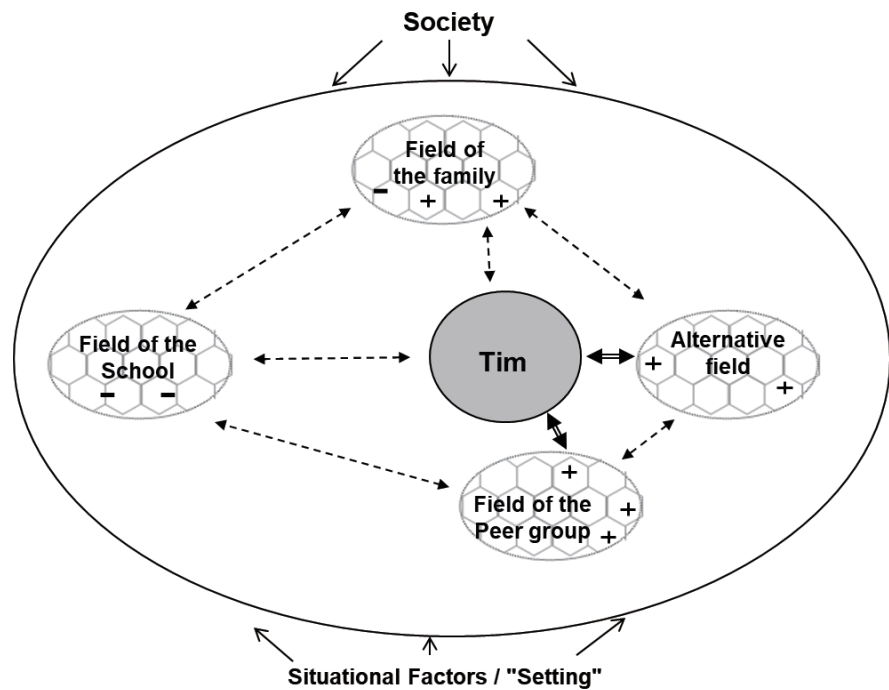
Figure 3: Drifting

V.   Prevention in Schools

School absenteeism as a primary problem concerning school laws regularly lead to legal sanctions. Corresponding provisions in school laws offer options to deal with this in stages from threatening and imposing a fine, compulsory attendance enforced by the police and arrest sentences. In addition, disciplinary measures (e.g. suspension) are also possible. The course and effectiveness of these measures, which are implemented very differently in school administration units, can only be guessed. From an educational perspective, it is doubtful whether a fine for parents who do not have educational influence on the child can be regarded as an appropriate sanction or whether it is sufficient to prevent future absenteeism in the long term. The procedure may serve its purpose if legal guardians deliberately detain the student from school.

Following Anglo-American research results, an increasingly elaborated level of knowledge is developing with central guidelines for pedagogical prevention in schools (Hennemann, Hagen & Hillenbrand 2010). The following overarching strategies are of fundamental importance (Ricking 2007, 2014):

1. Integration of the school into the community: cooperation between school, municipal institutions and service providers
2. Early interventions: early activation of the family and learning support within a preventive approach
3. Strategies for dealing with pupils at risk, such as school mentors, alternative forms of school and learning opportunities outside school, where appropriate
4. Support of the professional development of teachers, regarding activating forms of learning and individualized learning opportunities

The aim of pedagogical prevention in the area of a school is to strengthen and promote the presence and intrinsic participation in learning. It is therefore not primarily a matter of physical presence, but rather of involving all pupils in school and teaching through relationships and learning opportunities, and in this way making school a positive experience. A multimodal concept of prevention and early intervention in school absenteeism in schools consists of ten building blocks assigned to three levels (school, class and system), each represents a set of prevention and intervention strategies in a defined area of action (Ricking 2007, 2014). The levels are briefly explained below, and selected modules are shown in more detail.

						Didactic-Methodic Framework	Teacher's Behavior
C **Level** **System**	9 Cooperation with Parents			10 Cooperation with Communal Institutions			
B **Level** **Class**	5 Parenting/Relation- (ship)s	6 Promotion of Learning Skills	7 Mentoring	8 Enforcement of Attendance			
A **Level School**	1 Pedagogical Attitude	2 Attention / Registration	3 Safety in School	4 Social Learning			

Figure 4: Framework for the Encouragement of Student's Attendance and Participation
(Ricking 2014)

A Level School

Attitude: School Absenteeism as a Pedagogical Challenge

The attitude of a school/the staff towards school nonperformance reflects its understanding of the subject matter and often decides the question whether teachers feel pedagogically addressed at all in view of absenteeism. The legal definition of compulsory school attendance and forced school attendance does not necessarily give rise to an educational initiative. To overcome the still recognizable taboo of this problem, an open and solution-oriented attitude is seen as contemporary professionalism, from which helpful activities develop and which leads towards the prevention of absenteeism in the school-educational field of activity (Ricking 2014).

Registration of Absenteeism

The precondition for an appropriate handling of school nonperformance is whether they are perceived at all. This means that the presence of students must become the teacher's focus of attention, corresponding routines in data recording should be established and thus makes reliable assessments of the situation possible. Especially in large schools with frequent changes of teachers and rooms, the number of unreported cases is relatively high. The student's perspective must also be considered: If a student fails to attend school for a day and realizes that it has not even been noticed they expect that there is no reaction from the school, this acts as the best motivator for a student to continue with their absenteeism. In schools, which want to know more about their position regarding attendance and absence, absences are not only recorded in the class register, but the data is summarized, evaluated and presented so that the development of the attendance rate at school, year and class level can be discussed and interpreted and the pedagogical conclusions have a solid basis (Albers & Ricking 2018).

Consistent Rules for Excuses

The registration of absenteeism must be a standardized school-wide process including an arrangement with the parents, if possible in a way that they register an ill child by telephone the same morning (e.g. by 9.00 a.m.). If neither an excuse nor the pupil arrives at school, the responsible teachers or responsible school staff can be active towards the absence and react promptly (Reid 2014).

Ensuring Safety

One premise for successful learning processes and healthy psychosocial development is the feeling of security and acceptance at school, which is endangered by violent interaction such as bullying. Bullying refers to covert systematic harassment of individuals over a longer period to humiliate and socially exclude them (Alsacker 2003).

Bullying follows a system: it is a recurring pattern of action (e.g. spreading, ridiculing, mimicking, threatening and carrying out violence, humiliating and torturing) to which the victim is exposed for a long time without support in the group. This creates stress in the victim, causing anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms, with the unpredictability of bullying – when is the next attack coming? – is described as particularly damaging. Often, the victims often look for the problem within themselves, they do not turn to adults or only at a late stage, and they avoid threatening situations and leave the field. The recognition and reduction of bullying therefore also warrants special attention for the prevention of school absenteeism (Kindler, 2009). Against this backdrop, teachers and parents should pay atten-

tion to behaviors that can be considered as possible indicators of bullying:

- Psychosomatic reactions,
- unexpected performance problems at school,
- difficulties falling asleep,
- social pullback,
- school avoidance behavior and
- Suicidal ideation (Kindler 2009).

Teachers should know about the background of bullying, be aware of signs and potential dangers and address these with the teaching staff and in class, so that pupils are also encouraged to report incidents (offering different complaint channels, e.g. letterboxes, telephone). This calls for an attitude that is clearly opposed to bullying as a form of violence. "Bullying" as an object of instruction or as a school project makes further preventive effects possible.

School Climate

The social climate in schools has a big influence on the well-being of pupils and teachers and has an impact on school attendance behavior. In schools with a positive atmosphere, there is an appreciative and respectful style of communication; accepted standards of behavior are applied within the framework of a school culture suitable for children, which also has a positive effect on active learning time (Ricking 2007, 2014; Kearney 2016).

Social Competence

Social competence in particular is an indispensable quality for school and social integration. Adolescents with behavioral problems often have conflicts that escalate, become violent due to limited communication skills and problem-solving strategies. Fears and aggressions develop, as well as indifference and resignation, which cause psychologically stress, hinder lasting relationships and are unproductive for learning processes. In the view that social conflicts experiences are part of everyday school life for many at risk pupils, the development of social skills is a primary goal. Meanwhile, various prevention and intervention projects and programs to promote social behavior or to reduce violence have found their way into schools, and in some cases are already established and conceptually integrated. At school, social training for individual target pupils (Petermann & Petermann, 2010), teacher programmes, anti-violence concepts such as that of Olweus (2002), which relate to the entire institution, or mediative approaches can play an important role.

Expert in Teaching Staff

It is important to increase the professional knowledge about school absenteeism (e.g. on risk factors, diagnostic options, school-related prevention and intervention) within the teaching staff. One option is to establish a person from the teaching staff who is particularly interested in the topic and who has advisory competence to establish himself as an expert and a contact person. In addition, the topic must be anchored much more clearly than before in training and further education (Mutzeck et al. 2004; Ricking 2007, 2014).

B Level Class

Importance of Teacher-Student-Relation(ship)s

Experiences clearly indicate the great importance of the teacher-pupil relationship in dealing with pupils being at risk of disintegration at school (Mutzeck et al. 2004). They drift away from class and school because there is no one who binds them personally (Juvonen 2006). Teachers working on the relationship level pay attention to emotional open-mindedness and a friendly, optimistic appearance to facilitate a trusting relationship with the students. The strengthening of the class teacher principle – the teacher and their classes work together for a substantial part of the weekly hours – is regarded as an essential foundation for the creation of sustainable pedagogical relationships.

Noting Warning Signs

The dissociation of a pupil from class and school, which can be seen in the behavior of the pupil, often shows a problematic correspondence in an inner defensive attitude towards school action. It is expressed in refusal to learn or pullback and indifference towards school, but also shown by tardiness and clear teaching disturbances (possibly as a sign of content or social decoupling) or inappropriately long absences due to minor illnesses (which can be understood initially as fear-related avoidance behavior with psychosomatic components). Such patterns of behavior should be perceived by teachers as warning signs that can escalate into school absenteeism (Schulze & Wittrock 2008).

High-Quality Education and Competent Classroom Management

Although our empirical knowledge is still limited, teaching as a condition plays an important role, especially for truancy. Good experiences, also with school-aversive pupils, have been made so far with lessons based on the pupils' world of experience (cf. Chapter 6). This takes the respective performance level into account, in which the pupils can develop ideas themselves and bring them into the lessons, experience the learning object in an active and product-oriented manner (e.g. workshop lessons, projects, action-oriented lessons, student company) (Voigt & Ricking 2008).

In addition to didactic aspects, the quality of classroom management plays an important role in the prevention of school aversion and school absenteeism. In this context, the method of classroom management offers a wealth of relatively reliable procedures, which use promises low-interference, learning-intensive teaching and counteracts disintegration at school (Hennemann & Hillenbrand 2007). The focus is on teaching children who behave contrary to expectations and take advantage of opportunities to get out of lessons. It is essentially about the teacher establishing and evaluating clear processes and routines within their teaching in classroom. At its heart, the teachers express their expectations of the students' learning and behavior and show them their own responsibility for successful school learning.

Learning Success

It is understandable that notoriously unsuccessful students, who are often exposed to considerable stress outside school, tend to avoid the place of failure. Frequent feedback of incapability is creates an unstable self-concept and is self-damaging. Many students with school-avoidant behavior or tendencies need school success and often appropriate professional framing and support to realize this (Sutphen et al. 2010). These include educational measures for differentiation, changes in assessment modalities (e.g. use of the individual reference standard, in which the individual achievements of a child are compared at different points of time) or options for intensive small group and individual support (Ricking 2006, 2014).

Reaction from school

An illicit absence should be followed up in a timely manner by the school. This can be done, for example, by a telephone call with the legal guardians or by visiting, addressing and picking up the student. The reintegration process is possible when the student does not slip out of sight and remains in pedagogical focus. In this way, the school emphasizes a clear attitude towards the importance of the attendance of each individual student.(Kearney 2016; Reid 2014).

Reinforcement of school attendance

In the theoretical sense of learning, it can be assumed that appropriate and inappropriate behavior has been learned and can therefore be forgotten or relearned again. This is done by building desired or appropriate behavior and reducing unwanted or inappropriate behavior using behavior modification techniques. Instead of paying attention to unwanted student behavior, teachers should not take appropriate, targeted behavior for granted and systematically reinforce it. From the multitude of possible techniques, it has proven effective in the prevention of absenteeism

to systematically use positive amplifiers, token systems and behavioral contracts/contingency contracts. The systematic reinforcement of school attendance and active participation in lessons is directly related to the actual goals of absenteeism prevention: to enable effective learning processes to be sustained and thus to regain the student's participation in lessons and school life (Linderkamp 2012).

C Level System
Cooperation with Parents

Close cooperation between parents and teachers is considered one of the most effective resources of preventing and intervening for absenteeism. Parents and teachers should make agreements that structure the exchange and thus create the basis for secure interaction and commitment. To counter the danger of drifting into negative cycles of mutual reproaches, progress in terms of content and approaches to goals should be addressed. Regular contact (not only in the event of a crisis) with the parents of students at risk can create a positive basis for a trusting relationship (Reid 2014; Kearney 2016; Sutphen et al. 2010).

Cooperation with Supportive Services

A schools network is of central importance in the use in further extracurricular competences within a system of professional help. Measures in the context of school absenteeism are often based on cooperation between youth welfare and schools (Thimm 2000). In addition, networks with child and youth psychiatry institutions (Koppe & Ranke 2012), counselling and coordination centers such as the "2nd Chance", the police and institutions of alternative schooling (Popp 2007; Ricking 2014) are required.

VI.   Alternative Learning Environments

Even in times of increasingly inclusive teaching, there are students who are temporarily dependent on special pedagogical support. Therefore, school types offer acceptable alternatives for pupils with major difficulties (e.g. significant behavioral problems, extensive failure to attend school or dropping out of school) (Ricking et al. 2009). They function as intensive pedagogical micro-schools for teaching and extra-curricular support within an individualized approach of special needs education and social pedagogy as well as other professions. The often-considerable need for support of children and young people, especially in the fields of emotional and social development and learning, requires relationship-intensive framing, alternative didactic approaches, pronounced cooperation with legal guardians and the integration into functioning networks of supporting services. These institutions often represent a last chance of reintegration into school and social contexts and usually start where school-aversive behavior has already taken root relatively deeply within a rehabilitative approach.

Most alternative institutions began as model projects for truants initiated by cities or private youth welfare organizations (Christe 2006; Mutzeck et al. 2004). The locations are mostly outside the school (e.g. residential building, former farm or kindergarten), but in some cases they are directly related to (special) schools. Between 10 and 15 seats are usually offered, three to four teachers (mainly teachers and social workers) are employed. In this way, a necessary pedagogical intensity and an individual case reference are achieved which is often not feasible at school. At work, it is essential to convey the school to pupils as a meaningful institution, to promote their motivation to learn and thus to reopen them to pedagogical and educational influences. Living and learning together in a clear group creates good conditions for achieving progress in social behavior through positive community experiences. Finally, it is also about an emotional stabilization of the adolescents in the context of a positive self-concept and a realistic self-image. A tripartite structure with socio-pedagogical, learning and vocational / work-pedagogical elements, which can be found in many alternative schooling facilities, reflects the principle of needs-oriented and comprehensive interdisciplinary support (Popp 2007; Ricking 2014).

VII. Conclusion

It can be summarized that a considerable proportion of our students benefit only little from the school's learning opportunities. They do not or barely achieve the educational goals and thus have a low educational participation. Even if absenteeism is usually regarded as an individual problem, it is also an indicator of the integration power of schools and our society. Schools have the task of creating a learning and living space for weaker and marginalized students, which allows them to participate, makes school a positive experience and is accompanied by positive psychosocial development. It is not enough to simply consider repressive measures to prevent failures. It is rather necessary to create conditions at school, with the pupil, with the parents, in the community, so that the joy of learning, the presence at school, the participation in school is possible and the personal learning gain can develop positively.

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