

The Changing Meaning of Schools for Children: Focusing on All-day Schools in Germany

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Abstract

In the early 2000s, the traditional roles of schools were criticized in Germany because of the “PISA shock.” Since 2003, the all-day school system has been introduced in Germany. This chapter aims to analyze German education “from a Japanese perspective” and focuses on the following two points: 1) how the traditional norms of education in Germany are being questioned, and 2) how the meaning of school for children has changed through the introduction of the all-day school system.

I. Introduction

In Germany, three areas—school, home, and outside school (youth services; *Jugendhilfe*)—are recognized as partners, sharing the role of education equally¹ (Ikuta, 2011). Under the traditional norms of education in Germany, the roles of schools have been limited, teaching only academic subjects, and schools are recognized as “teaching schools”. Education that deals with the child’s personality or anything related to their daily lives was the responsibility of the home and outside school (Helsper/Hummrich, 2006).

This relationship between school, home, and outside school in education was maintained through the half-day school (*Halbtagschule*) system, in which school ended by 1 pm or earlier. Germany was one of the few countries in Europe that still maintained the half-day school system. Under this half-day school system, how children would spend their time in the afternoon was left to the discretion of each home (i.e., the parents). This is why Germany is known for its extensive development of an outside school culture for children (Giesecke, 2002). Toyama-Bialke emphasized this point through comparative research between Germany and Japan. In Japan, schools are the primary venue for socialization. On the other hand, schools in Germany are places only for the transmission of knowledge, and the outside school education, such as attending whatever regional sports clubs the parents might allow, or building relationships with friends outside school, plays a very important role in socialization (Toyama-Bialke, 2000; Toyama-Bialke, 2001).

However, at the end of 2001, Germany experienced the “PISA shock”, and the traditional norms of education, especially the limited educational involvement of schools, was criticized. Since then, the school system has been radically reformed and became an all-day school (*Ganztagsschule*) policy. In 2003, the all-day school policy was introduced in most states². Traditional German education approaches, such as schools maintaining a distance toward

1. Development of the traditional relationship between three areas with clear sharing roles in Germany is specifically related to historical German factors, such as reflection after World War II and East German (German Democratic Republic) differentiation— GDR introduced the full-day school system before the wall was taken down (Hagemann, 2009; Fukawa, 2013).
2. All-day school has been defined as being in session more than three days per week, with each day having at least seven lesson hours. Furthermore, KMK categorized all-day school into three types (KMK, 2011). First, the “all students are obligated (*die voll gebundene Form*)”

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children and families and not involving them directly, have been questioned and reconsidered in the discussion about introducing all-day school. Trying to strengthen the emotional support each student receives, and to create an approach that involves the student's daily life, was a turning point in German educational history (Helsper/Humrich, 2006).

II. Impact of the All-Day School Policy

Because of the “PISA shock”, the traditional limited role of schools as a teaching school was reconsidered, but most of the states merely introduced the “all students are free to participate type” (KMK, 2018). A “free participation type” of school system with after-school care for children is a so-called “reliable half-day school (*Verlässliche Halbtagschule*)”. Naming it this way ensures that the role is clearly divided into the morning lesson time (in which the school has responsibility) and the afternoon after-school care time (in which the outside school has responsibility), so that the “free participation type” cannot override the traditional norms under the half-day school system that taught lessons in the morning (Kielblcok/ Stecher, 2014). The all-day school policy was originally introduced in order to reduce the achievement gap (Holtappels, 2006), but the majority of schools across all federal states are following the pattern of focusing on the introduction of the “free participation” type of schooling, especially in elementary school, as a way to support “the balance between family and work”. In short, after the “PISA shock” occurred, it seems that the school system has been radically reformed, but we must be careful to understand that the traditionally separate roles of the three areas in a half-day school system are still being maintained in this society.

Although quantitatively very small, in order to reduce the achievement gap, the “all students are obligated to participate” type has been introduced in Germany as well. This type will try to expand the role of schools, prompting the argument that the traditional relationship between the three areas is changing (Coelen/ Rother, 2014). The research—which has focused on an all-day school in an area of Bremen that has a high number of immigrants (Haydn School), in which Bremen focused politically only on the “all students are obligated” type—suggests the conclusions about the changing relationship between school, home, and outside school (Fukawa, 2018a).

The results of the fieldwork conducted in Haydn School show that introducing an all-day school system with obligatory participation implies breaking away from the traditional limited role of schools of focusing on teaching only. That new working members at the school—childcare workers (*Erzieher/in*), social workers (*Sozialarbeiter/in*), social pedagogical workers (*Sozialpädagoge*), and facilitators—have diminished, drawing out a clear role for each area. Whereas the half-day school maintained separate roles for the three areas, it is suggested that a new perspective on school will be born from the “all students are obligated” type, which includes the roles of the home and outside school.

This means that the all-day school of the “all students are obligated” type has diminished the meaning of the three separate roles. Establishing a clear role for each area is no longer possible in the obligation type, and it has led to a reconstruction of the methodology and concept of education. Under the all-day school system, education is now described as an interaction among diverse areas working together, with the school coordinating those diverse areas. This phenomenon suggests that the framework supporting children's growth in Germany is now changing fundamentally (Fukawa, 2018a).

III. Changing the Meaning of “School” for Children

If the framework supporting children's growth in Germany is now fundamentally changing through the introduction of the all-day “obligation” type of school, then what has changed the meaning of the school for children?

type means that all students must attend school all day. Second, the “some students are obligated (*die teilweise gebundene Form*)” type means that some students in a grade or students of some classes must attend school all day. Third, the “free participation (*die offene Form*)” type means that each student in the school can choose whether they want to attend all day or not. These definitions by KMK are categorized into only three types, whereas the developing concept and management at the school depends on each state (KMK, 2011). Introducing these definitions is recognized as a minimum consensus between the sixteen states in Germany (Kielblcok / Stecher, 2014).

Under the half-day school system, children were at school from 8 am to 1 pm or earlier. The time spent at school was limited, break times were short, and lesson times were scheduled at 45-minute increments. It suggested that such a timetable tended to be overcrowding for students (Fukawa, 2018b). On the other hand, in an all-day school of the obligation type, students may spend twice as much time at school (from 8 am to 4 pm) in comparison to the half-day school system, offering not only the “time to concentrate (teaching time)”, but also “time to relax” (BMBF, 2009). In an obligation type of all-day school, lesson time is scheduled in 60 to 90-minute increments, and there is “relax time” between one lesson and the next. There is also a two-hour break in the afternoon that includes time for lunch. Generally, the curriculum of the obligation type tends to have more free time for children.

The half-day school had been recognized by children as a learning place; now the school has been restructured to be not only a learning place but also a living space that includes being able to eat and relax with classmates. Traditionally there were only teachers in school, but in the obligation type of all-day school, childcare workers, social workers, social pedagogical workers, and facilitators are working together as “pedagogical co-workers (*Pädagogische Mitarbeiter/in*)”. That means the adults whose children regularly meet at school are also more diversified.

These changes in schools may have a positive influence for example in children from lower social and economic backgrounds, because the space in their own homes is generally limited and school can offer them a place to relax instead of at home. In addition, having not only teachers but also different professionals—the “pedagogical co-workers”—working in the school makes them able to discover children’s difficulties earlier and solve problems by cooperating with the other adults in the school. However, those who attend an obligation type of all-day school must stay in school until 3 or 4 pm. Those children will not have as much time for after-school life compared to children in a half-day school system. Staying longer at school sets limits on children’s friendships, and with their world concentrated more on school. It becomes more difficult for children to develop an outside school culture.

Under the half-day school system, even if there are issues with classmates, there is only three to four hours spent at school, students can go back home and interact with a different peer group outside school. Under the obligation type of all-day school, however, long lunch breaks are spent with classmates; and afternoon times must also be spent together learning the course curriculum. Spending time with the group is unavoidable. For some children who are not familiar with spending time in groups or who do not have good relationships with their classmates, spending a longer time at school will be stressful and unpleasant. Also, for immigrant and refugee children with different cultural backgrounds, if there are no opportunities to respect their mother language and culture, the school will strengthen the idea of assimilation, which makes it more difficult for them to have a positive orientation toward school.

Therefore, if the role of the school is expanding, and students will be spending more time at school, the school environment, the content of education, and the personnel at school must be able to address differences in the children’s backgrounds, respecting their diverse needs. Unless there is diversity in the care for each child, it negatively influences children’s orientation toward school. School attendance will be much more stressful for children. The all-day school policy in Germany highlights those difficulties for children.

IV. Conclusion

Research in the case of the all-day school policy in Germany, especially focusing on the “all students are obligated” type in Bremen, suggests the following. As the role of school has been expanded and children spend more time at school, school attendance will be a burden for children, unless the school environment, the educational curriculum, and school personnel are dedicated enough to respond to children’s diverse backgrounds and various needs. Especially in the case of Germany, the half-day school system is still maintained in society and the decision of parents is more crucial, because they are the ones who choose between a school that ends in the morning and one that also has classes in the afternoon. This means that parents’ decisions influence children’s social interactions and their entire after-school life³.

3. In some states in Germany, where the school choice system has not been introduced, if the school district had only the “all students are obligated” type, parents have a right to reject attendance at the all-day school and choose a half-day school for their child if they prefer.

On the other hand, here in Japan, there is no half-day school system and every school is an all-day school; hence, parents have no choice from the start of their child's schooling. In addition, for children, it is "normal" for school to end in the afternoon. In a country where all schools operate under an all-day system, there is no term such as an "all-day school" or a "half-day school." The discussion about an all-day school itself is unique to Germany (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009).

In recent years in Japan, the time spent at school has become longer because of the criticism from "*Yutori Education*," which was designed to relieve the pressure on students and broaden their perspective and creative abilities. This was due to the Japanese version of a "PISA shock" in the middle 2000s. As a result, not only lesson hours but also the content of the curriculum was increased. Reflection to "*Yutori Education*" are now keywords aimed at improving academic achievement. Also, children's holiday periods (Saturdays and summer vacation) have been shortened to increase the number of lesson hours, this was to allow school visiting days for parents on Saturday to occur almost every month and so on. As a result of these changes, the physical and mental burden on children becomes greater. With the new educational policy aimed at staying longer at the school, there is no discussion about the importance of adding in time for relaxation. Discussion tends to concentrate mainly on increasing the number of lesson hours; how to create a comfortable learning and relaxing environment for children is rare and seen as less important. These differences between Germany and Japan are influenced by cultural, social, historical differences, such as differences in the teaching profession, the concept of working time, and so on. Spending time at school is becoming longer and also the curricular content of education is increasing. In addition, in the case of Japan, children of foreign nationalities have no obligation to attend school. Comparative studies of Japan and Germany are needed to determine how schools reflect these diverse needs.

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