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Beyond Public and Welfare Agencies

Is social work in schools a possibility to enhance capabilities?

Against the background of the Capability Approach (a normative framework for the evaluation of individual well-being) education contributes substantially to the “intelligent choice between different types of lives that a person can lead” (Sen 2003, p. 12). In Terms of the Critical Theory of Education one of the central aims of education is to enable individuals to a self-determined and self-aware way of life (Scherr 2005).

In this regard the principle task of school is not only to provide knowledge but also to take charge of the students` self-development and self-fulfilment.

The aim of my PhD Thesis is to investigate under the example of The Experimental College “Oberstufen-Kolleg Bielefeld”, whether and how school is able to meet the challenge to conceive education as more than knowledge transfer and thereby to what degree it is able to enhance capabilities of young people.

The Oberstufen-Kolleg provides several compulsive and optional support systems to foster the students. One of these support systems is School Social Work which I will zoom on in the following.

The social work office is located in the school building an accessible during the whole school day. The students are invited to come there with all concerns. Social work located directly in the school can be seen as a low-threshold offer for orientation and help.

In my first explorative analysis of the support system “school social work” three key issues have become apparent, namely: financial problems, accommodation/ dormitory and health. Referring to Martha Nussbaum’s List of Central Human Capabilities (Nussbaum 2000) everyone should be able to have good health, to be adequate nourished and to have adequate shelter. The three key issues bear on these central capabilities.

From these considerations arose two research questions:

1. Which students make use of the offers given by the school social work (SES, family situation et cetera)?

2. Are these offers adequate to enhance capabilities?

I will present preliminary results based on qualitative interviews and a quantitative study.

References

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