Editorial

School Libraries and Librarianship in Germany: Opportunities and Outliers

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Germany proposed and implemented various educational reforms in reaction to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) “shock” of 2000 when the country’s scores were unexpectedly low. Professional library associations in Germany pointed to Finland’s success in PISA where Finnish students tend to use libraries more often than students from the other OECD countries. But in Germany, it is estimated that less than ten percent of pupils have access to a professionally developed school library and far fewer have access to a credentialed teacher librarian.

In 2009, I was chosen to be part of a distinguished library science faculty group sponsored by the Goethe Institut to learn about library education in Germany and soon discovered that coursework for teacher librarianship didn’t exist. As we visited library science programs in Cologne, Potsdam, Stuttgart, and Berlin I began to wonder how could any of the students I met aspire to a career as a school librarian if they have never experienced a school library in their life or been exposed to the possibilities that school libraries provide?

That visit initiated a sustained quest to find out more about school libraries and school librarians in Germany. Brigitte Doellgast from the Goethe Institut’s Librarian in Residence program was also intrigued. She reached out to her colleagues and found two teacher librarians in Germany, Helga Hofmann and Julia Rittel, who were interested in coming to the U.S. to learn about school libraries. Julia authors, “Actionbound at School: An Introduction to Library Use with Apps & Co” in this issue. Julia and Helga spent three weeks at Florida State University and in Orlando where they visited a wide array of school libraries. Melissa Johnston, who coordinated their visits and conducted research on them, provides us with what has transpired since 2010 in “Revisiting an International Exchange of Best Practices Between German and American Teacher Librarians.” As Dr. Johnston describes in her article, we travelled back to Germany and visited school libraries there, presented at the German national conference, Deutsche Bibliotheekartag, and published in the journal, Buch und Bibliothek about school librarianship.

These cross-cultural experiences revealed a community of school library advocates in Germany. One of the most sustaining members of that community is Günther Schlamp, who along with Hans Günther Brée, describes grassroots efforts to establish school libraries in, “A Regional German School Library Association: A Story of Success?” Another is Dr. Heike Lammers-Harlander from Gymnasium Donauwoerth where in “Embracing the Future and the Past – A New Model For German School Libraries “she describes her school library program that
“visualizes possibilities and boundaries of creative and successful educational teamwork and presents a model for an altered school library system in Germany, closely related to international paradigm.” In Germany, this program might be referred to as an outlier. Readers will be interested in her descriptions of the libraries at various levels in her system as well as the historical background of why school libraries may not have developed. We are fortunate to have in this issue a preview of what will be published about school libraries in the forthcoming book, *Portals to the Past and to the Future: Libraries in Germany.* (4th ed.), written by Jürgen Seefeldt and Dr. Ludger Syrè, which provides further insight into the historical, as well as related political and cultural factors in, “German School Libraries – Requirement and Reality.”

In my own research, I have continued to probe and test the waters. “Education for Teacher Librarians in Germany,” reports on my recent study, which surveyed 174 members of the library community in Germany as to how receptive they would be to establishing coursework in school librarianship because it currently does not exist. Another American colleague, Dr. Jamie Campbell Naidoo, provides us with opportunities to conduct research outside of München, “Exploring a World of Treasures at Munich’s beautiful and well-resourced Internationale Jugendbibliothek/International Youth Library (IJB/IYL)” which is open to all.

As I read and edited these articles, it became clear that Germany reflects the universal professional themes that we discuss and lament through IASL. How many school libraries exist? What IS a school library? Is it a room of books, or a professionally staffed facility where learning takes place? What is the staffing? Do volunteers and parents count? How do we advocate for school libraries and teacher librarians when the public believes that “everything can be found on the Internet?” “How do we convince others about the valuable role of school libraries in raising test scores?” How do we impact the government to establish equal and universal school libraries throughout a country? We are fortunate to have this organization where we can share our ideas and research.

**Author Note**

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