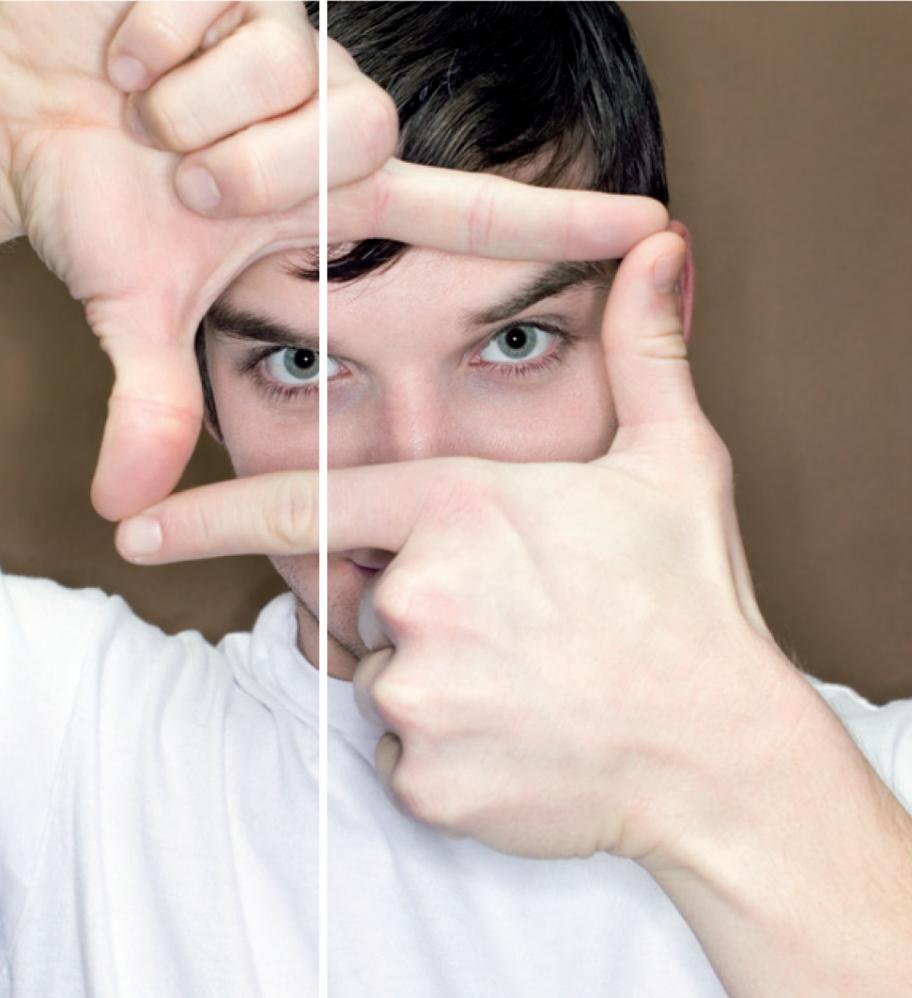


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**BHP OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE**  
**SPECIAL EDUCATOR**



BERUFS- UND FACHVERBAND HEILPÄDAGOGIK E.V.  
*Für Menschen. MitMenschen.*







## 1. Preamble

The following occupational profile follows up on the occupational profile adopted by the BHP General Meeting in 1986 and 2001.

It is supposed to show the self-conception, characteristics, principles and areas of practice of the profession of special educators/Heilpädagogen.

It is a model which describes, specifies and norms the self-profile, value and references of special education<sup>1</sup>/Heilpädagogik within the network of related social, pedagogic, psychological and medical professions.

Special education/Heilpädagogik is an independent science and profession within social work, with specific tasks and competences. Special educators counsel, support, educate and accompany persons with special needs and their social environment.

The professionals include graduates from professional schools and academies as well as graduates from study courses of special education/Heilpädagogik at colleges and universities.

The BHP as a professional association is committed to a high quality of special educational services.

Short-time further education courses for social pedagogues or social caregivers do not fulfil these quality requirements.

Special educational services can thus only be performed by special educators.

Professional actions in special education/Heilpädagogik are actions of individual persons who perform their professional tasks in freedom and responsibility to the best of their knowledge and judgment. They sensitise society for the concerns of special education/Heilpädagogik. At the same time, special educators act on behalf of social entities. Professional actions of special education/Heilpädagogik are therefore also essentially determined by social opportunities and limits.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "special education" is internationally associated with schools. We use it as a translation of the German term "Heilpädagogik" in this text and explicitly refer to it in a non-school context. Other common terms are inclusive education, remedial education, therapeutic pedagogy and curative pedagogy. The numerous possible terms highlight the spectrum of special educational professionalism and areas of practice. The German term "Heilpädagogik" literally means "curative pedagogy", however, at this point it is important to stress that this term does not describe medical curing. Due to its long, diverse and varied history, the BHP holds on to the term "Heilpädagogik". There have been many discussions about this term. The BHP understands the word "Heil" (English "curative", but also "whole") in the sense of "holistic", to emphasize the special educational conception of man and its comprehensive view of people with disabilities.

The social framework and conditions, in which special educational actions are performed, can be described by the following terms:

- increasing individualisation and pluralisation of lifestyles and life situations
- growing functionalisation of social processes
- unsolved challenges regarding the integration of people with migration backgrounds
- internationalisation and cultural, political and economic globalisation that demands more tolerance and cosmopolitanism, but causes scarcity of resources and distribution conflicts in some regions of the world

Within this social area of tension, the requirements for theory and practice have changed. Today, the central, guiding principles of special education/Heilpädagogik are:

- inclusion
- self-determination
- participation in all aspects of social life
- qualification and (self-)empowerment of the client
- legal equality of all people

Special education/Heilpädagogik is required to critically reflect and constantly evaluate all forms of education, guidance and care with regard to changes in areas of special education/Heilpädagogik and social conditions. In the last few decades, much has been achieved in the field of living situations of people with special needs. In addition to this, inclusion demands further change processes. The BHP explicitly supports and promotes the implication of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>2</sup> to achieve full and effective participation of people with disabilities in social life, as formulated in particular in articles 24–30 of the Convention.

Special educators actively contribute to creating inclusive structures, as demanded.

The BHP does not view the heterogeneity as a reason for separating and excluding areas in life, education and support, but rather as a pedagogical challenge.

Special educators essentially contribute to the realisation of the right for education for people with disabilities within the general educational system and the ensurance of the necessary support.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the rights of people with disabilities of 12/13/2006; resolution for implementation of the Federal Government of Germany of 12/21/2008 (Bundesgesetzblatt 2008, Part II, No. 35).

## 2. Professional ethics

The foundation of special education/Heilpädagogik is the awareness for and the confrontation with normative, ethical and anthropological principles and subjects.

It is based on the understanding that every human being is a person from the beginning of their life – they do not have to become one. There are no conditions attached!

This is why special educators of BHP actively advocate for the principles of equality laid out in the German Basic Law. The social and governmental efforts laid out in the "Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz" (Equal Treatment Act) are guidance for special educators. They specify to offer every individual seeking advice or help the best possible form of help, regardless of their gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, colour of skin, social status, race, religion, language or political views.

In addition, special educators at BHP adhere to the following professional ethics:

- They respect their clients' right to life, dignity and self-determination
- They consider every person to be capable of education
- They respect and support every person's right to an individual development of their personality and social participation
- They view people in their social environment and understand them as a whole

For them, acting ethically professional and an ethically professional self-conception also signifies:

- to constantly professionalise one's own activities, to reflect and question them in multi-professional teams
- to be prepared to study further in the sense of lifelong learning
- to avoid discrimination and not to take advantage of interdependencies
- to strictly respect privacy and respectfully and responsibly treat information about one's own occupational area and field of activity.

The members of BHP are committed to adhere to these professional ethics.

### 3. The self-conception of special education/Heilpädagogik

Special education/Heilpädagogik considers itself as an integral part of pedagogy. It is the empirically founded and value-guided science of diagnosis, support, education, guidance, assistance and counselling of people with disabilities as well as the counselling and advice of relatives. Special educational actions can also pursue therapeutic intentions.

Special education/Heilpädagogik is individual, interactive, value-oriented and meaning-oriented. On the one hand, it relies on the complexity of human existence and supports persons with disabilities in their development, independence and participation through personal assistance services. On the other hand, special education/Heilpädagogik considers and influences the relevant social and socio-cultural reference systems of its clients, in order to realise the persons' participation in social life.

This work is supported by the knowledge of psychology, sociology, psychiatry, medicine, law, theology and (philosophic) anthropology. The relationship of theory and practice in special education/Heilpädagogik towards its reference sciences is historically tense. Their influence on the development of special education has always been very distinctive and it took a long time until Paul Moor's saying "Special education is pedagogy and nothing else" has become the consensus of special educational theory. Since then, Paul Moor's classifying saying has been constantly developed.

The special educational conception of man includes a comprehensive view of people with disabilities. This conception of man, which is characterised by its holistic view of people, emphasises the inseparable unity of physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions that substantiate in every single person in an individually unique and equal way. For this elementary point view, the term special education/Heilpädagogik is characterising.

The special educational fields of practice include education, teaching, support and accompanying of people of all ages with physical, mental or emotional disabilities, possible disabilities or impairment of children with developmental problems and impairments as well as adolescents with behavioural problems.

Special education/Heilpädagogik as an action-related science needs to act according to special educational practice. It is supposed to explain, initiate, critically accompany and further develop actions of special education/Heilpädagogik.

It develops, founds and reviews concepts of theory and action which combine general and special parts, i. e. theory and practice. Special education/Heilpädagogik as science

and practice is oriented at a central regulation of action, the principle of individualisation. According to this principle, every case is individual and needs to be respected as unique and distinctive in its subjective and inter-subjective relations.

According to this conception, special educational practice is an interpersonal, communicative practice of being together (living, learning, working, leisure time).

Special educational actions in this sense require sophisticated and complex expertise on part of the professional as well as attributes and qualifications that correspond to the holistic approach of special education/Heilpädagogik. In education and further education, the specific requirements of special educational activities have to be considered appropriately.

When exercising their jobs, professional special educators have comprehensive and reliable specialist knowledge regarding the causes and effects of disabilities for a person as well as expertise of development theory and special education/Heilpädagogik, in order to be able to understand and act according to this in concrete situations.

The conditions for the development of a personality and new competences of a person are increased with the help of a diagnostically justified selection and indication of special educational methods. They are targeted in a way that transitions to new developmental phases can be managed and perceived in a positive way.

The special educational relationship creates the development of an offer of help, where the person seeking for help becomes a self-active and self-responsible partner. At the same time, encouragement to diversity and self-acceptance, in particular under difficult requirements and conditions, are important issues.

## 4. Special educational actions

Special educational actions are generally directed towards the realisation of inclusion of people with disabilities, with the aim to increase their self-determination and social participation.

Special educational actions are professional pedagogic actions that require a corresponding ethical attitude which is characterised by empathy and appreciation for the client. Furthermore, special educators are always oriented on the client's resources and try to understand, accompany and/or support his or her individual course of life and conception.

Special educators have particular methodical-therapeutic and methodical-didactic as well as rehabilitative competences.

They are independent and professional specialists in their areas of practice. Special educational assistance can only be performed by special educators.

Special educational actions are based on a special understanding of disability. According to this, disability is no characteristic of a person, but just the result of a complex interaction between individual and extra-individual factors. Disability is the conceptual term for a disabled relationship between the person described as "disabled" and his or her social environment. Disability is always relative and relational. There is no objective fact of "disability". What is described as disability in an individual case is a pragmatic determination with the purpose to give disadvantaged people access to help. This remains a dilemma in the current social legislation – only "disabled" people receive help or have legal right for help. Special educational actions are widely affected by this.

### 4.1 Special educational concepts of action

Specific concepts of action of special education/Heilpädagogik which are based on research and evaluation have been developed for the realisation of personal and social integration/inclusion of people with disabilities and developmental impairments.

Diagnosis, indication, realisation and evaluation of measures and methods of support, education, learning, counselling and accompanying are essential parts of special educational actions, also in order to preventively counteract disabling factors. They form the special educational concepts of action and are constantly reflected and further developed in practice and science.

#### 4.1.1 Special educational diagnosis

Professional actions of special education/Heilpädagogik require cause and reason, i. e. an indication. This is part of a comprehensive special educational diagnosis which introduces and accompanies the professional action process as initial and follow-up diagnostic procedure (condition and process diagnostic procedure). Its methodical forms are:

- Diagnostic conversations (case history, exploration)
- Diagnostic behavioural monitoring and analysis (inclusive behavioural and developmental inventories)
- Biographical work
- Psycho-diagnostic procedures (tests on performance, development and personality, projective procedures).

Special educational diagnosis comprises perceiving, understanding/explaining and acting; it is related to individual cases and respects the client with his or her subjective goals, biographical characteristics and social relations.

Special educators increasingly orientate their diagnostic actions on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) which has been approved by the general meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO). With the ICF, the stigma disability recedes into the background in diagnosis and the abilities of the disabled person in his or her different dimensions of existence are highlighted. This is a paradigm shift which sustainably challenges special education/Heilpädagogik.

#### 4.1.2 Methodical elements of special educational actions

Special educational actions are carried out in individual settings or group settings. According to one's personal focus, the following special educational methods are integrated:

- Sensory training and sensorial-integrative training
- Basal-pedagogical activation/supportive care
- Support through play/special educational play therapy
- Elements of psychodrama
- Special educational development support
- Special educational personality training
- Behavioural modification
- Psychomotricity, rhythmic
- Crafting, designing, playing music
- Special educational riding and vaulting

- Animal-assisted training
- Lingual and communicational support
- Validation

Methodical elements of the following general, systemic and psychosocial approaches are also integrated in special educational practice:

- Counselling (individual, system or organisational counselling)
- Parents and family training
- Group work
- Networking

Professional special educational actions include

- Interdisciplinary
- Development of concepts
- Evaluation
- Supervision
- Quality development, assurance and control of the measures carried out within organisational-institutional conditions.
- Documentation and presentation of the results, data and findings.

## **4.2 Special educational areas of practice**

The following list of possible areas of practice for special educators is related to activities or residency and is mostly realised in an interdisciplinary context. There is no requirement on completeness.

### **4.2.1 Age-related areas of practice:**

- Special educational early training and education
- Special educational elementary and pre-school education
- Counselling for schools and education
- School-accompanying training, special schools, integrative schooling
- Special educational crisis intervention
- Vocational preparation and training
- Instructions and assistance of integrational measures, workshops for people with disabilities or psychic disorders, work programmes, securing of jobs and counselling for employers and non-disabled employees

- Assistance in living and leisure activities
- Children and youth assistance
- Special educational adult education (andragogics)
- Pedagogic-therapeutic areas like speech therapy and psychomotricity therapy
- Special educational geragogics
- Management of institutions
- Research, education and further education

#### **4.2.2** Residency-related areas of practice:

- Premature infant ward/early training centres, social pediatric centres and ambulances
- Special educational practices or offices
- Special kindergartens, special educational kindergartens, integrative kindergartens, integrative day care centres and facilities, pre-schools and preparatory learning
- Educational, family and school advice centres/family centres
- Stationary and partly stationary institutions of educational assistance (e.g. day groups and homes)
- Clinics for psychiatry/psychotherapy
- Children's, youth and family aid, family support services
- Alternative projects in the area of children's, youth and social aid (e.g. intensive special educational individual measures)
- Schools (regular schools, special schools and schools for children with learning difficulties)
- Free Practices (special educational, child and youth psychiatry, pedagogic, psychological-psycho-therapeutic practices)
- Vocational training centres/rehabilitation institutions/workshops for disabled people
- Stationary and partly stationary homes and residential groups of disability assistance
- Special educational ambulances
- Retirement and nursing homes
- Multi-generation houses
- Professional schools, colleges and universities
- Professional associations
- Penal institutions (e.g. forensic psychiatries)

## 5. History of special education/Heilpädagogik

Since the beginning of the 18th century, there have been increasing systemic approaches of educationally shaped assistance for the disabled. These approaches were first directed to children and adolescents who were deaf-mute, blind or physically disabled. At the beginning of the 19th century, first systematic approaches of pedagogic work with so-called moronic and neglected children have been reported.

J. H. Pestalozzi (1746–1827) and his work – he took care of “poor, neglected and disabled” children – are the common historic roots of special education/Heilpädagogik and social pedagogy.

In the middle of the 19th century, the anthropologist and pedagogue Jan Daniel Georgens (1823–1886) and the pedagogue Heinrich Marianus Deinhardt (1821–1880) introduced the term special education/Heilpädagogik for the first time to unite all previous approaches of caring, pedagogic and medical assistance for disabled people in one term. They determined: “Special education in total is a branch of general pedagogy”; however, it is also an “intermediate of medicine and pedagogy”.

From the history of the diverse attempts of special education/Heilpädagogik, it can be clearly understood that special education/Heilpädagogik as a science has derived from practice. Special education/Heilpädagogik has long been in a field of tension between medicine, theology, psychology and pedagogy. Most institutions of disability assistance outside schools were institutions of church and welfare or charitable organisations; their practice was therefore of strong religious influence.

In the 19th century, an independent specialist discipline was merely at its beginnings. The first college for special education/Heilpädagogik was founded in Budapest, Hungary, at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1924, the first professorship for special education/Heilpädagogik was given to Heinrich Hanselmann (1885–1960) at the University of Zurich. The further development of special education/Heilpädagogik as a pedagogical discipline was mainly shaped by the Swiss theory of special education/Heilpädagogik (particularly Paul Moor 1899–1977). The first specialised textbooks of this specific field were also based on this theory.

The special meaning of school as a facility of socialisation in the framework of the educational system led to the fact that a part of special education/Heilpädagogik, namely scholastic special education, has been strongly concentrated on schools in theory and practice since the end of the 19th century, whereas there has always been the practice of special education/Heilpädagogik outside of schools.

In general, however, the term special education/Heilpädagogik refers to areas of practice both in and outside of schools.

Special education/Heilpädagogik in Germany suffered a severe setback during the Nazi time. Eugenic and racist tendencies which had already been latently present in society culminated to planned actions of enforced sterilisations, selection and mass murder of people with disabilities and mental illnesses under the Nazi regime.

After the Second World War, the destroyed tradition of pedagogical disability assistance had to be grindingly reinstalled in Germany. First, this rebuilding was strongly concentrated on schools (expansion of a structured system of special education/Heilpädagogik); in addition, the expansion of further special educational environments was increasingly supported (early training, special educational kindergartens, work and living areas, family counselling).

In East Germany, the term rehabilitation pedagogy was used. This described a comprehensive science which included medical, pedagogical, social and environmental aspects. The basic concept was based on the ideological maxims of Marxism-Leninism.

History shows that the mission of care and protection was not always ensured in the past. Only now the suffering of children in stationary institutions in the 1950s and 1960s came to its necessary processing. The BHP is committed to further reflect the history of special education/Heilpädagogik in a critical point of view.

## 6. Education and further education for special educators

### 6.1 History

After the first additional seminars (usually one year) for experienced educators, youth leaders and social workers, professional schools with its educational offers for state-certified special educators have been established at the beginning of the 1960s. At the beginning of the 1970s, the first independent study courses for special education/Heilpädagogik were introduced at universities of applied sciences. Next to the education of social workers and social pedagogues, there was the possibility to graduate as special educator, later with the Diplom degree.

## 6.2 General requirements

The requirements for the job as special educator include a high percentage of empathy, interest and understanding for the life situation of other people as well as acceptance of different lifestyles. In addition to that, special educators should be able to adequately deal with their own emotional and physical strains.

The dimensions of dependency and independence in assisting relationships show their own dynamics which require a special responsibility, ethical bond and personal maturity.

The readiness and ability to work together with colleagues of other professions as well as the ability to reflect and self-criticism are essential.

The education for special educators is very demanding in regard to its professionalism and necessity of personal commitment.

The former study course which ended with the award of the academic title of "Diplom special educator" (university of applied sciences or university), is replaced by Bachelor and Master study courses.

## 6.3 Further education

Special educators work at their personal and professional competence by regularly updating, deepening and expanding it. This requires exchange of experience with colleagues and further education in theory and practice.

The BHP offers an extensive programme through its "Europäische Akademie für Heilpädagogik" (EAH) that meets the requirements of the above mentioned eligibility of competences by corresponding points systems.

Furthermore, members of the BHP have the opportunity to exchange and learn by talking to colleagues in their regional groups.

The BHP supports the further development of education by its own initiatives and in close cooperation with the "Ständige Konferenz von Ausbildungsstätten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (StK)" and the "Fachbereichstag Heilpädagogik".

## 7. About BHP

Since 1967, there has been a professional representation for special educators in Germany. The association, which was founded as BHD (Berufsverband der Heilpädagogen in Deutschland, professional association of special educators in Germany), was established as a combination of socio-pedagogical professional organisations at the beginning of the 1980s.

In 1985, the BHP e.V. (Berufs- und Fachverband Heilpädagogik, professional association of special education) was founded as an independent, professional and occupational representation of special educators.

In 2010, 5200 colleagues are members of the BHP. The strong identification with the job and the comprehensive service offers of the BHP have led to a pleasant increase in members. Today, the BHP is the most competent contact for basic questions regarding the occupational profile, occupational area, professional matters, education and further education. It is eager to be a professional source of inspiration, companion and networker in daily professional life for its members.

The BHP as professional association has defined the following objectives in its statute (extract):

„[...] representing the professional interests of its members and promoting and developing special education/Heilpädagogik in practice, teaching and research. The association's responsibility is also to:

- promote, develop and shape the exchange of information and experience among special educators,
- offer specialist conferences, advanced and further education,
- seek exchange with social groups, like political parties, trade unions, employers' organisations and use this according to the association's objectives.
- advocate for the interests of the client in need of special educational work in a participatory sense,
- be a service provider for its members as well as a forum for developments of vocational and professional politics,
- promote European matters and developments,
- support the connection between science and practice by working together with training institutions and universities.“

In order to realise these goals, the association has created a committee structure in which colleagues are working voluntarily.

The professional association of special education/Heilpädagogik obtains its influence and impact to a great extent through the commitment and expertise of its members. Experience, personal effort, professionalism and self-confidence of members working voluntarily contributed to the fact that the inner structure of the association could be expanded and differentiated.

The BHP's members help to solve and advocate ethical principles with their expertise and contribute to further develop the professional outline of special educators. They ensure human and professional standards in the various working fields of special education. The association supports its members on regional and state level.

The International society of professional organizations of educationists (IGhB) was founded following an initiative of the BHP. It shapes the development of European special education/Heilpädagogik in a decisive way.

The vocational-political significance of the BHP as a professional association of many members has gained importance and is both obligation and commitment to consequently continue to follow the core objectives of its work laid out in its statute.

Berlin, November 2010





