

Country Report: Practice and Theory of Teaching Teachers of Philosophy in Germany – a short outline

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In the following, the German educational system with regard to the status and understanding of philosophical *Bildung* and education will be presented in two steps. In a first step we want to give a general overview of the current situation of teacher education and training in philosophy (1). In a second step, we want to present some of the didactic principles of teaching philosophy in school, that are connected with the practical education mentioned above (2).

1. Teacher education and training in philosophy

Teacher education in Germany is basically divided into two phases: the first phase, in almost all parts of Germany, usually includes studies for a Bachelor's degree followed by a Masters-of-Education program and a second phase that consists of a traineeship of 1.5 to 2 years, depending on the province (federal state).

The course of studies structured as a Bachelors and Masters was introduced several years ago after the so-called Bologna Reforms in Europe which were supposed to lead to international equivalency between academic degrees. This course of studies includes a Bachelors course for prospective teachers that already entails some course content relevant to the teaching profession, as well as practical training in schools (*Schulpraktika*) accompanied by seminars. In the Master's phase, where the graduates decide for a main focus on schools, they study, besides so-called educational sciences or pedagogics in their respective discipline, roughly proportionate disciplinary and didactic components.

In the second phase of teacher education that follows after the successful completion of the university studies, the preparatory service (*Vorbereitungsdienst*), the traineeship is taken, where the main educational focus for the prospective teachers is on the teaching work in specific school types. Alongside their activities in the schools, the future teachers attend supplementary seminars that are directed by experienced teachers and coaches (*Fachleiter*). These are teachers that are assigned by the administration for practical education to a corresponding *Centre for School Based Practical Teacher Training (Studienseminar)*.

Traditionally, there are few structural and institutional links between the two educational phases of teacher education. The university, which is responsible for the first phase of teacher education, sees itself as a scientific institution that is guided by theory in its teaching and research practices while on the other hand the *Centres for School Based Practical Teacher Training* are to be understood as more strongly lead by practice, accompanying and educating prospective teachers in their concrete and individual reflection on their respective experience in schools and in teaching. This difference also results in a different organizational structure and work culture. This becomes especially evident in the "Praxissemester" that was arranged in recent years wherein activities are supported by both the university as well as by the

centres. In the *Praxissemester*, the student spends half a year visiting, carrying out and reflecting upon teaching in a specific school for the duration of six months.

The situation of the subject of philosophy in German schools is a special one because of its relationship to the discipline of Catholic or Protestant religious doctrine, which is compulsory in almost all provinces in Germany, as this is guaranteed by an agreement with the churches in the German constitution (*Grundgesetz*). At the same time, all students have the right to take leave of participation in religious education by their own choice after the age of 14. This then entails the obligation for them to take a replacement subject (*Ersatzunterricht*). This generally consists in a subject with an affinity to philosophy. This is designed very differently in the sixteen different German provinces. It ranges from the subject *Ethics, Values and Norms*, to *Philosophizing with Children*, to *Practical Philosophy* right up to the subject of *Philosophy*. In addition to the replacement subject, the subject of philosophy is presented as a subject in its own right at the highest level of high school (*Gymnasium*).

2. Didactic principles of teaching philosophy in school Why should philosophy be taught and learnt in school? This question regarding the educational purpose of teaching philosophy is one of the central challenges of didactics of philosophy. This question of the purpose of teaching philosophy is also always at the same time a question concerning the self-understanding and the legitimacy of disciplinary didactics. Unfortunately, we can not go into the differentiated debates and positions below. In the following, we will at least briefly outline the central features of philosophical education that have been established in the course of the history of didactic theory (see Nida-Rümelin, Spiegel and Tiedemann 2015; Pfister and Zimmermann 2016).

Generally speaking, one can say that in German speaking realm the promotion of critical thinking, that is independent thinking in the sense of epistemic autonomy, the ability to justify beliefs plausibly, the capacity for critical judgment, is held to be the epitome of philosophical education. In other words: the pupils should be enabled to reflectively examine philosophical problems concerning their personal and social environment – and form their own judgment. (Didactic keywords are e.g.: *Selbstdenken*, *Urteilsbildung*, *Philosophieren*.) The goal is thus learning to *philosophize*, *philosophizing* as an activity.

In general, it is assumed that this understanding originally goes back to Kant's account of philosophical education. Kant's introduction of this fundamental Enlightenment principle has experienced a sustained reception and, indeed, a wide resonance in disciplinary didactics since its institutional beginnings in the 1970s. Today it has a paradigm-forming value – and is (mindful of all modifications) almost undisputed.¹² This goal is directly related to the

¹² In passing it should be mentioned that it is surprising that the concept of *critical thinking*, deeply rooted in Anglo-Saxon *philosophy of education*, is almost unnoticed in German language research. There are, of course, fundamental institutional and curricular differences - for instance, that critical thinking is said to be a trans-disciplinary educational approach, while philosophical *Bildung* or education is generally the task of the teaching discipline of philosophy. But a fleeting glance already shows that the representatives of this concept arrive at quite comparable pedagogical-didactic goals: namely to promote reflective, critically independent thinking of the pupils.

principle of the so-called *Problemorientierung mit Lebensweltbezug* (see Thein 2017; Tiedemann 2013). This principle accentuates an orientation in problems with regard to the life-world of the pupils; this means that motives and knowledge relevant to the life-world of the pupils hold as the point of reference for legitimizing the topics of instruction. The teaching topics must present a problem that can be discussed in conflicting ways and that leads to an independent judgment and positioning. An example would be: *Should the state be allowed to subject its citizens to digital surveillance?* This means: questions concerning material and knowledge of the specialist academic discipline are in no way brought into view as an archive of self-defined problems or invariant inventory of truths. The importance of expert knowledge and the legitimacy of philosophy is not of course disputed. On the contrary, what is concretized is the extent to which that specialist knowledge is also relevant to teaching, the process of teaching and learning and the pupils. To put it somewhat more precisely, knowledge of the tradition forms an interpretive horizon in consideration of the motives and challenges of the pupils' life-world. The pupils are thus put in the situation of *reflectively* appropriating and adapting the informative and meaningful answers of the tradition and applying them in a context sensitive manner to the challenges of the life-world. The pupils thus enter into a fruitful dialogue with the tradition (see e.g. Steenblock 2016; Torkler 2015).

It is also connected with these principles that philosophizing in school is understood as a methodically controlled and philosophically qualified activity. There are pertinent theories in which specific methods of philosophy (for example, hermeneutics, analytic philosophical, phenomenology) have been transformed into teaching methods for philosophy teaching (see Martens 2003; Rohbeck 2008). Of course, this does not mean that the the subject matter of instruction in philosophy is inevitably arbitrary; it rather shows that a philosophical content must be qualified in accordance with philosophical procedures and methods.

Of course the teaching of philosophy in Germany is also not, of course, immune to the effects and consequences of the results of the international PISA studies. The reaction and reorientation in educational politics in Germany has led to the establishment of so-called *educational standards and competences (Bildungsstandards & Kompetenzen)*. Very briefly, for instruction in philosophy that means: in the curricula and teaching plans, no canonical and material text-author guidelines are to be found in the teaching content; rather large number of competences are set down in the teaching plans, i.e. abilities that the pupils must have acquired at the end of a learning unit. These include, for example *judgmental, technical and methodological competences (Urteilskompetenzen, Sachkompetenzen, Methodenkompetenzen)*. These standards were discussed controversially and differentiated in the didactic debate of recent years (see e.g. Meyer 2015).

Furthermore, it should be considered that empirical research methods have been brought into the focus of the didactic debate in recent years. By that is meant that there are both approaches and positions that promote philosophically qualified empirical research, as well as a critical reflections on the conditions of empirical research (see e.g. Dietrich, Brand and Cordula 2016; Kminek, Thein and Torkler 2018).

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