

Mag. Irmgard Korber
Institut für die schulpraktische Ausbildung
Universität Wien, Austria

Mentoring in Teacher Education

Description of Teacher Education in Austria

Contribution to the 29 th annual conference "Teacher education between theory and practice. The end of theory....the future of practice?"
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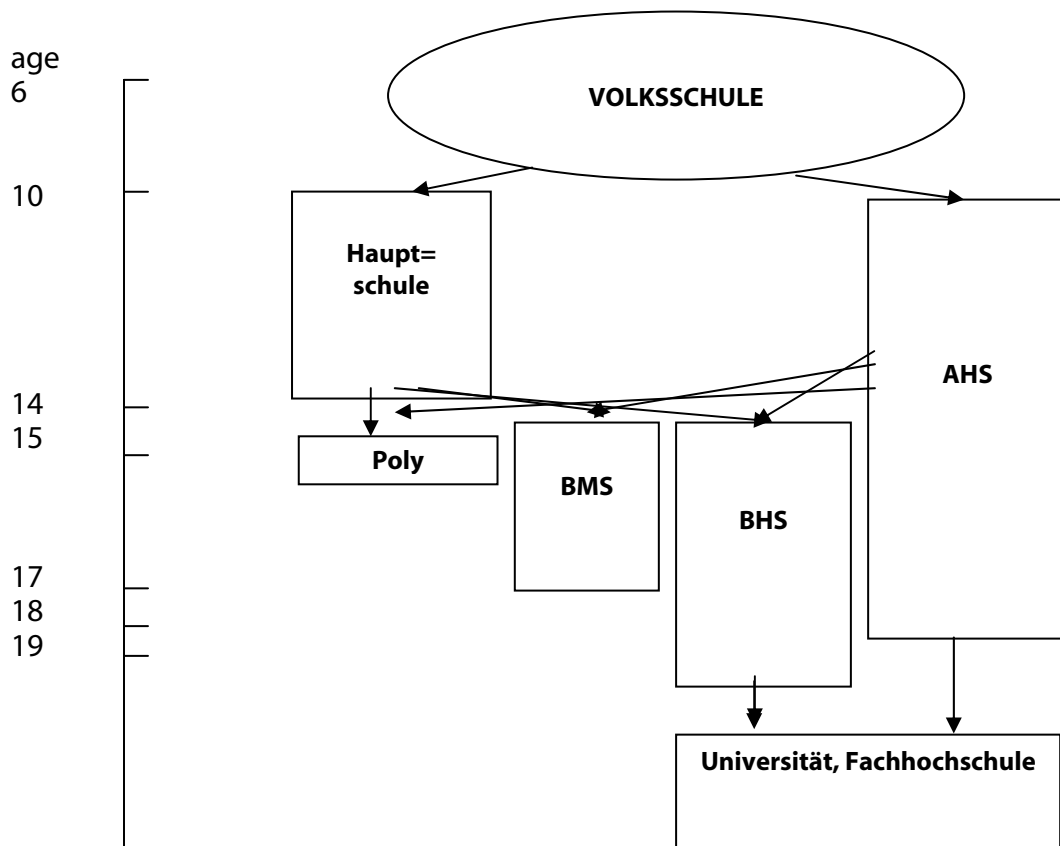
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1. Overview of the Austrian school system

In Austria we have 9 years of compulsory school – from ages 6 – 15. Children start their careers at "Volksschule" (elementary school) at the age of 6, finish there at 10 and continue their education either in "Hauptschule" (secondary school) , from ages 10 – 14, or at "Allgemeinbildende höhere Schule - AHS" (grammar school), from ages 10 – 14 or up to 15 and going further up till 18. After "Hauptschule" - at the age of 14 - pupils either attend one year at "Polytechnischer Schule - Poly" in order to start an apprenticeship at 15 or stay at AHS for 5 years.

In order to get a good education young people can decide to stay in "AHS" or change to "Berufsbildende höhere Schule – BHS" or "Berufsbildende mittlere Schule – BMS" at the age of 14.

"AHS" gives the young a broad and general education with graduation at 18, which means 4 more years of attendance, finishing with the "Matura", the necessary diploma for university or "Fachhochschule". The main emphasis of "BHS" is either on technical or economic subjects ending with the "Matura" after 5 successful years. "BMS" also offers a 3-year-education, focussing on either technical or economic subjects, without the option of "Matura" and the possibility to go straight to university.

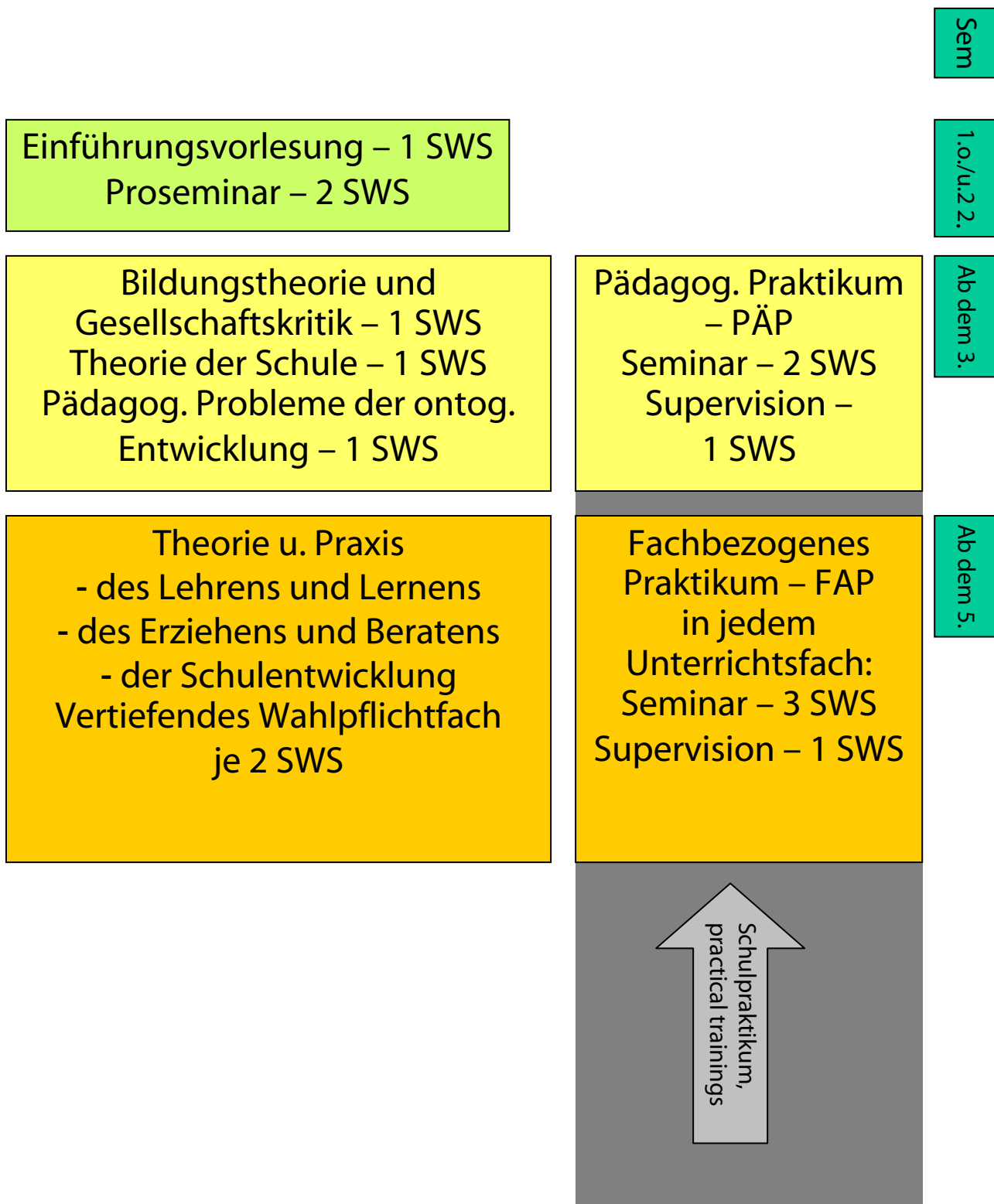


I want to put the focus of my presentation on mentoring in teacher education at AHS although I am also involved in mentoring of some subjects at BHS which is similar with just some minor exceptions.

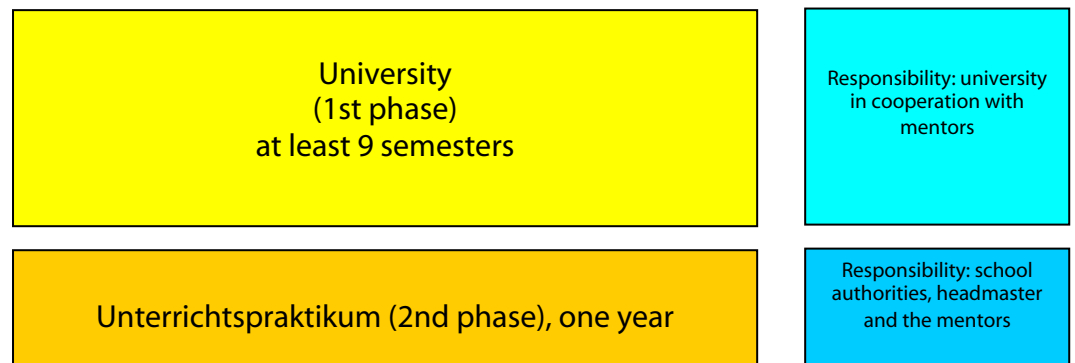
2. Course of study for teacher education for AHS at the University of Vienna and practical training at school

In order to become a teacher you have to study at least two different subjects at university (e.g. maths and physics as I did!). The minimum length of this course of study is 9 semesters and focusses mainly on specialized knowledge of the subjects. Teaching methods cover approximately 20 - 25 % of this course of study at most, all together about 120 – 280 SWS (hours per week and semester). In addition students have to attend courses for educational theory (14 SWS) at the "Institut für die schulpraktische Ausbildung" (Institute for Practical Training), where I work, and practical trainings "Schulpraktikum - SchP" at various schools. The precise term for these trainings is "Pädagogisches Praktikum – PÄP" and "Fachbezogenes Praktikum – FAP" (1 PÄP includes 2 SWS, 2 FAP include 3 SWS each) and they are supervised at university. In these periods mentors, so-called "Betreuungslehrer – BL" accompany students; I will go into detail later. At the University of Vienna this new course of study for educational theory is compulsory for every teacher-to-be since autumn 2002/03.

Course of study for educational theory (14 SWS) and practical trainings (8 SWS) at the Institute for Practical Training:



After having finished their studies at university students have to cover a second phase to become teachers. They have to work and teach at an AHS for one year; this period is called “Unterrichtspraktikum - UP”. These young mentees are again accompanied by experienced mentors, the “Betreuungslehrer”. I will go into detail later.



3. Mentoring of teachers-to-be during practical training, the “Schulpraktikum” in the 1st and “Unterrichtspraktikum” in the 2nd phase

I. “Schulpraktikum – SchP”:

a) “Pädagogisches Praktikum - PÄP”:

As I mentioned before first of all students have to go through „Pädagogisches Praktikum – PÄP”, which they can attend from the 3rd semester of their studies. At my institute at university groups comprise approx. 25 students covering similar subjects, eg. maths+physics+chemistry or a group of creative subjects like drawing and handicraft. These groups are supported with theory by lectors at university, e.g. basics about teaching, lessons and classes, perception, communication, rules of feedback, preparation of lessons, structure, surroundings, teaching and learning goals, the role of the teacher, voice, movements, teaching methods,

After this period at university the groups are split into smaller units of only 3 to 4 students. These small groups are sent to those schools where mentors work. Mentors are specially trained and experienced teachers, so-called “Betreuungslehrer”. These teams work together for 15 lessons. Here the students’ main task is to observe lessons with an emphasis on special aspects. Besides getting to know a specific AHS, the headmaster, administrator, teachers, pupils, the house with its various rooms, the special aspects and aims of this school, the focus is on lessons. The mentor provides information about his classes, discusses his aims, teaching goals and preparation for the lessons with the students, takes the mentees to his classes and then again discusses specific observations, events.. after lessons. The students are either asked to watch the same aspect and can then find similarities and differences in their perception or they are asked to observe different aspects which broadens their view in the discussion afterwards.

After accompanying the mentor students have to teach classes themselves, either small units of 10 – 15 minutes like comparing homework, special explanations, working with groups of pupils, ...or a whole lesson in class. It is

also possible to cooperate with another student for the lesson and to teach in teams of two. During this period the mentor and the other students watch the mentee at work. Here preparation, the lesson itself and looking back on the lesson is as important for the mentee as getting feedback from his colleagues, which give him more information about the lesson.

While working at school, all the various groups of students are supported by a supervisor at university. There they can work on their experience and problems during lessons at school. (Yet, because of financial problems at university this support was cancelled last year!) At the end of the semester the group meets with the lector at university. The students reflect on their experience at different schools with their personal mentors, exchange common experience and become aware of the variety of school realities in Vienna and outside the capital.

In order to finish the PÄP the student has to write a reflecting paper, submit it to the mentor, who reads it and gives his advice. Then the paper is sent to university and kept in the library for further studies of those interested. The student gets a report without a mark and has so passed the practical training successfully.

b) "Fachbezogenes Praktikum – FAP"

The focus in „Fachbezogenen Praktikum - FAP“ is on the subjects the teachers-to-be have specialized on. The 5th semester is the first possibility to start an FAP which has to be done in every subject. It is better to cover just one FAP a semester because it means quite a lot of work for the student.

The student chooses a mentor himself (A list of mentors is kept at the Institute for Practical Training and it is recommended to choose a range of various schools during practical trainings in order to get to know different realities of school, e.g. in the capital, in smaller cities in the countryside, AHS, BHS,..). A mentor is allowed to have 3 students at most in an FAP during a period of 15 blocks 3 lessons each. Proceedings of an FAP are similar to a PÄP which means watching lessons of the mentor followed by a discussion within the group of mentor and students before and after classes. Teaching methods in the subject are in the centre of interest, such as how to go into a topic, how to get pupils' interests, how to enlarge and test their knowledge, ... At the beginning of practical training the mentor himself teaches his classes and later on the student has to teach 5 lessons in his mentor's classes.

Supervision at university as well as a reflecting paper are compulsory in order to pass an FAP.

II. "Unterrichtspraktikum – UP"

The one year period at school after graduation at university is called „Unterrichtspraktikum“. The young teacher is led by a personal mentor, the "Betreuungslehrer", in each subject from the very beginning of the school year till the end. The mentee teaches one class in one subject, ages 10 – 14, and another class, ages 14 – 18, in his second subject. Furthermore he has to attend courses covering e.g. legal aspects of school and teaching, teaching methods for their special subjects, methods of education,...

At school mentor and mentee work through the topics of the school year, which means starting with the characteristics of a school (building and

equipment, staff, social characteristics of pupils and parents, aims, common habits and routines at this school, special needs, ...), the class where the mentee has to teach and the classes the mentor will teach.

The two of them decide if the mentee starts in his class on his own or if the mentor leads the class at the very beginning and takes his responsibility back step by step during the following days and weeks. They talk about aims, structure and methods of the lessons and as during practical trainings at university the flashback on the lessons are again important routines in "Unterrichtspraktikum". These proceedings are followed usually after every lesson taught by either mentor or mentee. During the mentee's teaching periods the mentor watches, which is necessary especially at the beginning of the year and is reduced later on. Vice versa the mentee watches the mentor's teaching - for five lessons covering both subjects at most. In advance, both have to develop a detailed curriculum covering a year.

The mentee is the teacher of his class; he teaches, prepares and corrects examinations and finally gives the marks to the pupils. The mentor has to supervise him, to discuss the tasks in written or oral exams, to check the mentee's correction and he has to consult him concerning meetings with parents.

The mentee has to work with modern techniques (computer,...) during at least one longer period, he has to teach the mentor's classes in case of sickness or the like and to get familiar with administrative tasks. Furthermore, he has to write a portfolio reflecting on his work. This should contain products of lessons (like an outstanding sequence of a topic in class or coping with a specific educational difficulty) and the process experienced in teaching, personal ups and downs, preparation, description and a flashback of a specific lesson, thoughts about exams and marking, educational aims,... This portfolio is checked by a person who is neither part of this specific school nor involved in the mentee's assessment; the reader gives feedback to the writer.

In accordance with the "Betreuungslehrer" the headmaster has to assess if the mentee is able to start a career as a teacher at the end of the school year. If not, the school authorities are concerned and the mentee, if interested, can start a "Unterrichtspraktikum" once more in order to get his qualification.

4. Education, role and tasks of the "Betreuungslehrer", the mentor

To become a "Betreuungslehrer", a mentor, you have to fulfill certain criteria, which means at least 5 years of teaching, ... in order to attend a course at the Institute for Practical Training at university to get the qualification for mentoring and supervising. These courses, whose costs are split between university and federal school authorities, start in February and end after 3 semesters. Teachers of 4 or 5 different subjects come together in groups, work on new specialized knowledge in their subjects, are trained in perception, watching tasks, feedback and feedforward,... The main aim of the courses is to be a model for supervising which later on can be used similarly during the periods with students and mentees at school.

To give you an impression I have attached the curriculum of the training program for teachers in mentoring and supervising.

Part of my work is on the one hand to see to the content of the curriculum, the course and training of teachers and its organization for teachers from Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland. On the other hand I give students advise on mentors and schools and I have experience in mentoring at an AHS myself.

A mentor can decide if he wants to work with students in "Schulpraktikum" (PÄP or FAP) or if he wants to accompany a graduated teacher from university in "Unterrichtspraktikum". I mentioned these tasks above. In most cases the mentor is supported and respected by the headmaster and by his colleagues at school and expected to fulfill his job properly. He has to train young mentees in teaching and confront them with school affairs and necessities for the future development of school. He is an important partner for university and school authorities. If he supervises during "Schulpraktikum" he gets an additional income (PÄP: approx. 350 for 4 students, FAP: approx. 780 for 3 students). If he accompanies a mentee during an "Unterrichtspraktikum", he teaches less as one of his classes is taught by the mentee and he gets an additional income (approx. 380). Being a mentor is usually quite strived for. I'll point out the main reasons: it can simply be an interesting job and possible change after a long teaching period, a necessary further step in a successful career at school, having some more income or being able to reduce teaching in classes - or the headmaster is interested in an enormous amount of mentors in his school because of honour for his school.

Mentors are asked again if there are no serious complaints about their work. There is no further training for mentors except in a few subjects (e.g. biology and music). Mentors work for themselves and sometimes reflect their work with friends. There are no compulsory meetings for mentors.

5. Summary of the development and future demands

Teacher mentoring is a traditional and appreciated way of training young teachers in Austria. The new development with practical trainings during the education at university is very successful and is a first step to integrate practice in education and by that combining theory and practice. Mentees usually agree that mentoring means a great benefit for them.

On the one hand education for supervising mentors is very much appreciated and on the other hand criticized as well. So teachers are thankful for being trained and some, mainly those who fail, complain about the tasks and criteria they have to fulfill.

Evaluation is made constantly, research is not really integrated.

Yet, in response to the change of structures at the University of Vienna and the special tasks for the Institute for Practical Training a new curriculum for supervising mentors is discussed and prepared.

For further improvement the cooperation between university and school authorities has to be prolonged and even extended, which means cooperation in the content of the course of study for teacher education and personal cooperation talks between the instructors. The need of constant support of mentors as well as further education in their careers is obvious; supervision is desired.