

Interview partner: Dr. Christian Bauer (Teacher)

I. And now on to your current occupation. How would you describe your current position in three to five sentences?

I'm a German teacher – and if I have to, I also teach history. But teaching German is my passion. What I like about this in particular is to develop and promote abstract thinking and to interpret complex matters. To some extent, this takes place in all lessons, from teaching grammar to interpreting hermetic poetry. To me, literature is very important – which I also try to convey to my pupils. I understand if someone isn't interested in fiction, but it is my goal to make sure they still profit from working on it. Last but not least, I'm also interested in teaching media skills.

My history lessons are always political. This is why I almost only teach senior classes. I am primarily interested in historical structures.

And I'm also involved in school development.

II. Please describe a typical day in your work life.

I teach 32 lessons a week. Each lesson requires between 10 and 60 minutes of preparation, sometimes longer – especially if I'm developing larger scale concepts for my lessons.

I correct four exercises in three classes. Correcting exercises takes between 20 and 120 minutes, usually an average of 50 minutes. With 25 pupils in each class, this adds up to 250 hours a year, mainly at the weekend, sometimes during the school holidays. And there are also practice essays. (As a German teacher you should find a very tolerant partner.)

As head of department, I co-correct my colleagues' exercises – randomly but at regular intervals. This is to ensure consistent requirements.

A considerable part of my working hours consists of educational discussions and administrative tasks, especially as head of department.

III. Let's talk about motivation. What do you like most about your profession?

I believe that I am able to convey the contents I care about for the benefit of the children. I'm often fascinated by teaching materials. I get along well with children and I like to see my senior pupils make progress and accompany them while they are learning. To me, it is always an extremely exciting challenge to go from a year 5 to a year 12. I also enjoy optimising teaching methods. I trained in film and theatre because I like that children are fascinated by learning something I teach them.

I also like corrections, but I prefer practice essays to exercises. This gives me the opportunity to discuss matters with pupils and to help them achieve better results.

Feedback has shown that my pupils don't seem to be suffering too much with me as their teacher. I'm also happy about that.

IV. Every profession has its very specific core tasks and challenges. Please describe three core tasks and challenges for your professional practice.

A teacher's main tasks are well-known. I wouldn't put too much emphasis on the idea of motivating pupils. As from middle school level, it's ok for them not to like German lessons, as long as they meet the basic requirements. Moreover, good lessons are always subjective: Some pupils will like your teaching, and some won't. If you're not able to motivate yourself in the senior classes, you will run into obstacles. After all, how do mechatronics apprentices that are the same age get motivated? Nevertheless, there are objective criteria for good teaching, meaning in terms of time management and content. This is what you have to be measured by.

However, there is one problem: monotony. Teachers will always start repeating old lessons for new classes. Although changes to the teaching curriculum every ten years bring about some change, a lot stays the same. This isn't as bad at grammar schools as it is at primary schools, but you can always complain that pupils are capable of less and less these days.

The real challenges are educational. How do you deal with pupils with disorders (ADD, ADHD)? How do you deal with bullying among pupils? With ethnical and cultural differences? What about children who are clearly not made for grammar school, but

their parents won't accept it? What about children nobody cares about? Children displaying deviant behaviour because they are seeking attention?

I've never had a problem with pupils' discipline. However, if you are not able to assert yourself in a classroom, you should change your profession. Nobody will help you. On the contrary: If pupils act up (which happens – everyone knows that), you will only get pressure from the parents and maybe from the school administration. A fresh start at another school won't cut it, either. Pupils immediately notice if you are insecure.

V. Which skills and competences do you need in order to meet the three challenges and core tasks mentioned above?

You must like children and teenagers and take them seriously as individuals. (Maybe you could teach maths without these abilities, but to me they are key.) Children aren't "insufficient" adults, they have their own worldview – which they are entitled to and which you have to respect. They need to feel that you are interested in their problems. They must also be able to see their teacher as a real person. Teachers must keep their distance - after all, it is the marks that separate them and the pupils - and be approachable at the same time. If need be, they can show regret about bad marks they give to pupils.

And if you like children, you won't have the problem of monotony. Especially at the primary school level, you simply can't repeat lessons because the pupils are always different. Every class is a challenge of its own.

It's hard work. Lazy teachers are despised by colleagues and pupils alike. Pupils notice if someone preaches water and drinks wine.

You need to stay up to date in terms of education and your subject (even though this is a challenge during every day work life). Your life will be easier if you are interested in many different fields. It is important to believe that what you are teaching is relevant. Otherwise, you will easily get frustrated and cynical. It is also important to constantly improve your own teaching methods, but to also identify and accept your limitations.

To this end, you should develop an eye for educational and human processes within the classroom. Every class is a completely unique, complex system that constantly fluctuates. You permanently have to react to this: Even though I am explaining a

difficult topic, I have to note that Maxi is dreaming, and that Anna is distracting Julia, who is actually not very interested, and Leo is getting this empty stare that means he no longer understands what is going on. Meanwhile, Veronika is fidgeting because she already knows what I'm trying to get at. At the same time, you have to decide whether and how to react to these things. At the end of the lesson, you also have to remember to ask Emily why she moved her chair away from her friends, and to contact Til's parents because he is always falling asleep...

And one more thing: Sometimes you should also be silly. Pupils laugh about their teachers anyway. If I give them a reason, at least I decide what they laugh about. And laughing with them is definitely better than being laughed at – even if it's behind your back. This also requires a confident personality.

VI. Imagine a student wanting to learn the same profession as you. Please give two to three recommendations on how to easily but purposefully learn the necessary skills while studying.

Basically, before you start studying to become a teacher, you should find out whether you get along well with kids and teenagers and whether you like them. If you didn't have any problems as a tutor or as a group leader at a youth organisation, you probably won't have any as a teacher, either. However, if you feel that you can't deal with children or pupils, you should hit the breaks in time. Even the best pupils (in a group or class) don't have any qualms about torturing a weak teacher. (It really is an experience to be at the mercy of twenty giant seventeen-year-olds for the first time. The first lesson can decide whether you survive or not.) Take your work placements at school seriously, too!

As a grammar school teacher, it is important to have a well-founded scientific education. Those who neglect "what you won't need for school anyway" at university, will become bad teachers.

During your teacher's training, you will definitely reach your limits. Carrying out administrative tasks, such as taking minutes, meeting deadlines, etc., in a reliable way is really crucial. Those who are well organised, have a clear advantage.

Those who become teachers because of the weeks of vacation or because there are good opportunities for part-time work, shouldn't forget to pay their burnout insurance (if such a thing exists).

VII. How do you keep your professional skills up to date? (Please give a short description in bullet points)

- Professional literature or educational content (magazines or books on teaching methodology)
- Advanced training, preferably at the Academy for Teacher Training and Personnel Development in Dillingen
- Regional teacher training; currently on the educational use of media equipment
- Professional and education-related discussions with colleagues