

Chapter 3

Co-operation, Counseling and Reflective Practice: Swiss Induction Programs

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1. Supporting the first two years of teaching

We start this chapter with a look at the real lives of two young beginning teachers at the start of their teaching careers. Markus, whom we interviewed, teaches science and mathematics in a middle school (grades 7–9) in the canton of Zurich; Bertila, whose practice group we observed, teaches mathematics and French in upper elementary school (grades 4–6) in the canton of Bern. The practice group constitutes a common approach to induction for elementary and lower secondary teachers: it is a facilitated group of novice teachers from across a geographic area within a canton, who together engage in solving problems arising from their classrooms. Zurich, on the other hand, features a required course as part of induction, before teachers can be fully certified. Though this course requirement is unique, Zurich's use of voluntary counseling reflects induction practices in other cantons in the country.

The stories of these two teachers illustrate the rich variety of activities characterizing the Swiss notion of *Berufseinführung* – the “leading into the profession” – for beginning teachers. Yet a common philosophy undergirds these induction activities: the “leading in” involves deeply experienced colleagues who are specially trained for their counseling and mentoring role; nevertheless, the beginning teacher is seen as an adult learner who has a large say in the content of the induction activities. Most significantly, the emphasis is on the development of the individual as a whole, as well as the development of an effective, self-confident teacher.

Markus's induction experiences

Markus has just started his third year of teaching. He now teaches in the canton of Zurich in a middle school (grades 7–9) of 120 pupils (two classes per grade). He teaches mathematics/geometry, *Man and the Environment*

(an integrated science, geography and social studies course new in the curriculum), technical drawing and a shop class that involves working with materials and tools. He received his undergraduate training in Philosophy II (Natural Sciences, including mathematics), obtaining a four-year university degree with a major in chemistry and minors in both mathematics and geology. He undertook all his teacher preparation coursework in Zurich.

Markus's practice teaching was done in several cantons, in different types of schools and with pupils from diverse social backgrounds. However, he never worked with ethnic minority pupils, as pupils who are not proficient in German usually attend schools other than the regular middle schools. He had three sets of practice-teaching experiences, the first observing the mentor teacher and teaching a little, the second instance involved teaching with the mentor present and the third planning and teaching lessons on his own.

In general, he found all the practice sessions and related didactics classes helpful [1], acquainting him with problems of real teaching (e.g. what do you do with classrooms unequipped for experiments?) that could then be discussed in the didactics classes. The didactics teachers seemed to him more effective when they worked with direct feedback from the students' practice-teaching sessions. One mentor teacher really impressed him; Markus adopted a lot of his teaching strategies and has also asked this teacher for advice on a number of occasions since starting to teach himself.

Markus found it quite difficult to find the job he was looking for. Positions are scarce for a male teacher with a Philosophy II degree who wants a full-time job teaching mathematics and the sciences. Most experienced science and mathematics teachers are males who work full time and, having found a position to their liking (which takes four years on average), they remain in that same position for the rest of their professional lives (especially in the countryside). Women change jobs more often (they get pregnant, for one thing), more often work part-time and usually teach languages and history (the Philosophy I fields). So women are really in demand for the science and mathematics positions, since there are now so few of them teaching in the technical fields.

Markus has completed a four-week induction course, which is compulsory in the canton of Zurich. He found the course very helpful:

I was really grateful for the course and its down-to-earth, realistic grounding in actual teaching. It gave me much-needed time to reflect on my work.

The course needs to be completed by beginning teachers within the first two years of teaching. After two years of teaching and completion of the induction course, Markus (as with all teachers in Zurich) has completed the

‘beginning’ phase and is considered to be a fully licensed teacher by the canton. As he sees it, however, the distinction between beginning and fully-licensed teachers will become less sharp under the canton’s proposed new employment provisions, which mandate one-year rather than the traditional four-year contracts for all teachers, not just beginning teachers.

Markus has found no time for other professional development since he started teaching. Informally, however, he has created a community for himself. Ever since graduating from teacher preparation, he has been meeting with ex-fellow Philosophy II students, now teachers themselves, on a voluntary basis three or four times a year (usually on Wednesday afternoons, when Swiss schools close early). The teachers exchange experiences, materials and information on cantonal and school policies, as well as on testing and pupil evaluation. Initially, the meeting was a social dinner, but by their second meeting they had already decided to make it more professionally oriented. Topics concerning teaching are chosen and presented in turn by one of the teachers.

This group has been a great source of support for Markus. Together, the participants plan lessons, get help on instructional problems or undertake work on their curriculum or action-research projects. In the future, he expects to spend four weeks over a period of four years on further education; this will count toward the five percent time allotted to all teachers in the canton for professional development. Markus will probably spend two weeks of that time taking a didactics course in a particular discipline; the other two weeks he will most likely devote to more general pedagogic work.

Before Markus’s time, the canton mandated counselors to help with induction during the first two years. This counseling was compulsory and carried out by an experienced middle-school teacher; it also involved evaluation. But a few years ago, this practice of obligatory counseling/evaluation was abolished in Zurich. In part, the tension between the two functions, those of counseling versus evaluation of the beginning teacher, made the counselor’s role problematic and led to the policy’s demise. Now, during their first two years, beginning teachers have the right to seek counsel voluntarily from any teacher of their own choice.

Some new teachers prefer to work on their own and are glad that counseling is no longer compulsory, while others continue to seek out support and advice. In these latter cases, the counselor observes the teacher’s lessons and afterwards discusses them, offering advice. The maximum number of counseling sessions a beginning teacher can apply for is sixteen. A second set of sixteen counseling sessions is possible if specially applied for. The absolute maximum is thirty-two visits. Mostly, however, two visits from a counselor are sufficient to solve a beginning teacher’s specific problem.



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