MY YEARS AS A TEACHER
in the (West-) German state
in Lower Saxony at a GYMNASIUM

Ulrich Vocke

To introduce myself



- 1953: born in Darmstadt
- 1960 - 1972: school
- 1973 - 1979: studies
- 1979 - 2015: teacher
- 2000 - 2001: sabbatical (MA in Europ. Educ.)
- From 2006 on: introduction of another school system: PISA, centralized testing…
- From 2026 on I live in Thailand without an address in Germany

In Germany, education is task of the 16 *Länder*

- Consequence of the heavily centralized Nazi history
- Results in 16 school systems today
- PROBLEMS: COMPARABILITY

- Pre-school education
- Primary education (class 1 - 4 or 1 - 6)
- Lower secondary education (5 - 10)
- Upper secondary education (11 - 13)
- Final exam: ABITUR

Besides vocational schools, music schools…

I was in seven schools in three *Länder* and didn't experience any difficulty

In Germany, teachers have TWO subjects

- For example Biology + English, Mathematics + Ethics, Sports + French, Computer Science + Chemistry…

- I had the subjects GERMAN (literature und speech) and POLITICS/ECONOMY
- Officially: and additional task CAREER GUIDANCE
- Inofficially: I made 157 class trips and student exchanges in about 20 years

(1) The subject of *German*

Language: the aim is to practise linguistic conventions and styles (essay writing)

Literature: an overview of the literature from the German speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland; Switzerland has four languages) is required and included, literature written in times of exile, too

(2) The subject of *Politics and Economics*

In the Politics module, pupils are taught about the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany, including the EU and Switzerland; the UN and the World Bank are discussed; globalisation versus nationalisation; the USA, China and Russia; BRICS; emerging economies and developing countries; strategies for reducing dependencies

In economics, the focus is primarily on Ludwig Erhard and his social market economy; the opposite of this is Schumpeter; managing money, the money supply and inflation; banks…

(3) Career guidance

What can I do? What do I want? - What don't I want?

Career guidance aims to help pupils gain an understanding of what they might do in the future; to discover their talents and steer them in the right direction; and to attend careers fairs…

Before the computer came in



in einer Phase des Umziehens ca. 1989 – eigenes Foto

- I had several hundreds hanging file folders
- and I read the daily newspaper very carefully
- I used to subscribe to a different newspaper every year
- and I used to cut out newspaper articles on topics that interested me or were in the news
- On top of that, there were specialist journals and books, books, books…
- That way, I was always up to date.

Of course, the computer and the internet connection make it easier. But I didn’t feel like a failure. Quite the opposite, in fact.

(5) In my case, class trips and student exchanges were primarily the topics of:

2014

142. 28.01. – 02.02.2014: Fahrt für Politikkurse nach Frankfurt zum Thema Wirtschaft
143. 08.02. – 10.02.2014: 9a und 9n Berlin zum Thema Demokratie (Bundestag, Bundesrat, Parlamentsausstellung, Hohenschönhausen)
144. 21.02.2014: Hannover, Landtag mit PW-eN-Kurs 11
145. 29.03.2014: Hannover: Schiller, *Die Räuber* (bei so einem wortgewaltigen Autor eine Inszenierung ohne ein gesprochenes Wort)
146. 24./25.05.2014: Frankfurt (Paulskirche) und Hambach (Hambacher Fest)
147. 12.6. – 13.6.2014: Fahrt nach Berlin zum Thema Demokratie mit PW-eN-Kurs 11
148. 24.7.2014: Fahrt zum Landtag mit 9a und 9n
149. 29.11.14: Hannover, Staatstheater, Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues* mit 9a und 9n

2015

150. Januar, Braunschweig, Lessing, *Emilia Galotti* mit 9a und 9n
151. Februar, Leipzig, DDR-Geschichte mit Freiwilligen aus 9a und 9n
152. Berlin mit 9a: Bundesrat und Bundestag
153. 09./10. Mai: Frankfurt/Paulskirche und Hambach – Abschiedsparty
154. 07. – 09.06.: Frankfurt: Vorbereitungsfahrt für Polen (Anne Frank)
155. 15. – 20.07.: Polen: Krakau; Abschiedsfahrt

---------- **Schluss** ----------

2016

156. Januar: Fahrt nach Weimar mit Frau Kollegin Fischer, Berlin

2017

157. Juli: Fahrt nach Amsterdam mit Frau Kollegin Fischer, Berlin

5.1 Democracy
5.2 Economy
5.3 Theatre and cultural trips
5.4 Trips to discover new things
5.5 Student exchanges
5.6 Pleasure trips

There were a few compulsory trips, but I did most of them of my own accord and in addition to those.

Experiencing is more than reading or watching videos



I wanted to highlight the *DARKEST* aspects of German history at Auschwitz,
as well as the forward-looking, *OPTIMISTIC* aspects in Hambach (1832), both then and now

I wanted to show how the economy works

I wanted to show that theatre isn't detached from real life, but right at the heart of it; the same applies to culture in general

Sometimes we've just set off like that

5.1 Trips on the theme of democracy

1. the history of the absence of democracy,
2. the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany
3. the struggle for democracy in Germany in 1832, 1848 and so on

5.1. The darkest moment in German history: Auschwitz

It is one of the responsibilities of future generations to embrace the legacy of history and draw conclusions for the future – whether one likes it or not.

For me, that means organising visits and guided tours to as many memorial sites as possible; not just Auschwitz, but also Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen… Auschwitz has become a symbol (and has been reduced to a mere symbol).

Sometimes, looking at another culture can be helpful – for example, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, where they employed the same or similar methods of rule, albeit on a much smaller scale.

The question is: **IS ANYONE A RACIST?** or **IS ANYONE HUMAN?**

5.1 Auschwitz / Oswiecim



More than 1 million people were brought to death in Auschwitz (ca. 17 million alltogether)

1. Jews
2. Polish people
3. People of the Soviet Union
4. Sinti and Roma
5. German people (Social Democrats, communists, homosexuals, people from the believing Church, disabled people…)
6. and so on, and so on

I was nine times with students in Auschwitz in co-operation with a school in Kraków for the students exchange.

5.1 Questions about Ausschwitz



From the *impact of the location* to *questions*, such as

- How did the Nazis arrive at their racial doctrine?
- Was there no resistance?
- Why didn’t the USA and Great Britain destroy the railway lines leading to Auschwitz, even though they knew what was happening there at least since the summer of 1943? *(It was not considered as a military target)*
- What does Auschwitz for today? Is there any lesson to be learned, or does everybody interpret it however they want? (For example, the Jewish, the Polish and the German interpretations?)
- We received advice from Prof. Masako Shibata, University of Tsukuba, Japan. She explained processing strategies in Asia und Europe to us.

5.1. Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Phnom Penh



Having been to Auschwitz, is there now a similar museum in Phnom Penh about the Khmer Rouge and their massacre of their own people. Does it teach you anything?

a) I am relieved that others, too, have their own *atrocities*; this takes some of the pressure off Auschwitz and the fate of Germans born after the war, though I do not wish to gloss over anything

b) It would appear to be a human trait that such unbelievable excesses can occur

c) The key would be to prevent it from arising, but the trend towards autocrats and populists, combined with the current geopolitical situation, does not point towards a path towards ever greater humanism, although I am no clairvoyant

5.1 Buchenwald





Entrance to a concentration camp

5.1 Buchenwald



What sort of people are those who kill others and derive pleasure – or at least a sense of obedience – from doing so?

What view of human nature lies behind such a notion?

Where can we see parallels today?

What can each and every one of us do to ensure that something like this doesn't happen again?

5.1 Kraków (PL)





Being a German in Poland is a difficult task

5.1 Kraków



Kraków, market place



Does (or did) Kraków have a problem with Jews? Cracovia is one of the football clubs

5.1 Kraków - Nowa Huta



This is the entrance to a huge steelworks dating from the socialist era, the former Lenin Steelworks. It's a clear display of power: 'We're somebody!!'

The steelworks is now owned by ArcelorMittal, Poland.

It is important to realise that during the Cold War, the West feared the East (nuclear war) and built bunkers; and the East feared the West (nuclear war), so it built the same kind of bunkers.

Ordinary people in both the West and the East would have been the victims.

5.1 Kraków





The teacher who organised the student exchange on the Polish side, her daughter and her husband

5.1 The return journey from Poland, Kraków/Auschwitz



I organised the school exchange programme with Poland for more than 10 years. Then interest waned. It all depends on individual teachers and whether they get involved (or not).

Just a little aside: although I don't speak a word of Polish, I've become a fan of Polish rock music; for a while, half of the CDs I owned at the time were by Polish artists. KAZIK and KULT were my favourite bands (Wolnosc).

5.1 The most optimistic chapter in German history: the Hambach Festival of 1832

“Three cheers for a united Europe” (the flags of France and Poland hang alongside the German flag)

The Lützow Freikorps (which played a part): **led to the German National Flag**

Determining the colour sequence:

- Black – was the easiest basic colour to produce the uniforms
- Red – decorative stripes
- Gold (gold-coloured, brass) - buttons

5.1 The “Lützowsches Freikorps“
a volunteer association from ALL independent German states as a symbol for a UNITED German state (against Napoleon) (they didn’t win anything; <u>good for the production of myths</u>)





5.1 The Hambach Festival (1832)



At the Hambach Festival, around 30,000 people (without telephones, the internet, trains, motorways…) fought for fundamental democratic rights and some economic freedoms



Today, the French and the Polish flags hang alongside the German flag - the European flag

175 years of Hambach Festival (1832 - 2007)





Colours from Braunschweig, Germany, Poland, Croatia, the UK – countries I'd had dealings with up to that point. – It's not always serious: in the evening, there was a wine festival.

5.1 Berlin





Bundesrat

5.1 Berlin Bundestag





From the German Bundestag, you have a good view of the city of Berlin

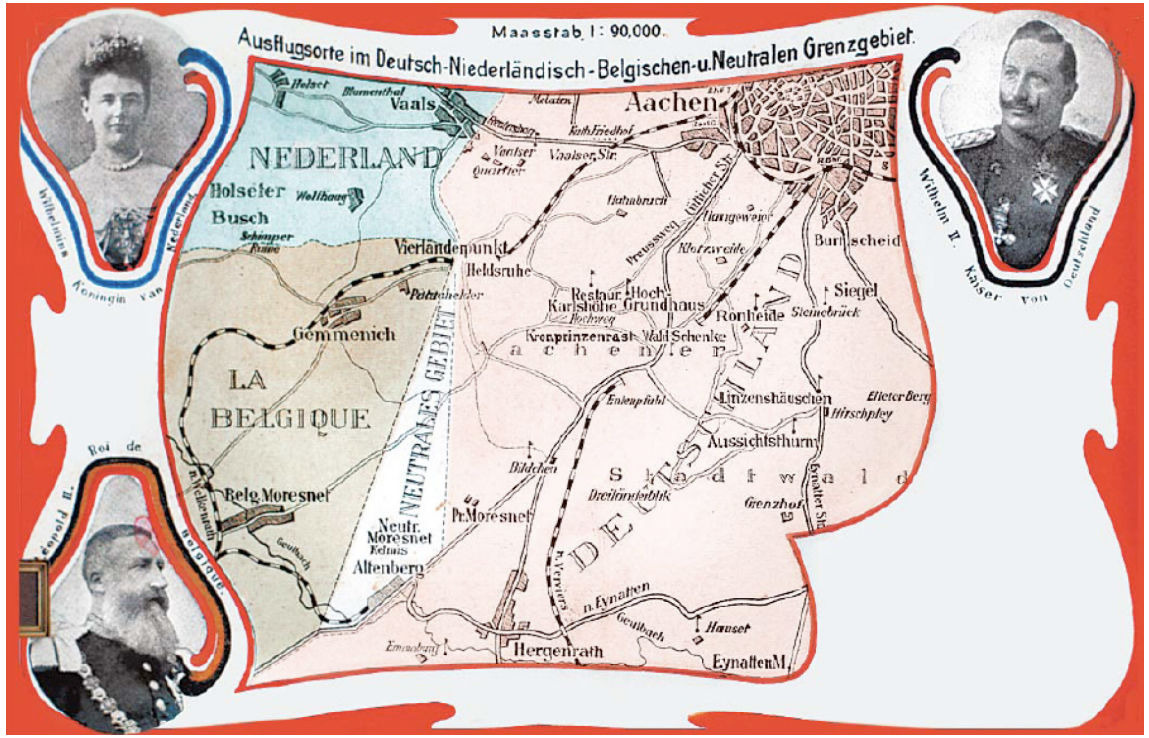
5.1 Berlin Bundestag





Berlin, visit to the German Bundestag together with Polish and German students

5.1 Euregio Meuse–Rhine (Aachen/Germany – Eupen/Belgium – Maastricht/Netherlands)



An old map of the aera before World War 1

This is where the European Union operates

Borders between nation states are becoming administrative boundaries

For example, there is a three-country ticket for local public transport

For example, there are Dutch-German and German-Dutch police checks at folk festivals…

But what language is spoken amongst the officers?

Which rules and regulations apply?

In the event of a crisis: Who decides on the use of weapons?

5.1 Hannover - Landtag



The Leine palace



5.1 Straßburg / Strasbourg





The European Parliament

5.1 Amsterdam



At the Anne Frank House, Amsterdam



The Hollandsche Schouwburg – this is where Jews were rounded up and deported to Auschwitz via Westerbork station

5.2 Frankfurt/Main





Two tired students

5.2 Frankfurt/Main airport



It is Germany's largest airport

It handles up to 100 flight movements per hour and 1,400 per day

This places an enormous burden on the public – a ban on night-time flights

Problems: it cannot be extended any further because there is no space

5.2 Frankfurt/Main - Goethe's house





The German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt (to wealthy parents). Anne Frank, who later became famous in Amsterdam, was also a girl from Frankfurt.

5.2 Frankfurt/Main - Paulskirche



In St Paul's Church (1848/49)

- First German 'National' Assembly
- Task: Drafting a constitution for the yet non existing "Reich"
- It was rejected by Emperor Frederick William IV because he felt bound by the *divine right of kings* and did not wish to be dependent on Parliament (the people)

5.2 Frankfurt/Main - the constitution of “Paulskirche“





The Berlin Uprising of 1848

Whilst the 1848 Constitution was a **‘bottom-up’ constitution** (fundamental rights…) and was NOT adopted, the 1871 Constitution was a **constitution ‘from above’** and was dictated

5.2 Frankfurt - “Bankfurt“



Frankfurt is home to Germany’s largest and most important banks

Banks:

- rich and poor
- Different types of banks (Deutsche Bank v. GLS, *Bank for lending and giving*) for various purposes and various people

Stock market:

- Who runs the stock market?
- The relationship between the real world and the financial world

We visited the ECB Museum

London, Sabbatical, 2000/2001



On the path to a Master of Arts
in European Education.

“He’s so enthusiastic!”

It makes sense to study theory.

The old education systems, with their national focus, stood in contrast to the new, Anglo-Saxon-influenced system with its standards, benchmark tests and centralised examinations; the new ‘god of education’ was QUANTIFICATION. I fought back:

I lost.

But I still believe that pupils are rational beings who want *MORE* and someting to be *INDEFINITE* than just to be managed.

5.3 Magdeburg, Friedrich Dürrenmatt: Besuch der alten Dame

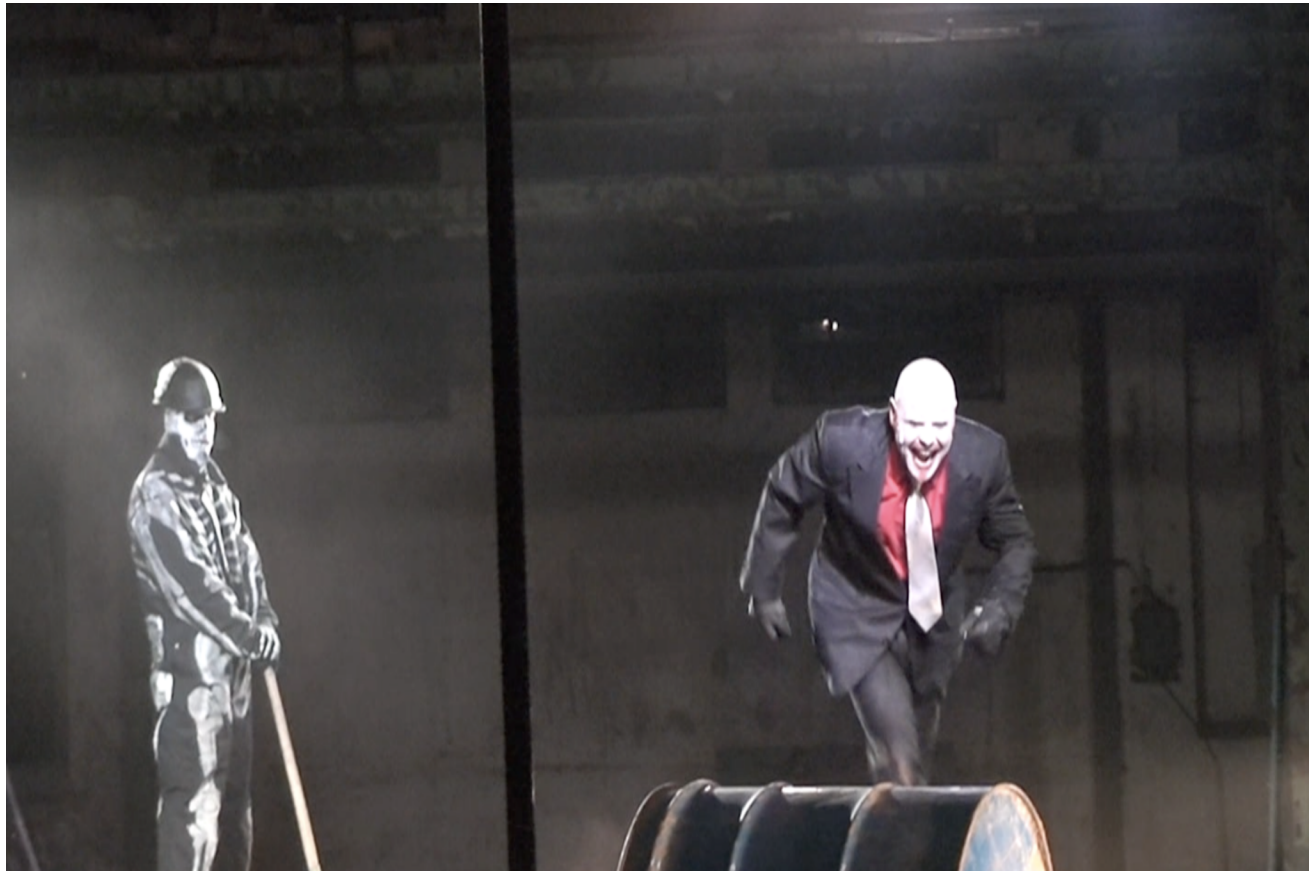


(Swiss author)

A tragicomedy about the power of money (corruption)

The elderly lady is sitting here on top of a prefabricated block of flats from the GDR era,
A reference to the situation in West and East Germany and the money involved in reunification?

5.3 Senftenberg, five hours: J.W. von Goethe: *Faust* Parts 1 and 2



Here, Faust can be seen moments before his death:
'It's over.
Gone! What a silly word.
Why is it over? [...]
What's the point of all this end-less toiling!
To sweep away all that has been created!
'That's it, it's over!' What can we make of that?
'It's as if it never happened.'

That's an equation for life.

5.3 Weimar





School trips aren’t all serious business.

5.3 Weimar



Key pieces:

Goethe, J.W.: *Urfaust*
Goethe, J.W.: Faust Part 1
Schiller, Friedrich: The Robbers
Schiller, Friedrich: The Criminal of Lost Honour (dramatic reading)
Brecht, Bertolt: The Threepenny Opera
Horváth von, Ödön: Stories from the Vienna Woods (Austro-Hungarian author)

5.3 Köln





Roman-Germanic Museum, Cologne

5.3 Köln





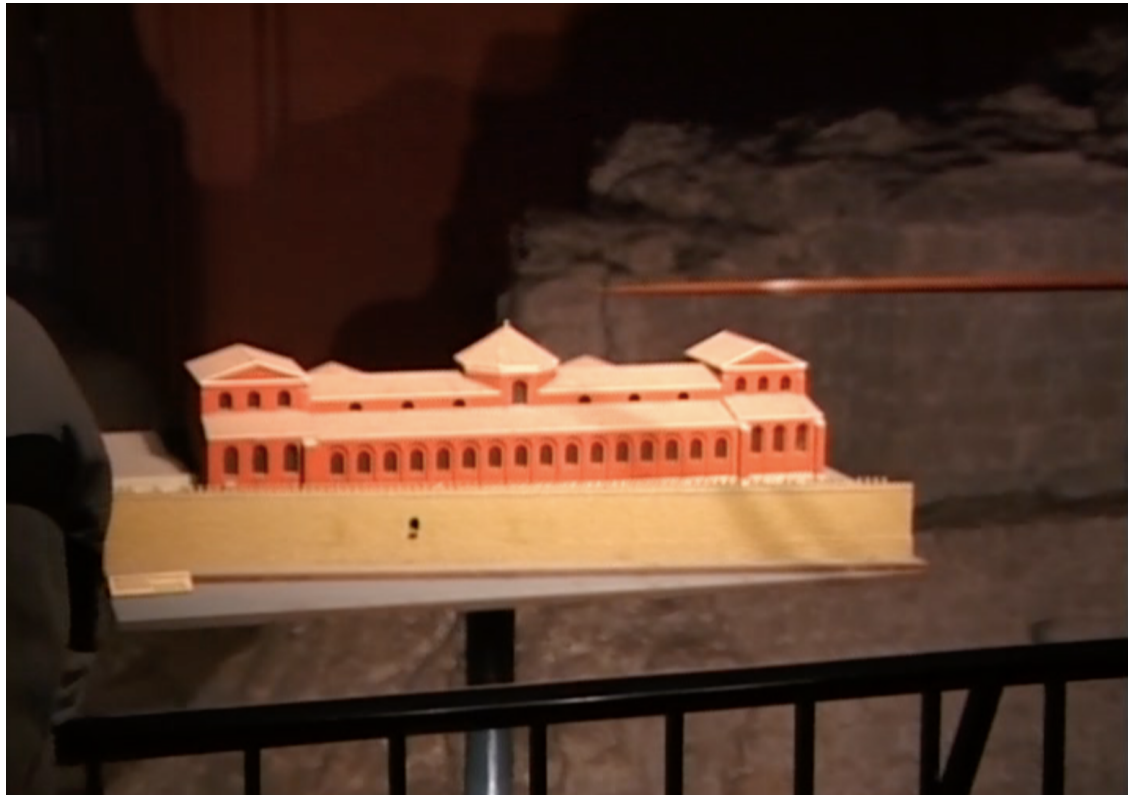
5.3 Köln





5.3 Köln

The Praetorium, the official residence of the Governor in the capital Cologne of the Roman province of Lower Germany





5.3 Bonn

The Old Bundestag in Bonn, idea “transparency“ from 5 sides; cafeteria





5.3 Hannover



Important plays included:

Brecht, Bert: The Threepenny Opera
Kafka, Franz: The Trial
Kafka, Franz: The Metamorphosis
Schiller, Friedrich: The Robbers
Remarque, Erich Maria: All Quiet on the Western Front
Voltaire, François-Marie: Candide

5.4 Budapest





Above: The Hungarian Parliament
Right: The Gellért Baths

5.4 Budapest





Lecture and discussion at Andrássy-Univ.

5.4 Budapest



House of Terror



The Goethe-Institute

5.4 Budapest



Visit to the German school, Zagreb



The subway runs increadibly deep undergroud

5.4 Budapest





Old Underground

5.4 Budapest





5.5 Zagreb, Beli Manastir, Vukovar



I have to excuse the selection of files; the video files are unreadable.

It was just like it was in Poland:
a genuine connection between teachers and pupils/students

The teacher even cooked a Croatian meal for us on her birthday

Croatia was not yet a member of the EU.

5.5 Zagreb, Beli Manastir, Vukovar



Vukovar, destroyed Church

Topics for discussion:
1. What does it mean to separate a former constituent state from a complex political entity and establish a new nation state?

2. Flight, displacement, return to a devastated homeland (if at all), reconstruction, further destruction, further reconstruction to a minimal standard

3. Changed human relationships

4. The future?

5.5 Zagreb, Beli Manastir, Vukovar

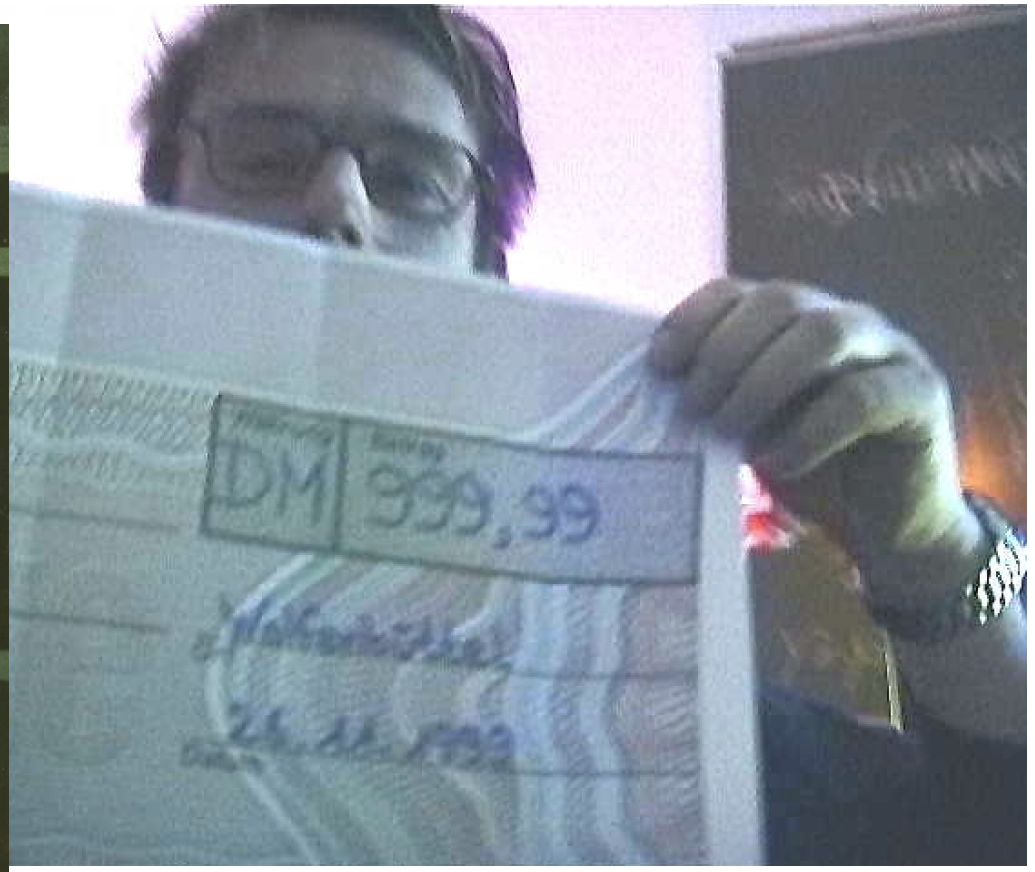




1. It was the first time we had expiereced the effects of a war so close to Austria (European Union)
2. Sometimes we were told not to go down from the asphalt road because of the risk of landmines

5.5 Zagreb, Beli Manastir, Vukovar





999,99 DM = 511 €

5.6 Sierksdorf





Sometimes we'd also go away when there was absolutely nothing going on at school; the last few days before the summer holidays.

My voluntary trips with students

157 class trips and student exchanges in about 20 years

GERMANY:

Berlin, Bonn, **Braunschweig,** Bremen, Bremerhaven**, Frankfurt/Main**, **Hannover**, **Hambach**, Hamburg, Havixbeck, Hildesheim, Köln, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Marienborn, Nordhausen, **Senftenberg,** Sierksdorf, Schöppenstedt, **Weimar,** Wien, Wolfenbüttel (Schleswig-Holstein)

EU:

I made class trips to **Amsterdam**, **Budapest**, Niederbronn-les-Bains and Strasbourg, the Euregio Maas/Rhein with Aachen, Eupen, Maastricht (D, B, NL), and Prague

and I made two student exchanges as a leading teacher to Poland (**Krakow, Auschwitz**) und Croatia (**Zagreb, Beli Manastir, Vukovar**)

INTERNATIONALLY:

Cardiff, **London**

What is 'learning' and what is 'Bildung'? (education)

"Teachers teach and children learn. It is as simple as that." (Woodhead, C. [the former Chief Inspector of English schools] in Rudduck and Flutter 2004: p. 23; emphasis added).

It couldn't be put more simply.

But this is not the whole truth about education in Britain; Lady Plowden is for example a contrasting example.

One definition of education states

"that education *[Bildung]*,

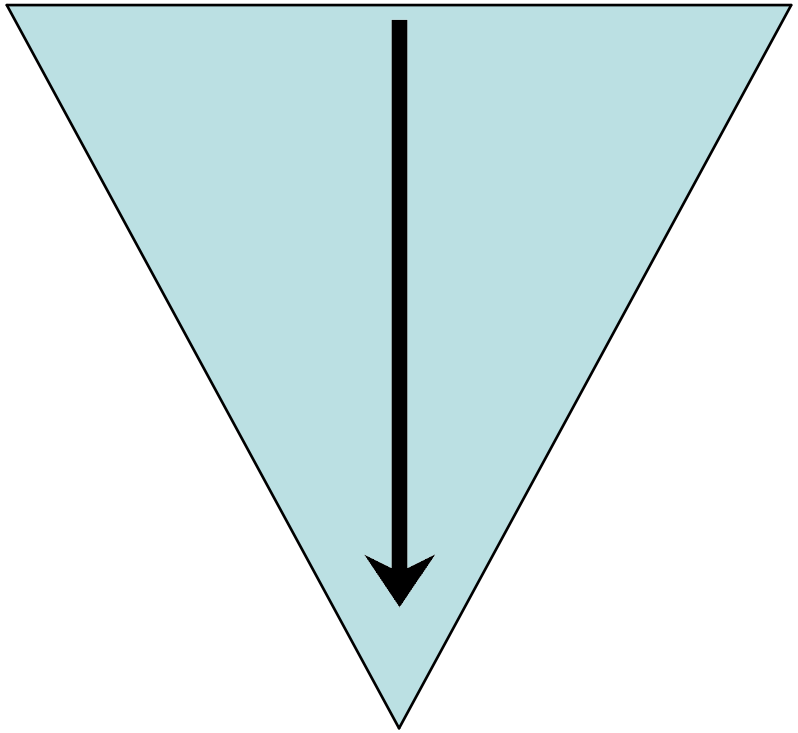
- whilst prompted by teaching, cannot be produced by it;
- that education cannot exist without the other, yet does not owe its existence to the other's intentionality;
- that it **is therefore always <u>the subject that educates itself, but can only do so as a responsive being,</u>** that is to say, in relation to others and to the other." (Wimmer 2014: p. 107 – emphasis added)

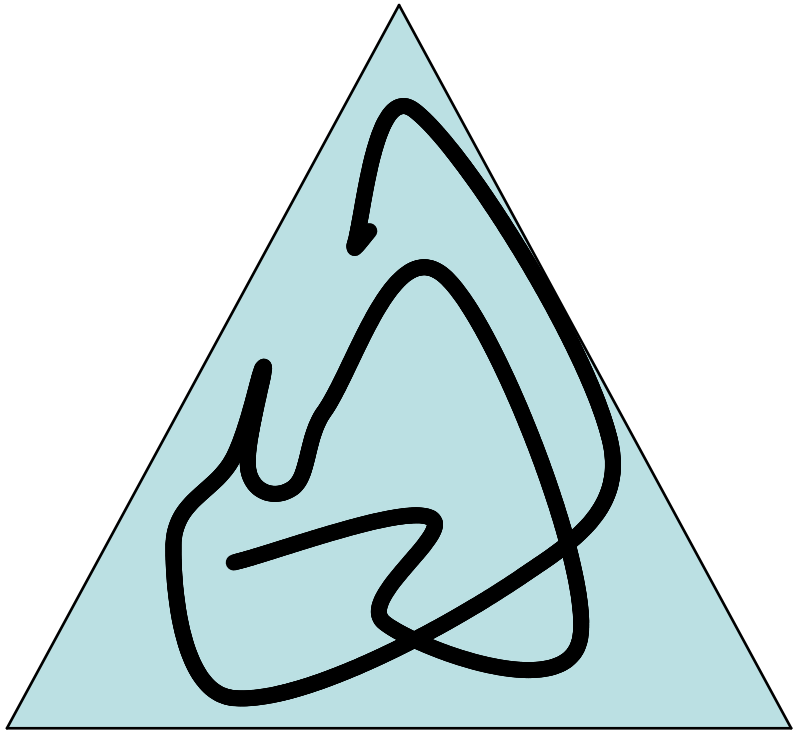
Lifelong learning - from child to the old

“We have learnt: **Schools cannot compensate for society** and that in making high demands of teachers and raising our demands of schools we must have scrupulous respect for the evidence of social-economic in-equality and the changing nature of family and community life.“ (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001)

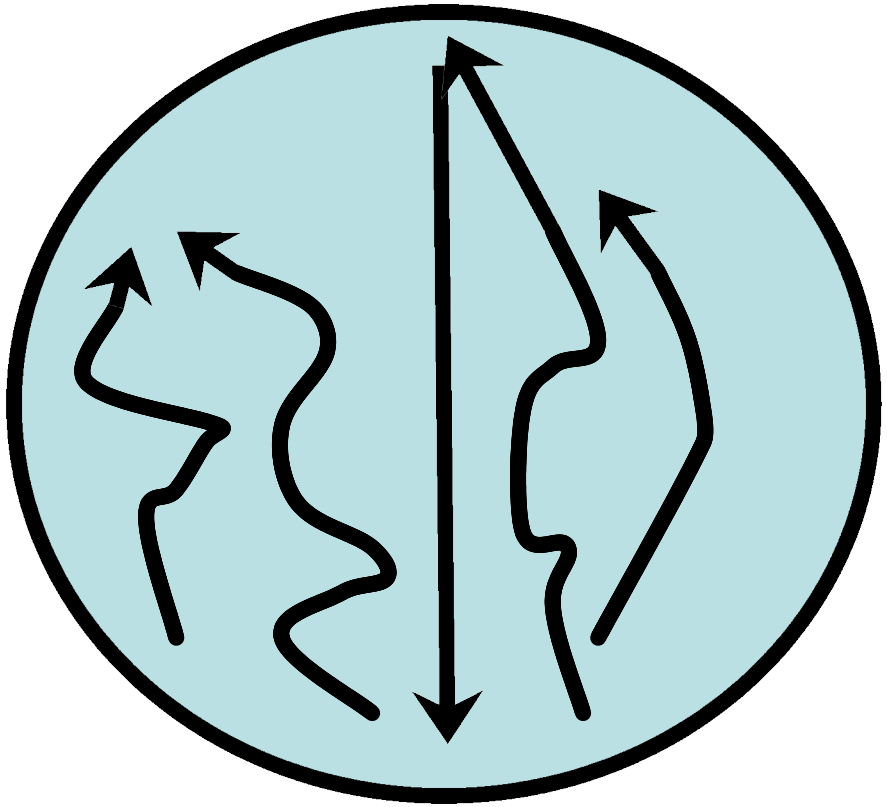
“school reform“

Top/down or bottom up?

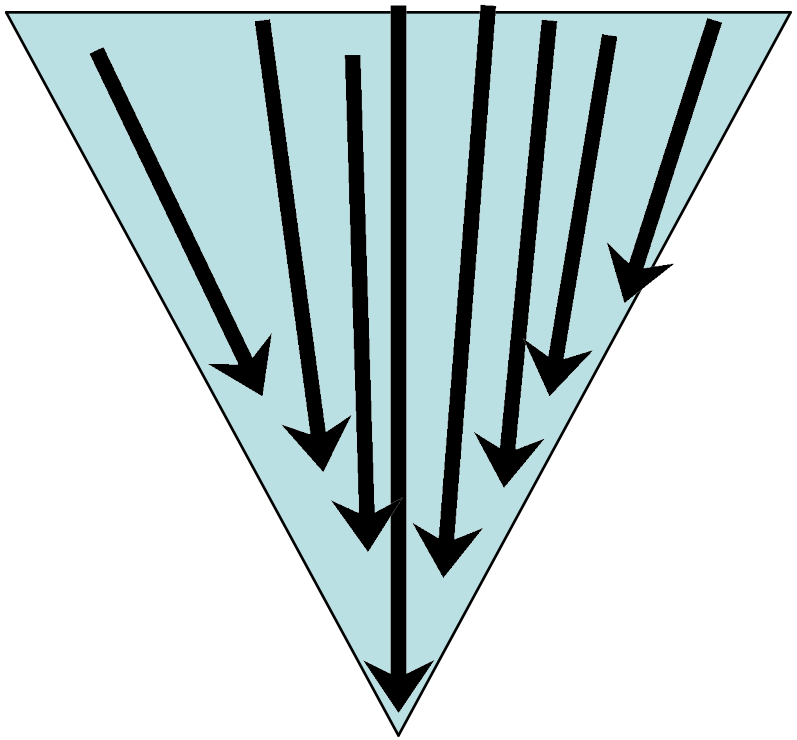




My interpretation from top/down und bottom/up



The reaction to schools



A bombardment of new regulations.
No room left for original ideas.

LOWERING THE LEVEL to ensure comparability.

FURTHER DECLINE IN STANDARDS, MORE REGULATIONS, which led to even more red tape.

A letter to the four parliamentary groups in the state parliament of Lower Saxony

I set an A-level exam question in *German* three years early as a standard class essay in Year 10, and the results were similar. I sent them to Hannover.

NO ANSWER, NOT A SINGLE ONE.

I gave a graduation speech to parents and students and bitterly lamented the decline in standards. Everyone is aware of this.

I even published a satirical magazine (“A-levels now without prior knowledge“) and handed it out at the A-level graduation speech.

Abi-Satire-Magazin 2015



"High school diploma now without prior know-ledge"

With this, I'm criticizing the PISA approach: it's not about knowledge, but about skills.

Of course, skills play a role, but so does knowledge.

AN HONEST QUESTION

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN SUCH A SITUATION?

I’ve given up
and let me retire.
(I was fortunately old enough)

‘That’s it, it’s over!’ What can we make of that?
‘It’s as if it never happened.’ (Faust)

I’ve been living in Thailand since then

Germany

- I have given up all hope

Thailand

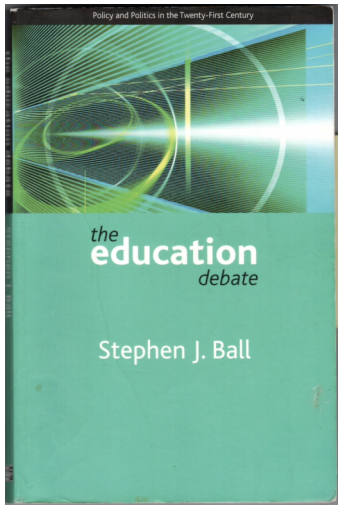
- The weather is better, the health is better…
- **!!! I’VE BEEN GIVEN THE GIFT OF YEARS !!!**
  THANKS TO THE PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT
- **I have got a lot of friends**
- **I FEEL AT EASE**
- Although all that glitters is not gold

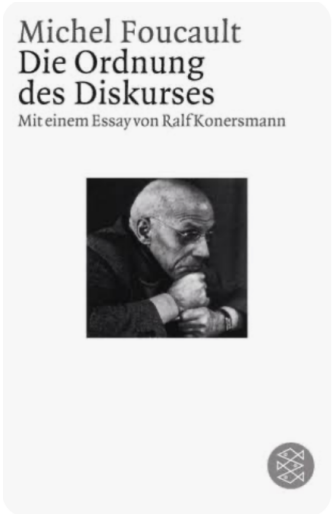
Books that have had a significant influence on me

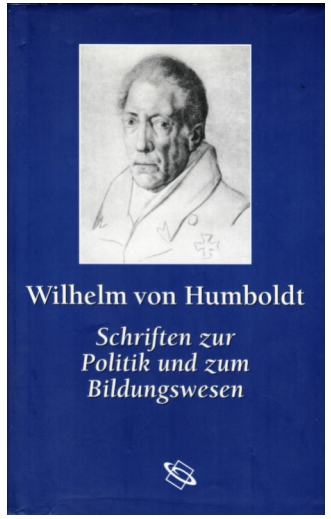


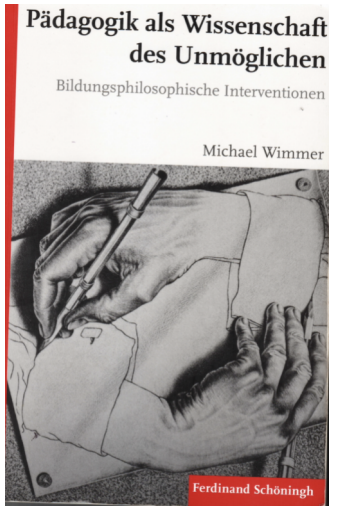


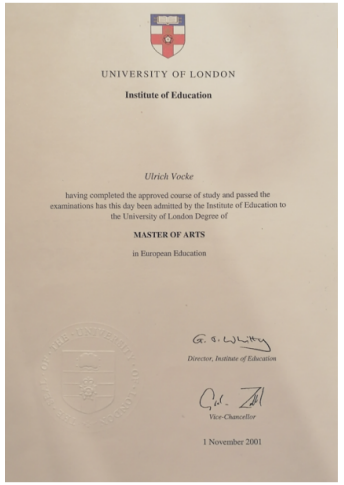




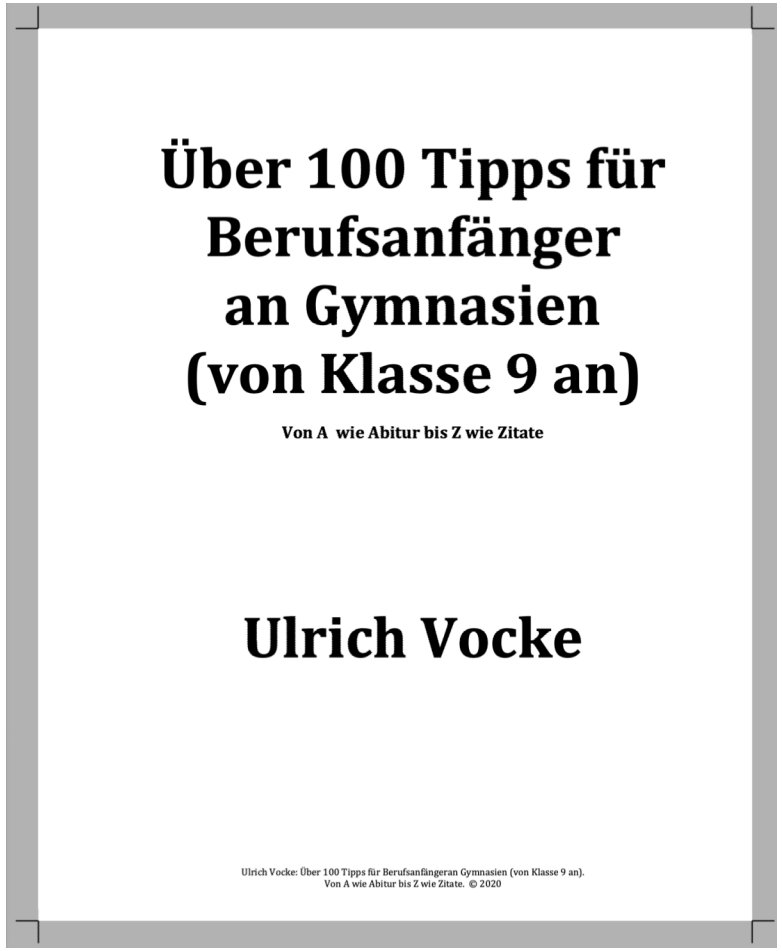








A book I've written

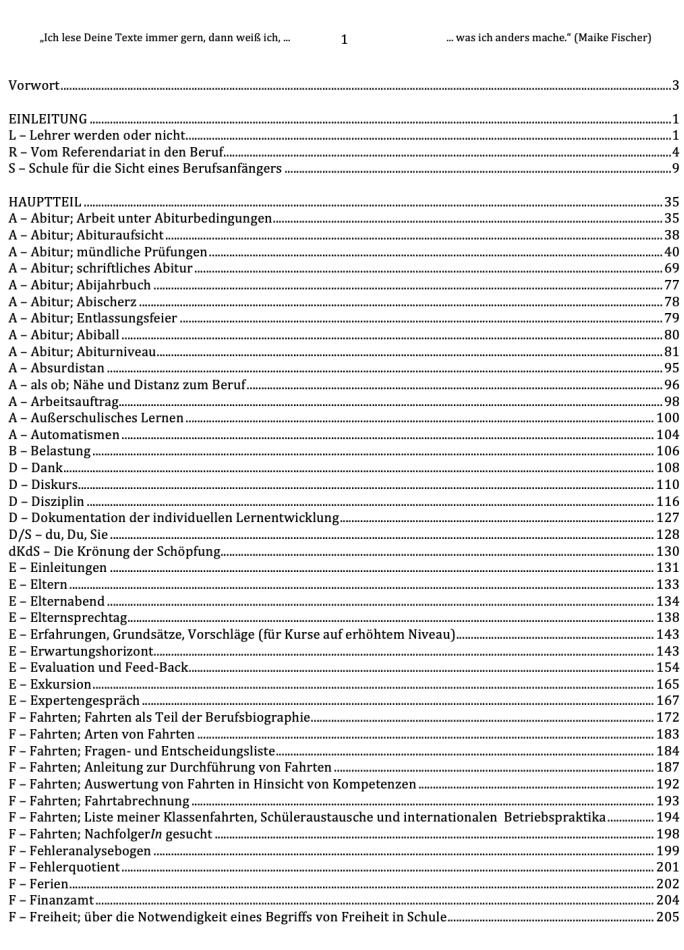


Über 100 Tipps für Berufsanfänger an Gymnasien (von Klasse 9 an)

Von A wie Abitur bis Z wie Zitate

Ulrich Vocke

Ulrich Vocke: Über 100 Tipps für Berufsanfängeran Gymnasien (von Klasse 9 an).
Von A wie Abitur bis Z wie Zitate. © 2020



„Ich lese Deine Texte immer gern, dann weiß ich, ... 1 ... was ich anders mache." (Maike Fischer)

Vorwort ... 3

EINLEITUNG ... 1
L – Lehrer werden oder nicht ... 1
R – Vom Referendariat in den Beruf ... 4
S – Schule für die Sicht eines Berufsanfängers ... 9

HAUPTTEIL ... 35
A – Abitur; Arbeit unter Abiturbedingungen ... 35
A – Abitur; Abituraufsicht ... 38
A – Abitur; mündliche Prüfungen ... 40
A – Abitur; schriftliches Abitur ... 69
A – Abitur; Abijahrbuch ... 77
A – Abitur; Abischerz ... 78
A – Abitur; Entlassungsfeier ... 79
A – Abitur; Abiball ... 80
A – Abitur; Abiturniveau ... 81
A – Absurdistan ... 95
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Conceived as a critical recipe book for those starting out in their careers

Written by an 'old hand' from the lowest level of the school

766 pages

Completely for nothing: COVID threw a spanner in the works, and that completely changed demand

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