

A Basic Law for teachers?

by Michael Felten,* Germany



Michael Felten
(Picture ma)

(CH-S) Doctors have the Hippocratic Oath to which they must adhere. After all, we trust them with our health and, not least, our lives. We entrust teachers with our young people, our most valuable asset, our future.

Wouldn't it be time to think about a "Basic Law for teachers", analogous to

the Hippocratic oath? Scholar Michael Felten does this with regard to Germany, but his thoughts are no less important for Swiss teachers.

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We have heard a lot about our Basic Law recently. For 75 years, it has provided a legal basis for people living together in Germany, not in the details, but in the basic features. It applies to everyone living here, not least teachers. But for them it should be specified a little more. After all, teachers have a special relationship with our community and our future – after all, we entrust our young people to them.

Our children's teachers are very different types, which firstly cannot be changed and secondly is not such a bad thing. After all, this is how adolescents learn to cope with the differences among people. In addition, our education system is federally structured, so teachers in southern Bavaria and teachers in northern Bremen do not act according to the exact same principles. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that – in addition to the guidelines and service regulations of the federal states – there should be some basic rules for the teaching profession. However, these are not written down anywhere – so let's give it a try.

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The decisive factor is not whether a method has a nice-sounding name, but whether the learning processes are sustainable. (Picture keystone)

Article 1: Teachers are pedagogical leaders.

Teachers are neither best friends nor officers. Rather, they must master the art of dealing with young people equally and unequally at the same time. On the one hand, they must empathise sensitively with children's thoughts and feelings, but on the other hand, they must also be able to point the way and make judgements undauntedly.

Article 2: Scepticism is one of the most important characteristics of teachers.

This is because they work in a kind of Bermuda Triangle: Pupils want to do as little homework as possible; parents want their child to have at least university entrance, and the Ministry of Education wants one thing before the election and another afterwards. Teachers should therefore

have an inner independent and be critical people, because they must find the path, they can justify for their particular learning group and their particular pupils.

Article 3:

There are many ways of teaching effectively.

That sounds banal, but it's not. For a long time, many people believed that there was a single, blissful teaching and learning method, such as self-organised, independent learning by pupils. Research has disproved this, and individual authorities have also admitted it – but teachers in the country should also be aware of this. In general, they should keep up to date with what research knows about which paths are more likely to lead to Rome – and which are not. The decisive factor should not be whether a method has a nice-sounding name or looks good. It is whether the learning processes of the pupils are sustainable, whether they have a profound effect.

*Article 4: Human beings
are more important than numbers.*

Recently, everything we do has to be measured – and evaluation certainly provides interesting data in education too. Yet, key figures are by no means all that matters in schools. Teaching is essentially a matter of relationships, an

emotionally based exchange between teachers and learners. It works differently to the processes in a bread baking line, can at best be rudimentarily described in the language of economics, and is ultimately not embraced by terms such as output or income.

*Article 5: Education for tomorrow
happens with present-day objects.*

From all sides, we hear that schools need to be completely reorganised – completely new skills are needed for the 21st century with its uncertainty and complexity. Education can therefore no longer be about acquiring knowledge; instead, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and communication should be on the agenda. Well, these have of course always been extremely important skills – but they cannot be acquired in a dry dock, but rather in the context of specialised learning.

In any case, the future was one thing above all for previous generations: uncertain. Serious and challenging education in a historically reflected present has always been the best thing a society could impart to its youth.

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