

Dear teachers, educators, students and lecturers

We are very much looking forward to next year's eleventh World Teachers Conference at the Goetheanum.

Under the heading of «Affirming – Nurturing – Trusting, an Education for Today and Tomorrow» we will explore central pedagogical questions that confront us today. Much in the biographies of children and young people, even in the social world at large, will depend on the answers we find to these questions.

Affirming children in their uniqueness, in their coming into the world, creating an environment that supports their development, an atmosphere of becoming that trusts in their future forces and intentions – these are the tasks we are facing every day.

The fact of the child's or young person's dependence places great responsibility on their entire social environment. They need our devotion – their bodily and mental situation is an unspoken plea to the adult world. Rudolf Steiner spoke of this plea at the beginning of his 1919 course for teachers, saying that it was the task of education to bring together the spirit-soul with the bodily organism «into a harmonious whole». How can we meet this unspoken plea given the real situations, challenges and dangers so many children and young people are exposed to in their environment?

Promoting health-giving forces is a decisive goal in education, as the young people learn to inhabit their body, to be in the world, to connect with others and with the world down to the possibility of taking on responsibility for the future. It is a journey of experiences and discoveries: in child play, in the directed attention, in the encounter with the richness and abundance of the world. Here, the foundations are prepared that will make the «harmonious whole» possible that needs to be promoted according to Rudolf Steiner.

Children and young people need others in order to be in the world. They need the 'you' that unlocks the world for and with them. This «you» provides safety, teaches trust and the courage to openly experience the world. Safety and protection are prerequisite for the strength that is required to courageously take steps into the unknown, into a world that holds new, astonishing possibilities and maybe also risks. Experiencing that one can trust in the world makes everything else possible, including the anticipation and longing for what can be known. As if evoked by the world, interest and a sense of being connected – and therefore the will to learn – can arise.

Every living organism depends on its environment. Life is needy: it needs more than itself, and it needs what is different from itself. This neediness is not only an expression of something lacking but also an achievement. In human beings, it signifies the space where freedom can arise in relation to the other. In children this neediness is almost physically existential. Only gradually is it released from the physical in order to live on in the soul, where it also concerns and addresses the essence of a person's existence.

Josep Maria Esquirol published remarkable thoughts about this neediness, about the longing for feeling safe and its conditions. In his essay *The Intimate Resistance. A Philosophy of Proximity*, he describes closeness as the foundation of humanity. The other person, safety, everydayness and being cared for are elements of this proximity. They are also basic elements of education. It is with great pleasure that we will be able to hear the Catalan philosopher right at the beginning of the World Teachers' Conference at the Goetheanum!

Esquirol thinks that being welcomed is existential for children; they need affirmation and devotion because these provide the child's first home:

Human existence begins in the home, which is the other. The other is then the original point of reference, and the one that only makes the other two points of reference (heaven and earth or orientation in time and space) possible. The «you», earth and heaven; the «you» comes before everything else.

This kind of being at home in the world opens up the possibility of wishing to explore it, of meeting it with a sense of wonder. The «you», which first envelops and receives the child, will for the adolescent become the mediator of the world. The mediator can unlock the world together with the child. Teachers facilitate access to the whole cosmos for children, Rudolf Steiner said in Oxford in August 1922. And this world, as a cosmos, can be experienced as a wider home – a home for which we can assume responsibility in life, out of freedom, so that it «may remain habitable», as a shared place for coming together, for learning and working.

To this our conference will be devoted.

Constanza Kaliks