

Affirming – Nurturing – Trusting, an Education for Today and Tomorrow

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The authors of the 2021 UNESCO report on the future of education did not mince matters when they described the current situation of humanity: «Our world is at a turning point. In our quest for growth and development, we humans have overwhelmed our natural environment, threatening our own existence.» [1]

They ask: «What role can education play in shaping our common world and shared future as we look to 2050 and beyond?» [2]

It is this question that we would like to address at the World Teachers' Conference. We think people who are interested in Steiner's educational impulse, and have gained experience in Waldorf Schools and Waldorf kindergartens, can indeed contribute to shaping our common world and shared future; to educating human beings who have enough strength, motivation and knowledge of their life conditions, including the dangers that threaten their living environment and who have, in addition, the creativity to develop and implement possible solutions. In 1922, Steiner said in Oxford, during a course on education, «If children are to live in future society, it is most important that they have strong, healthy bodies, free souls, and clear spirits.» [3]

Many of those who have taken on the great challenge of becoming teachers are interested in this goal of paving ways through education to overcome the multiple crises of our time. To quote Unesco: «Knowledge and learning are humanity's greatest renewable resources for responding to challenges and inventing alternatives. Yet, education does more than respond to a changing world. Education transforms the world.» [4] Those who have come together to form the foundation *Learning for Well-being* wish to see education and healthcare working towards one shared vision which supports human development. [5]

The *International Play Association* is trying to raise awareness through conferences and publications of how free play in early childhood and beyond can promote capacities that will be urgently required in tomorrow's society. [6] And the initiators of the learning method *Essence of Learning*, which aims to rekindle motivation and joy in learning in children who have experienced war or crises, inform potential donors that they «need to be ready to contribute to a safe and quality learning environment which includes the physical security of such locations, and to financing counselling and capacity building to local implementers and national education systems.» [7] Helping to enhance the pedagogical skills of local educators is seen here as a condition for sustainable change.

As Waldorf or Steiner teachers and educators we are clearly not alone in striving to use our pedagogical skills to kindle in children and young people skills that can contribute to changing life conditions and society. «Education transforms the world» is the motto put forward by Unesco to inspire all teachers to develop and rekindle enthusiasm and motivation in a profession that is often not sufficiently valued by society.

The question teachers and educators ask in their daily pedagogical practice is: what can contribute to a healthier living environment and social renewal; and what concrete steps can be taken to promote the desired skills.

At the World Teachers' Conference we would like to work on the following questions:

- How can education foster an appreciation of the physical foundations of our existence today? Steiner said in this context in 1922, «If we denigrate the body because we consider it something low that must be suppressed, we will certainly not acquire the ability to educate in a healthy way.» [8]
 - How can education inspire empathy? «Just as I need to empathize with others in order to understand them, I can understand nature better when I can feel myself into its processes.» [9] We need a flexible thinking that can really embrace the special qualities of all that is alive. «If you know that things must be seen from manifold positions, you can avoid fanaticism and live in universality.» [10] How do we promote empathy and flexible thinking in everyday life in our schools and kindergartens, in all age groups?
 - How do people awaken to a sense of responsibility for nature and society? How can we plant seeds for lifelong learning and continuous development in childhood and youth? «We must not force moral judgment on children; we merely lay the foundation so that, when children awaken at puberty, they can form their own moral judgments by observing life.» [11]
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To summarize these three aspects – affirmation and appreciation of physical existence, nurturing of our life conditions and trust in our own scope for development – we have chosen the title:

«Affirming – Nurturing – Trusting, an Education for Today and Tomorrow»

Each day will focus on a different question:

- Learning and development originate in the body and in sensory experience. How can this be adequately reflected in education?
 - Learning and development can be enhanced when we keep in mind that human beings have feelings and emotions that enable them to connect with what they have learned.
 - Learning and development aim to promote flexible thinking which ideally allows for a lifelong openness to new experiences and perspectives. What can the teaching of sciences and arts contribute to this?
 - School learning should also promote resilience and support physical and mental health. How can this be achieved?
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Nurturing new capacities in children requires us to also develop ourselves so that we can be open to a changing world. In the words of Gerald Hüter, «In an environment that keeps

changing as a result of our actions we will only remain healthy when we, as cognitive beings, are ready to keep changing.» [12] And in Rudolf Steiner's words, «A Waldorf teacher must be prepared to face something that will be completely different tomorrow from what it was yesterday.» [13]

We are looking forward to our working together at this conference!

Literature for preparation:

Rudolf Steiner: «The Spiritual Ground of Education» (GA 305, lectures 4, 8 und 9)

International Commission on the Futures of Education: «Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education»

Footnotes

[1]«Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education»

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Rudolf Steiner, *The Spiritual Ground of Education (GA 305), lecture 8, 24 August 1922, Anthroposophic Press 2004, p. 105*

[4]«Knowledge and learning are humanity's greatest renewable resources for responding to challenges and inventing alternatives. Yet, education does more than respond to a changing world. Education transforms the world»

[5]«We dream of seeing education and health care systems working with media, communities, national governments – indeed, with all of society – towards a shared vision of supporting human development, recognizing that well-being is its fundamental expression»

[6]«Research evidence highlights that playing is also central to children's spontaneous drive for development, and that it performs a significant role in the development of the brain, particularly in the early years. Play and recreation facilitate children's capacities to negotiate, regain emotional balance, resolve conflicts and make decisions»

[7]«If donors aim to support sustainable change they need to be ready to contribute to a safe and quality learning environment which includes the physical security of such locations, and to financing counselling and capacity building to local implementers and national education systems», p. 11

[8] Rudolf Steiner, *GA 305 (see footnote 3), lecture 8, p. 109*

[9] Valentin Wember: «*Was will Waldorf wirklich?*», Tübingen 2019, p. 41

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 134

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 52

[12] Gerald Hüther: «*Liebllosigkeit macht krank*», Freiburg 2021, p. 10

[13] Rudolf Steiner, *GA 305 (see footnote 3), lecture 9, p. 125*