

## The comprehensive education of his students is the teacher's task

**“A well-functioning and well-instructed  
classroom community is of crucial importance”**

by Dr phil Alfred Burger, Headmaster

“Only schools that are committed to a personalist view of man, only schools who guide and educate, can raise and develop children who later, as mature citizens, will help to forming democracy, to actively improve their own lives and the lives of others.”

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“Schools need to serve as models that train – on a small scale at that early stage – the intellectual and foremost the social abilities of children for their later lives as adults. Teachers show children how to actively approach learning problems, how to solve difficulties in their dealing with other children, how to live with divergent opinions, how to live peacefully with different kinds of children. This is educational work.”

*It often happens in our school that very interesting children are registered who have failed in school in spite of their high intelligence. In most cases they come to us with a long history of “clearing-ups” and diagnoses, which are not helpful, though. Instead of blaming the genes or looking for other speculative conditions as a cause for the problems, one should come back to and draw on the well-proven insights of pedagogy which are based on sound anthropology, i.e. a personalist view of the human being. A lot of research has been done on this basis; we can make use of a lot of well-proven results if we are to work with difficult children. One important foundation was laid by Alfred Adler's individual psychology. Its insights are giving us very relevant approaches for today's pedagogy and educational work.*

### We meet Alexander

One day we got a phone call from the school community. The school president asked us to accept the transfer of a student with whom they did no longer know what to do. In the past two years he had been at a therapy institution, but the stay there was limited to two years and the community had to pay more than CHF 100,000

annually. We wanted to meet the boy and invited him for an evaluation at our school. Alexander came to the appointment accompanied by his mother. He was a small, slightly stocky boy, not yet developed. I estimated his age at 12 years. In fact he was already 15. He brought a folder from the therapy school. With some pride he showed me his works. There were some math papers, hardly readable, then a number of presentations indicating a fourth grade level. Overall it was a mess, no system, no order, the handwriting was an unreadable scribbling; hardly a line was met. I listened to his vivid explanations on the contents of his presentations and soon we were talking. Then we read a small paragraph and did a short dictation. Finally we tackled some math with the basic arithmetic operations. Alexander cooperated willingly during the check-up, was rather quiet and concentrated. He tried his best. According to what we had learned from his parents and the therapy institution starting at a much lower level would have been mandatory. But my personal impression was different: Alexander had shown surprising speed and intelligence which did not match his earlier

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## No to the Curriculum 21\*

*The so-called consultation process on the Curriculum 21 is still going on. The resistance against this curriculum is broad and comprises the entire political and ideological spectrum. The criticism includes philosophical-ethical and state-political aspects as well as educational and psychological objections or technical and didactic, respectively methodological arguments.*

*In their introductions and presentations, curriculum developers keep repeating over and over again that there is no paradigm shift, that the sovereignty of the cantons will remain intact, that the kindergarten will continue to exist (in order to distract from their stealthily overriding the referendums against the introduction of a “base level”), etc. etc. – knowing that all that would just be the result of the new curriculum. Their assertion that it was not a fundamental reform, is mostly “correct” in so far, as many of the changes, which have already been introduced up to now, did anticipate the Curriculum 21, for example, at the level of teacher training and teaching materials. Here the ideas of Curriculum 21, e.g. its “Menschenbild” (the concept of the nature of the human being), its philosophy and politics have already*

\* Since the 1990ies the successful Swiss educational system was subject to fundamental changes. By means of so called “soft governance”-instruments, by medium of the OECD (PISA-studies) and the EU (Bologna-Process), radical reforms were implemented without honest democratic discussion. One part of these changes is centralisation, since education in the federal – bottom-up – organized Swiss state is in the sovereignty of the cantons. Under the pretext of “facilitating mobility” the now proposed “Lehrplan 21” (“Curriculum 21”) – the term standing for the 21 German speaking or bilingual cantons and the 21<sup>st</sup> century – shall standardise the curricula of these 21 cantons for compulsory education (2 years of kindergarten plus 9 years of primary and secondary school). In reality it includes a complete break with the European educational ideal.

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achievements. We determinedly agreed to the school president's request.

After I had met Alexander personally, I delved into the mountain of reports and test results. Here are the most important points:

Alexander, born 3 May 1991, diagnosis:

- Organic brain dysfunction
- Hyperkinetic dysfunction of social behavior
- Motoric dysfunction
- Perceptual disorders
- Partial performance disorders
- Normal intelligence

Case history and treatment plan: After inconspicuous pregnancy slightly delayed motoric development, as of young age a motorically rather restless, uncontrolled child. Massive behavioral disorders with aggressiveness, uncontrolled violence and lack of social integration as of kindergarten age. In consequence severely burdened school development: recommendation for treatment at a day clinic. Postponed according to the parents' wish. Instead school enrollment in a special enrollment class. In spite of individual teaching increasing behavioral disorders (strangling other children, restlessness, disturbing classes), in some cases his dispensation from school was unavoidable. Although the boy was promoted highly individually and supported intensely, he was not able to make progress at school and was no longer bearable in a group of more than two children. Evaluation as inpatient in a neurological clinic, child psychiatric treatment as inpatient, individual tuition and tuition in a group of two, tuition in the children's hospital, treatment with methylphenidate, therapy for dyslexia, several schools with small groups, finally referral to a child psychiatric therapy institution at the age of 13. Family intact. Working father, housewife mother. Older sister, inconspicuous. Due to mental problems, the mother was absent for recreation twice.

According to the report by the therapy institution, Alexander is still very restless, especially in case he is challenged. The institution's recommendation for his further schooling: avoidance of challenges in order to prevent the feeling of excessive demand. In these situations, Alexander might suddenly snap. Psychotherapy is recommended, likewise the administration of methylphenidate.

**Character shows at school**

At first we tried to get to know Alexander. Reports and tests always describe a current status. We consider humans as developable and dynamic beings forming an

indivisible entity. This entity needs to be grasped and understood as a whole in its complexity. This is why it is always necessary to watch the child in its motions when learning and in its behavior within a community. At the beginning of the new school year, the boy started in our school with individual lessons, sometimes together with several other children. Soon my impression was confirmed that Alexander was very intelligent and able to grasp the material immediately – if he felt like it. After two or three lessons I took the papers with basic exercises away which I had prepared and gave him the books of the secondary school level B. I sent him to English lessons, later to French, even though his mother held the opinion that foreign languages would be an excessive demand. Then he became part of a little group where he soon became a pretty good student. But: The commotion that Alexander caused in the group was impressive from the start. As soon as he heard a catchword or something else crossed his mind, he immediately jumped on it, interrupted the lesson and claimed all attention. He started to tell something in a loud voice and could hardly be interrupted. Or he rushed to the window because he saw an interesting car, demanding that we all come and watch it. If he could not say immediately what he wanted to, he was going to forget it, he told his protesting teacher. When he did not want to learn something, he started to complain loudly. He could not do it, it was boring, we would never need this in our later life, etc. He was extremely glib and always had the final word. If this was in vain, he put his head on the table, demanding that he would be allowed to complete the exercise at home; he would now prefer to draw a car, he said. In lessons he always managed to attract attention. He was so skillful in this that there was hardly a teacher who did not fall for it. He often got a shrewd expression, his eyes wandering eagerly – the sign that he was soon about to start one of his attempts to communicate with a fellow student. Among children he was always tempted to communicate with the others: He disrupted them verbally or he touched them in some way, always claiming that it was the other child who had started it. There was always action in his vicinity, he laughed overly loud, annoying the other children. At break time, he often ran about, red-faced, always escaping from someone he had irked with his so-called jokes. What started as fun mostly ended in a quarrel because the others felt molested. The other children liked him but somehow, however, on close looking it was clear that nobody really wanted to deal with him. He had little contacts,

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*been incorporated. Today's educational crisis – e.g. the fact that apparently 15% of the Swiss are functionally illiterate after the end of compulsory elementary school – is a harbinger of what the new curriculum would bring, since it would be cementing exactly this undesirable development.*

*The purpose of this special issue is to continue our recent documentaries on education and deal with several fundamental aspects.*

*The adjacent contribution from the teaching practice shows what a pedagogy oriented towards a personalist view of the human being can achieve, and it reflects – together with a mother's experiences (p. 7) – basic educational (mis)assumptions of the Curriculum 21: The propagated "self-directed" learning causes failures and leaves children completely in the lurch, while the alleged "Gemeinschaftsschule" (in Germany) or the methods of individualization practiced there (as they are in Switzerland) mean that children become lonely, are left alone with their feelings and their failures and all too often fall by the wayside. That all the other children will not draw any positive conclusions from this experience in regard to forming a well-functioning community, is obvious.*

*But children want to learn, they want to achieve, they want to play a meaningful role in the human community – and this is why they need teachers who accept them as human beings and who are actually familiar with the abundant knowledge of pedagogy and developmental psychology. Thus they are also able to cope with the educational objectives as determined in the cantonal constitutions and school laws of Switzerland. In different formulation and each with its own emphasis the latter demand that our children should be brought up and educated to become independent and responsible people who are in a position to live their lives independently and at the same time contribute as citizens and fellow human beings to the common weal.*

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hardly any friends, even in his village. If he liked a girl, he was hardly able to concentrate on anything else; he wanted to take her in completely, just like he wanted to have everybody else just for himself. In spite of the great commotion he created, he was a likeable boy who had his witty sides. He was not violent; he was responsive and could also behave reasonably.

So, after a short period, we had made a wealth of observations and experiences with Alexander. He was able to think of only himself; everything else had to be busy with him. He never included others in his feelings and in his thoughts. Neither was he aware that he was stopping his fellow students from learning; his sense for community was hardly developed.

**What drives Alexander?**

We quickly suspected that with his difficult behavior Alexander aimed at persuading the teachers to spend all their time on him. His exaggerated striving for self-assertion constantly drove him to actions that made the adults having to deal with. In fact, we learned from Alexander's parents, that as an infant, he had kept his mother occupied from morning to night up to the point of exhaustion. She constantly had to look after him and could leave him alone for one minute. In the evening he could not go to sleep, because he always had to find out what was going on in the living-room. So, not even at night the parents were at rest. It was due to Alexander's great restlessness that from exhaustion the mother had to take holidays for convalescence several times. Causes for this were the mother's own personal insecurity and anxiety, which were felt by her son. He had realized at an early age that with his restlessness he had her always to himself.

Also, another of his mother's reports showed Alexander's aim to seek a particular situation. As things did not go well in the public primary school a check-up in a neurological clinic was prescribed. Soon it was discovered there, that Alexander's symptoms were not the result of a disease. But he felt so extraordinarily comfortable at this clinic and its school that he wanted to stay there and he enforced his will. Among those children, who had to live with a real restriction, Alexander, without great effort, gave one of the best performances. So, he never had any homework, which he clearly enjoyed. Like a king he was driven from far away in a taxi every day and felt obviously comfortable, particularly because he never had to do any homework. But in the long run he could not stay there. Then he came to a teacher, who didn't want to let him get away

with anything. Of course, he did not like it there, which he loudly expressed. The parents soon took him out of this school, because they simply could not take his dissatisfaction. No man, no school was able to give Alexander this attention, which, in his opinion, he needed.

But how to cure such unrest? How to develop more security and more sense of community with Alexander?

**The educational work begins**

Every child has some positive sides. This is, where we had to start with Alexander. His cleverness, his intelligence and liveliness were outstanding and we immediately noticed that. Previously one had always tried to stop Alexander or not to expect too much from him, because then his evasive maneuvers began. He had high expectations and he was basically always discontent with himself. We made it clear to him, that we did not at all agree with this level offered by him up to now. From now on, this writing, this presentation of his notebook, his refusals to learn anything was absolutely out of the question. We told him, that the examination had shown that he was extraordinarily intelligent, and that any protection would be wrong for him. The objective would be to catch up on the missed subject matter and, in individual subjects, also to change to the secondary school level A, and finally to target a challenging apprenticeship. We would not have in mind to continue dealing with him in the previous way. Alexander immediately agreed and he entered into a kind of working alliance with us, because he wanted to stay at our school, by all means. So, with immediate effect, we demanded a normal program. Behold, he began to improve his performance continuously. The notebooks were better kept, the writing became legible. We gave Alexander a detailed instruction on how he could achieve the objectives, and also talked to him again and again, when he fell back into his old learning behavior. So, over many weeks we tried to demand more from Alexander in this manner and to give him the feeling: I can do, what I have planned, I can do, what is required of me, and I can do it as well as the others.

The earlier efforts had all fell flat without an effect, because they had addressed Alexander's uncollaborative behavior. Alexander's disruptive behavior during lessons was unstoppable. He imposed his will most of the time. The actual reason of his behavior was rooted in his feeling not to be able to stand up to the comparison with the others and in his permanent imagination that he was not as smart as others.

**A widespread phenomenon**

It is not difficult to see nowadays that children at schools are more restless and more

nervous than in former times. When difficulties arise in school, children as Alexander are readily sent to the so-called “Abklärung” (psychological check-up), where diagnoses such as ADHD and the like are soon provided with appropriate therapies and medications. On the one hand, schools and teachers try to protect themselves from later accusations, because not a few of those maladjusted children later end up in psychiatry or in crime. On the other hand, we may actually speak of a surrender of pedagogy. A pedagogy dedicated to the education of the future generation, unfortunately does hardly no longer exist – committed teachers must be excluded, here. Today, schools spend all their potential on reforms and structural changes, the computerization of teaching and the adaptation to the so-called globalized world with quality management, quality testing, etc. Meetings and discussions chase one another, everything is reorganized. The teachers are harnessed for trivialities and administrative tasks and really worn down – many lectures are cancelled. At best teachers are mere learning guides. One wonders, where in this whole arrangement the children are. “It is the school system, the system of the theory of education and didactics, the system of psychological and pedagogical understanding that breaks down here,” says *Wolfgang Bergmann*, a psychologist who has extensively dealt with the so-called ADHD (Attention-Deficit-Hyperactivity-Children).

Coming back again to our example, I would like to mention, that under no circumstances, I want to blame teachers, psychologists or psychiatrists, who have spent their time on this boy. Alexander has always been and still is a difficult child, who surely brought the educators quickly to the brink. However, the example also shows, how far the school and the assisting institutions have become detached from basic psychological and educational considerations that have already been well-known for quite a long time.

**Difficulties at school are rooted in the child's personal environment**

Alexander's feeling of insufficiency had a lot to do with his elder sister. But she is hardly ever mentioned in the reports. The constellation of siblings as a factor in the development of inferiority feelings is hardly considered today. The child is too much considered merely as an individual without regard to its environment. The diagnoses are correspondingly one-sided as are the respective measures: individual work, play therapy, etc. Often legions of specialists deal with such children. In almost all cases, they are removed from the community with other children. Thus

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each child will soon think of itself it is the only one that is afflicted by this problem.

As *Alfred Adler* already emphasized, the birth order of siblings is quite significant. He ascribes a large part of inferiority feelings and damage of the "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" (sense of community) to the position and the rivalry and jealousy problems in the siblings' relationship. The only child's jealousy is often even more problematic, because it constantly competes with adults. The family situation is different for each child. Greater activity of one child may severely discourage the other one; the younger sister's success at school may lead to the older sibling's failure. Siblings often specialize. The older one is good at mathematical subjects, a younger one is better at languages, and vice versa. A middle sibling may completely fall back into old habits when a new child is born. It also wants to be small or starts to bother the younger one. All this clearly shows how important siblings are for the person's emotional life. Siblings are always comparing to each other, which is quite normal. This jealousy among children may be significantly increased if the parents carry inequality into the siblings' community by privileging and discriminating or if they think they might prevent jealousy by measuring and apportioning accurately. But this will only fuel jealousy. There should be an atmosphere of equivalence within the family. At the same time it is quite normal that a younger child can do less than the older ones. If the parents are unsure on this point, you can be sure that the jealousy of the younger child will grow strongly and that it will desperately claim to do, what the older children are allowed to do. You can not treat the children as the same, but as equals. Today we often see that younger children fall into a great nervousness, because they can hardly bear to have an older sibling. They are constantly trying to catch up, are unable to find any peace of mind and will soon be considered as hyperactive children. Of course, this restlessness has also much to do with today's environment of children, where only counts what is going fast, what is extraordinary.

The difference between Alexander and his older sister was striking. Unlike Alexander, his parents never had any problems with her. She was a good student, was pretty, had many friends and was well liked. Alexander did not get on well with her. He annoyed her whenever possible. Thus the mother was always kept busy. Alexander could never get used to the fact that the older sister just knew more. Instead of emulating her in a constructive

spirit, he expanded his position as difficult boy more and more and was soon known for that in the whole village. When we told his sister in a conversation Alexander could learn as well as she and others could, she was outraged and insisted that there was something wrong in Alexander's head and that this was the reason why he was such an outrageous person.

School would have to take into account the changed situation of many of today's children in their families and their sibling position, if they wanted to help the children on their way on. Today there is unrest and uncertainty in some families. Many parents do not dare to demand anything from their children. From this point of view the education reforms with their free and open types of teaching, with self-directed learning and with teachers who see themselves as animators are a catastrophe for many children.

**Many children are like Alexander**

Children like Alexander are egocentric children with few social skills. With such children it is often the mother who is in the focus, and there often is an absent or weak father in the background. Their mothers are often overprotective and harmonizing and barely able to really empathize with their children and to act spontaneously and genuinely in the educational process. The kids are always in the center. Therefore, nervous children would not need anything of what is the fashion of the day, the trend of our times, which many schools offer today. Children like Alexander need benevolent but firm guidance, they need reliability, they need external and internal order. Education requires authenticity in behavior and a sense of self. Today this is missing to a large part. Parents and teachers do not dare to demand something from their children, to switch the television off right in front of them, to make them participate in a sensible association and to ensure that they go there. Where chaos is reigning, troubled children are restless. Therefore, a school with structures would be important. That gives them support in the confusion of their feelings. They calm down. It is a mistake of our time that it is considered unfashionable to demand keeping a nice book and acquiring a legible handwriting from the children. People believe it is no longer appropriate in the computer age. And yet spelling, writing and keeping one's exercise books are extremely important to give the missing support to the children. They are more satisfied when they have designed a beautiful page and can rejoice in it.

We found that was also true with Alexander. When the teachers firmly demanded from him what must just be requested at school, he calmed down, started to

work. If this clear guidance lacked, he got nervous and even more nervous. For Alexander it was important to be challenged and to be demanded to do tasks he found too difficult. It was important not to fall for his evasive maneuvers. He had developed a huge repertoire in this field, as a teacher you can only marvel. But it was worth doubling one's own forces and leading him on to a positive path with even greater endurance. Again and again, when he managed to tackle a task which initially seemed to be too large in his view, we helped him to gain a bit more self-confidence, a bit more confidence among the other children. In fact, he felt extremely inferior to them just as he felt in the relationship with his sister. As a side note: If the teacher does not evaluate the problem correctly, if he thinks that there is something wrong with the student, that needs a check-up and diagnosis, etc., the cause is lost with such a child. Or even more so if he feels pity for the student from his own personal story. Therefore school and teachers have to ensure that the children can cope with the subject matter and that as many as possible think: "That is something for me, I can do that."

**The significance of the class community**

A well-functioning and well-guided class community is of immense importance for the integration of children, who have had a lack of preparation at home. Here a small excursion on the importance of the class community would actually be necessary. In the 20s of the last century students of Alfred Adler ran schools, in which the well-functioning class community was of central importance. In each class there are children bringing with them a sense of community. The teacher can count on them, they will help him with his task, to win children with a less-developed sense of community over, that is, children with less exercise and familiarity with social interaction. School must provide a model training already on a small scale the intellectual, but above all the social skills of children for their later life as adults. The teachers show the children how to cope actively with difficulties in learning, how to solve difficulties in being together with other children, how to learn to live with different opinions, how to get along in a peaceful and non-violent way with children, who may be different. That is educational work. The teacher does not only lead them to the beauties of nature and of science, to the beautiful feeling of having understood something, but he also shows them how other people feel and are doing and thus raises their social interest for their neighbors and for the people around the world. It is important in this context

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that the teacher totally and genuinely dedicates himself as a person, applauds, and also assesses and classifies, what children do. That he also has the heart to demand something and to say if he finds that something is wrong. A child, anchored and trained in such a manner, has learned to confront the problems in a more courageous way and it is more immune to withdrawing and reacting with depressions to the storms of its future life, in cases of disappointments, of loss and of other difficulties coming across him or her in his life.

Therefore, schools are needed, which start out from a pedagogical approach and seeing their most sacred duty not to discourage the children and to make them co-players in the community. Reviving this beautiful concern would be a task of today's education. As already mentioned, unfortunately, our schools are moving in a different direction.

Returning to our example Alexander: School had also failed on this point. The reports show that some educators managed to establish a relationship of trust with the boy. But no one succeeded in accompanying Alexander to be part of a larger community, in demanding an adequate behavior from him and in ensuring that a peaceful atmosphere prevailed in classes. In almost all cases children want nothing more than to get along with the others in the community. For that to happen they absolutely need the guidance of their educators. The bibliography of this actually lovable boy showed that a natural contact with the other children was lacking. Already at an early age he was removed from the community because of his

enormous difficulties in it. Obviously, no one realized that his behavior – admittedly inept – was an attempt to get in contact with other children. What he had trained with his mother, namely to attract his mother's entire attention to himself at all costs, he as well tried with the children at school. During his first class he was constantly walking around in the classroom, because he wanted to see how far the others had proceeded with their work. This behaviour had been construed as a lack of control of his urge to move and as an inner restlessness. But actually he was unsure whether he was as good as the others, and he wanted to keep trying. In order to direct his nervousness to a collaborative effort, it would have been better, for example, to appoint him assistant teacher of mathematics.

**The consolidation of the achievements**

The development of Alexander was marked by many ups and downs but over time he calmed down more and more and began to play a positive role in class. We also noted that he liked helping others. So we gave him tasks at school which he had to accomplish. Even with the parents, we discussed how he could make himself useful at home. He supported his mother in cooking. He showed her what he had learned in the cooking lessons at school. He had to assist his father with more difficult tasks. We thought that this was important, so that he begins to align himself more to his father. So far, his mother had taken the dominant role. At school we put also emphasis on the fact that Alexander helped the other children. First he helped younger ones and later peers. In doing so he could show his strengths and make a constructive contribution to the community. Alexander had grown con-

tented with himself to the point that we thought about a next step. He was to be re-integrated into a larger class in the municipality. This had to be prepared carefully as we knew that Alexander's mother would oppose vigorously. In some discussions with the authorities, we discussed Alexander's development and convinced the parents to take this step. Then, after the period of two years, Alexander left our school and entered a normal class in his municipality. I did not inform the teacher, I wished that he could see a normal boy in Alexander from the very beginning. And lo and behold, Alexander behaved perfectly, no longer disrupted the lessons, cooperated and took an active part in lessons and achieved good grades. Six months later, he got an apprenticeship as a plumber, which he had wished for. Today he has already successfully completed his apprenticeship and has become a young man living his life and you would not suspect him having had those difficulties previously.

When he popped in a few weeks ago and talked about his development at school and during the apprenticeship, he finally said with pride: "Come out for a little while, there is my car out there in the parking lot!" Obviously it was important for Alexander to demonstrate to us what he had achieved. The orientation of children towards adults, even when those children are grown up, can simply not be explained away. The human being is a person and a social being that would like to get an echo from other people. Only a school that is committed to the image of man as a person, only a school that guides and educates is able to train children who will later help as citizens to shape democracy and to actively improve their own lives and the lives of others. •

# Curriculum 21 from a juridical point of view

by J.D. Marianne Wüthrich

The Curriculum 21 (C21) is to be rejected for the following juridical reasons:

## 1. An obligation for the cantons to introduce C21 cannot be derived from Article 62 of the Swiss Federal Constitution (“Bundesverfassung”: BV).

Article 62 BV decrees in paragraph 4 (effective since 21 May 2006), the “harmonisation of school education by means of co-ordination in the areas of school entry age and compulsory school attendance, the duration and objectives of levels of education, and the transition for one level to another, as well as the recognition of qualifications”.

*This is phrased in general terms and one cannot deduce from this wording that the cantons must agree to a curriculum which was generated at the administrative level under exclusion of the public.*

*It cannot even be derived from Article 62 BV that the cantons could be at all obliged to implement a common curriculum.*

## 2. The “objectives of the education levels” according to Article 62 BV must be formulated in such a way as to maintain the educational sovereignty of the cantons.

According to Article 62 (1) BV, the cantons are responsible for the school system. The Curriculum 21 interferes severely with the educational authority of the cantons by overriding the requirements of the cantonal school laws.

Here as an example the clause stating the purpose of the Elementary Schools Act (“Volksschulgesetz”: VSG) of the Canton of Zurich (from 7 February 2005), whose objectives the C21 is diametrically opposed to. The same applies to all cantons. All school laws set targets, whose intellectual level and superior humane cast of mind C21 is completely incapable of achieving:

*§2. 1 Elementary school promotes behaviour that recognizes Christian, humanitarian and democratic values. It safeguards freedom of belief and conscience and has consideration for minorities. It encourages and promotes girls and boys alike.*

*2 The elementary school complements education in the family. School authorities, teachers, parents, and, if necessary, the appropriate youth service institutions work together.*

*3 The elementary school fulfils its educational mandate by organising the lessons and the school’s communal life.*

*4 The elementary school provides basic knowledge and skills, it guides students to recognize contexts. It promotes respect for fellow human beings and for the environment and strives for the holistic development of children to become independent and socially competent human beings. The school strives to awaken and to preserve the joy of learning and of achievement. It notably furthers commitment, motivation to take on responsibility, sane judgement and the ability to criticise with discernment as well as a capability for dialogue. Teaching takes the individual talents and inclinations of the children into account and lays the foundation for lifelong learning.*

## 3. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) has no democratic legitimacy.

The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) is not the same as “the cantons” and has no democratic legitimacy to prescribe a curriculum – or anything else – to the cantons. It consists of a collection of individual executive members who have been elected each as an individual person by the citizens of their cantons to transact cantonal affairs and in particular to execute the orders of their sovereign and of the cantonal parliament. Decisions of the EDK (as well as decisions of the other “Cantonal Ministers’ Conferences”) are in no way binding to the individual cantons. The Directors of Education may solely submit proposals for concordats (inter-cantonal treaties) or for cantonal laws to their canton, i.e. its Parliament and its people.

## 4. The canton’s policy makers are not bound to the “Administrative Agreement on the implementation of the development project for a regional-language curriculum (Project Agreement Curriculum 21)” dated 18 March 2010.

As can be read in the “Framework Information on the Consultation” for C21 from 25 June 2013, all the governments of the 21 German-speaking cantons have signed so-called “Administrative Agreements” in the course of 2010, which regulates the organization, implementation and financing of the development of a “Regional-language Curriculum.”

To make this harmless-sounding process explicit the following must be set down :

a) The executive bodies have agreed to the development of a common curricu-

ulum and respective loans without involvement of the Parliament and the people.

b) Also, politically highly interested citizens have not heard about this, because they can of course not read all decisions of their cantonal administration.

c) And on top of all this even the government councils of those cantons that have refused to join HarmoS have signed the “Management Agreement.” This monstrosity in direct democratic Switzerland is worth a separate paragraph.

The sovereign and the cantonal parliaments are not bound to a management agreement, and definitely not to its result, namely the Curriculum 21.

All cantons can say no to the C21.

## 5. No to bypassing and eliminating the sovereign in the non-HarmoS cantons.

The sovereign said no to HarmoS at the ballot box in the seven cantons of Lucerne, Graubünden, Thurgau, Nidwalden, Uri, Zug, and Appenzell Ausserrhoden. In Appenzell Innerrhoden the rural community assembly rejected HarmoS. In Obwalden and Aargau there was not even a vote on this matter – because it became apparent that the population would vote against a curriculum that tars all cantons with the same brush. Despite this clear democratic decision the EDK tries to impose the HarmoS curriculum on the non-HarmoS cantons.

This illegal and undemocratic process needs to be stopped immediately.

The governments of the cantons that did not join HarmoS have to adhere to the will of the people. The cantonal parliaments must request respect for the people’s decisions from the national executive.

## 6. The Curriculum 21 is a HarmoS product according to their explanations. With the rejection of the HarmoS Agreement, voters have said no to the planned unified curriculum.

“Based on the HarmoS Agreement EDK has developed and publish basic skills (National Education Standards) for the school language, two foreign languages, mathematics and natural sciences. The harmonization of curricula has been defined as a task of the language regions by the HarmoS Agreement. Curricula, teaching materials, assessment instruments and educational standards are to be coordinated. The HarmoS Agreement became effective on 1 August 2009. Within 6 years

# Curriculum 21 is not suitable for Switzerland and ought to be rejected

ds. Jean Monnet, who pandered to American interests when the European Community was founded is reported to have said: “If I could start all over again with the European policy, I would not start with the coal and steel sectors, but with education and culture.”<sup>1</sup> – Those who dream of an imperial Europe today, are lamenting the lack of a unified “European social and educational policy”, which could mobilize citizens for the new Empire.<sup>2</sup> – And the United States have urged the OECD, under threat of their resignation, to develop internationally comparable and measurable standards of education, so as to be able to influence the educational policies of other countries with the help of the OECD. This is what Pisa was developed for. – Empires have always known what establishing and keeping up their power comes down to.<sup>3</sup>

By now, everyone can read how it is done. Numerous publications describe with downright infuriating openness how the removal of democratic structures and the heteronomy of those countries’ educational policy was achieved with the help of Pisa and other “soft governance instruments”. This course of action, which runs contrary to democracy and to international law, is well documented.<sup>4</sup>

## Switzerland as a research laboratory?

At the Collaborative Research Centre 597 “Transformations of the State” of the

University of Bremen, the influence of international organizations on Swiss educational policy was examined.<sup>5</sup>

Conclusion: “The results show that international organizations provided important stimuli for domestic reforms by applying various governance instruments. National transformation capacity – Veto Players and Swiss cultural guiding principles of education – did not prevent this. Instead, the empirical findings demonstrate an unexpectedly high influence of IO governance instruments – particularly of standard setting, coordinative activities and discursive spread – on the shaping of Swiss educational policy. “The study considers the successful transformation of the Swiss educational sovereignty as a model for political change in other countries! Yet until now, Swiss politics have persistently denied (their citizens) a look at reality.

## The break with the humanistic tradition of education is against our constitution

*Curriculum 21*, released for consultation at the end of June and to be introduced in the 21 Swiss German cantons in 2014, turns out to be a genuine OECD-new-speak concoction. With its emulation of Anglo-Saxon methods, and its reference to Pisa, educational reform, its constructivism and pragmatism,<sup>6</sup> it leads to a radical break with the humanist tradition of education in favour of pure utilitarianism, which

is known to deny education to a majority in its countries of origin, England and the United States. True education is to be had only in expensive private schools, and to be had there, of course, by means of traditional learning.

The authors prefer using positively charged terms, but – in keeping with the constructivist ideology that everyone creates his own reality – these degenerate into empty non-words, because they are filled with new content. Thus the central concept of *competence* has nothing to do with the notion of competent people which we all know. Being competent has always enjoyed a high reputation – the wheel needs not be reinvented. But in the curriculum 21, the concept of competence is a hollow pattern which is filled with all kinds of contents and then comes along once as self-competence, then as linguistic, social, or namely as “Kompetenzkompetenz” (competence-competence: meaning the competence to define your own competences). Not the acquisition of knowledge, or learning, are at the centre of all this, but “intended behaviour comes into focus.”<sup>7</sup> An idea that is not even fit for behavioural conditioning of dogs, let alone the formation of people.

The curriculum 21 does not connect to the existing curricula and is neither a “necessary update”<sup>8</sup> nor a “harmonization project”<sup>8</sup> but lays down a repositioning of

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## “Curriculum 21 from a juridical ...”

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after coming into effect, i.e. from school year 2015/16 onwards, the joined cantons are bound to apply the basic skills (National Education Standards).” (“Framework Information on the Consultation” dated 25 June 2013, p. 7).

From this it follows clearly: The cantons which did not join HarmoS must not introduce C21 without a referendum.

The “Framework Information on the Consultation” indeed flatly asserts: “The cantons that have not joined the HarmoS Agreement, are required by the Federal Constitution to harmonize the duration and objectives of the school levels. Therefore, all the German-speaking cantons are involved in the curriculum project. The Curriculum 21 has been designed so that it can be used by all cantons, regardless of whether they have joined the HarmoS Agreement or not.”

This reasoning demonstrates best how it would work out if our youth would be taught the “competence” in school to “speak their minds” without having the necessary background knowledge:

Due to the obligation of the cantons according to Constitution Article 62, “to harmonize the duration and objectives of the school levels,” no canton can be forced to adopt a curriculum which has been produced by a non-democratic non-legitimated body in secret. This would violate the principles of the rule of law, of federalism and democracy.

## 7. Also cantons, that joined HarmoS are not obliged to accept the C21.

The latter argument also applies to the cantons, which have joined HarmoS. Even though they have agreed in Article 8 of the HarmoS agreement on the development of a common curriculum (inter-cantonal agreement on the harmonization of compulsory education [HarmoS Agreement] dated 14 June 2007) that does not mean that they bought a pig in a poke.

The C21 as of today must not be implemented in these cantons as it does not reach the goals set in the HarmoS Agreement.

Examples where the aims of the HarmoS Agreement are not achieved are given below:

*Article 3, Paragraph 2: “During compulsory school each student acquires the basic education, which provides access to vocational training or general education at the secondary level II [...]”*

*Article 3, paragraph 1 a “Language: A comprehensive basic education in the local standard language (oral and written language proficiency) [...]”*

## 8. The cantonal authority over education according to Constitution Article 62, paragraph 1 is to be respected.

This is indicated by the “Framework Information” (p. 7).

It needs to be noted that the school jurisdiction of the cantons must not be reduced to the duration and method of implementation. Even the “permission” of the C21-authors that the cantons may make “adjustments”, set the timetables, organizing classification of the cycles and the like, downgrades the sovereign cantons to implementation agents.

Such an erosion of the cantonal authority on education cannot be tolerated by us citizens of all cantons – with or without HarmoS Agreement. •

# Curriculum 21: more US-testing, “market society” and erosion of democracy

by Dr phil Balz Kling

Since July 2013, the new Curriculum 21 – hitherto kept under tight wraps – has been brought forward for consultation in the Swiss Parliament. It is doubtful how serious the authors take public discussion and assessment of this curriculum that will uniform the entire Swiss education scenery if not impose political conformity on it. After all, the Curriculum-21-promoters know that this curriculum – elaborated secretly

“We have to clearly realize the meaning of the new ‘competence concept’ which is solely and expressly oriented towards the commercial factor. Its goal is the management, centralization and globalization of the educational system. Education has no specific value, here. Subjects like art, music, history, literature, let alone Latin and Old Greek, are threatened to be shifted to the storage siding. The American sociologist Ritter even speaks of ‘McDonaldization of education’: The same product, the output, shall be generated like a ‘Big Mac’ of the same quality, independently of prerequisites, educational traditions, and educational goals among others: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control are the fashionable magic words. The standardization of the product logically leads to ‘competence curricula’ in order to create quantitative statistics on educational outcomes. Interestingly, the ‘educational standards’ which are now being introduced to us, failed in the US long ago.”

Prof Dr Hans Klein, President of the German Society for the Teaching of Biological Sciences and Director of the Society for Education and Science ([www.bildung-wissen.eu](http://www.bildung-wissen.eu)) in an interview with the internet blog “Kirschsblog”, Source: <http://kirschsblog.wordpress.com> of 18 September 2012

(Translation Current Concerns)

by a small panel of selected people – will virtually eliminate the sovereignty of the 21 cantons in terms of primary school education. In future, the “CEO-level” in Berne (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education with their department heads, think tanks, etc.) will dictate the “strategy” for future primary education and the cantonal and communal level will only be “operationally” active, i.e. implement the “orders from above” – acting in the spirit of New Public Management, which has now taken the lead in the Swiss political system. In plain language, this means that the federal political culture of Switzerland, working in a subsidiary way from “bottom-up” and not centralized, would now work “top-down” and would finally be abolished at least with regard to the school system. Once the cantons and communes will have started realizing this insight, determined resistance is guaranteed. Therefore, the curriculum-makers together with universities have counteracted this “danger” prior to the disclosure in the media by issuing the slogan that the Curriculum 21 contained the necessary “adjustments” to the requirements of time, i.e. “globalization” and the need to an overall “mobility”. Dissenters, who want to hold on, for example, to the sovereignty of the cantons, are stigmatized as “anxiety neurotics”, “hillbillies” or at best “nostalgians”. Thus a real debate should obviously be nipped in the bud. This approach is not new, but was not always successful, as the first attempt to uniform Switzerland – HarmoS – has shown. Nevertheless, one may, given the direct democracy in Switzerland, be quite amazed at how it has been possible in recent years to implement sweeping changes in the Swiss school system without any public debate. This was the case especially with the EU-initiated “Bologna” reform (university and college) and the “Pisa”-

“The whole thing is not a German [and certainly not a Swiss] invention. As early as in the 90s in the US, ‘educational standards’ were nationwide implemented to get a grip on the extreme educational gap of the singular US states. Professor Diane Ravitch, once a fervent advocate of educational standards, who was instrumental in implementing them under President George Bush Senior, has written a much-noticed book in the US recently: ‘The Death and Life of the Great American School System. How Tests and Choice are Undermining Education’. This means analogously translated: Educational standards lead to the erosion of education. And instead of learning from the experiences of the US, we are now copying and implementing it.”

Prof Dr Hans Klein

Source: <http://kirschsblog.wordpress.com> of 18 September 2012

(Translation Current Concerns)

testing prescribed by the OECD – hence “reforms” of international organizations that have never been legitimized, neither by the Swiss population nor the Swiss Parliament. This article focuses on the one hand on the US-inspired “content” of Curriculum 21, and on the other hand on the question of how the democratic process in education and school issues has been virtually eliminated in Switzerland.

In an interview with the German weekly *Die Zeit* on the political process in Switzerland with the “Bologna” reform, the current President of the Swiss University Conference of Directors, Professor Antonio Loprieno, recently expressed clearly and unequivocally that democracy must be temporarily put out of force to avoid

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the Swiss elementary school, for which article 62 of the Swiss Federal Constitution, which is forever referred to, does not provide the mandate. What we have here is an encroachment of international organizations on the Swiss education system, so that the curriculum 21 should be returned to the sender. •

<sup>1</sup> Joachim Starbatty: *Tatort Europa. Bürger, schützt das Recht, die Demokratie und euer Vermögen* (Murder in Europe. Citizens, protect

the right, democracy and your assets), Berlin 2013, p. 17

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Guy Verhofstadt: *Für Europa!* (For Europe!), Munich 2012

<sup>3</sup> See “A kick to scrap”, in *Current Concerns* 25 of 11 June 2012

<sup>4</sup> Roman Langer: *Warum haben die Pisa gemacht?* (Why did they make Pisa?), in id.: *Warum tun die das? Governanceanalysen zum Steuerungshandeln in der Schulentwicklung.* (Why do they do that? Governance analysis to control action in the school development.), Wiesbaden 2008

Kerstin Martens and Dieter Klaus Wolf: *Paradoxien der Neuen Staatsräson* (Paradoxes of new raison d'état), in: *Zeitschrift für internationale Beziehungen*, Volume 13, 2006, Issue 2, pp. 145 – 176

Barbara Müller: *Die Anfänge der Bologna-Reform in der Schweiz. Rekonstruktion, Kontextualisierung*

*und Rezeption des hochschulpolitischen Prozesses aus akteurtheoretischer Perspektive* (The beginnings of the Bologna reform in Switzerland. Reconstruction, contextualisations and reception of higher education policy process from stakeholder theory perspective), Berne 2012

Soft Governance in Education: The Pisa Study and the Bologna Process in Switzerland, <http://www.sfb597.uni-bremen.de/homepages/bieber/arbeitspapierBeschreibung.php?ID=159>

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Halber-Edelmann: *Lehrplan 21. Ergebnisse eines globalen Trends.* (Curriculum 21. Results of a global trend), in: *PH/akcente* 4/2011, pp. 32

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *Medienmitteilung der D-EDK* (Press release of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education of the Swiss German cantons) from 28.6.2013

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“false” decisions of Parliament and the people. Therefore they had avoided a public debate at all costs when the agreement with the EU was signed by a government official who the former Federal Councilor *Ruth Dreifuss* had sent to Bologna. The decision on the Bologna process had been so “basic” that it could “only be taken at the top level”,<sup>1</sup> Loprieno said. He probably considers this “top-level”, whose will is more important for Loprieno than that of the Swiss population, to be the EU as the strategic originator of “Bologna”. The decision on the EU’s reform in higher education was deliberately withheld from the Swiss Parliament and the population, because “A broad debate would have led to a political attitude towards Bologna as we maintain towards the EU. But this position would be disastrous for education and research.”<sup>2</sup>

The arrogance, which is expressed in Loprieno’s comments, towards the sovereignty of Switzerland as a country as well as towards the Swiss population, together with the fact that these statements did not result in a scandal show that direct democracy has obviously suffered considerable damage or has been weakened in recent years. This coincides with the findings of a study by the German political scientist from the University of Bremen, *Tonia Bieber*, titled “Soft Governance in Education. The Pisa Study and the Bologna Process in Switzerland”.<sup>3</sup> Bieber surprisingly concludes in her study which explored the success of the influence of international organizations – notably the EU (Bologna) and the OECD (Pisa) – on the Swiss education system, that in spite of the numerous “veto players” in Switzerland they succeeded in having substantial influence on the Swiss education system via the “management tools” Bologna reform and Pisa studies. They had “triggered a wave of reforms in the Swiss upper secondary and higher education”. The EU and the OECD had strategically managed to initiate “the discursive dissemination and implementation of ideas”, for example the setting of educational standards, and thus to manipulate the Swiss education policy in a surprisingly effective way.

Given these processes that are now clearly documented, the question arises as to what secret agenda is to be pursued with such education “reforms”, which make it necessary to be implemented beyond the democratic control by the people and by Parliament. A critical look at the new *Curriculum 21* may help here.

**Diagnosis Curriculum 21:  
Tendency to monopolizing  
and “Americanizing” education**

For many citizens as well as many teachers there has long been quite a discomfort

**An informal empire, the force field of which however  
emanates solely from Washington**

In his study “American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe” the American Professor for History, Technology, and Society at the Georgia Institute of Technology, John Krige, refers to a fundamental factor in the US-foreign policy towards Europe: It went about establishing a new kind of hegemonial regime, an informal empire, based on consensus and being formed in «co-production», the force field of which however emanates solely from Washington. This “required not only the ac-

tive collaboration of national elites who shared the economic, political, and ideological ambitions of the United States – and had sufficient legitimacy and power to impose their conception of the path that Europe should take on those who thought otherwise; it also required a subtle refashioning of European identity, a gradual implantation of American norms and practices”.

*John Krige. American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 255.*

in face of the permanent reforming in the field of education, but also in face of the perceived powerlessness against an all-defying political “steamroller”. We also realize increasing annoyance that despite the internationally renowned, excellent performance of our schools, many proven characteristics have been “plowed under” in the last 20 years and the character of the Swiss education loses its high standards in various fields. There are increasing voices that call for transparency and honest debate “in light of the public”, i.e. they simply reclaim democracy in the development of the school system and reject the manipulation of certain policy makers in education as well as inner administrative circles. This is reflected not least in current publications and journalists’ articles. *Michael Schoenenberger*, managing editor on educational issues of the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*”, for example, took an illuminating stand on the new “Curriculum 21” on 13 August.<sup>4</sup> He puts his finger on two alarming core aspects of this paper and calls educationalists and researchers in education, to finally make an enlightening contribution to the public debate in view of the explosive political power of the paper. Firstly Schoenenberger problematizes a tendency for state’s monopolizing the children in the Curriculum 21 through the “invasion of privacy”. As an example, he cites the “competence area ‘Consumption and Lifestyle’”, with which the Curriculum 21 wants “to control the youths in their behavior and to educate them to fellow citizens with a sustainable consumption behavior”. Schoenenberger emphasizes with respect to the “curriculum-makers” that the “freedom of the individual – the child and his parents – [is] inviolable” and warns at the end of his article against “a governmental re-education plan, which comes in the form of a ‘modern’ curriculum”.

This comment alone speaks volumes, especially because hereby totalitarian objectives are diagnosed in the nature of Curriculum 21, that are in deep contrast to Switzerland’s political culture.

The second aspect, that Schoenenberger brings forward, is the “conversion to-

ward competency-based teaching”, which is based on the intention, “to measure and control education and hence to make school comparable” or to introduce so-called educational standards (“Output-orientation”) respectively. He rightly points out that there “is little evidence that the quality of school leavers will increase”, if all schools are brought into competition with each other. Schoenenberger also belies the protestations from the offices of the education officials and some education experts that want to appease by claiming that “there will never be school rankings in Switzerland”. The 2009 study of the FIT Zurich,<sup>5</sup> which did not miss its intended shock effect, told us a different story. Instead, Schoenenberger confronts the promoters of the “curriculum-makers” with two very important questions on whose answering we will have to insist:

1. “How will corrupting effects on school management and teachers (due to the public benchmarking and ranking) be excluded?”

2. What will be done in our country in order to avoid the negative experiences that have been made in the US?”

We must pay high credits to the journalist of the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” for his revealing the total alignment of Curriculum 21 to the US model and pointing to the fatal consequences that have to be expected. Behind the term “competency-based learning” which – for European ears – sounds rather positive, there is nothing but the intended implementation of a business control system for the entire education system according to the American model – instead of ensuring the high level of education by well-trained and dedicated teachers, as it was consistent with the tradition of schooling and learning in Europe. This thrust is, however, not only pursued by Curriculum 21; however, it is a consequent continuation of the already mentioned “reforms” according to EU and OECD dictate, which together with the preliminary work of *Ernst Buschor* in the canton of Zurich (first as Di-

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rector of Health, then as Director of Education) increasingly “took up much space”.

The aforementioned President of the Swiss University Conference of Directors, Professor Loprieno, does not take offense of this “Americanization” of our education system in the *Zeit*-interview, but calls the “Bologna” reform a “result” of a social development which was due, almost “natural”. It is simply the result of the “historic victory of the Anglo-American education model over the European one”. Considering the content of this statement – namely the potential of decomposition of European cultural values that is expressed in this “result” – we wonder how it is and has been possible that this transformation process towards the US model, which worldwide enjoys a literally lamentable reputation indeed, has oddly enough been hardly discussed in Switzerland and in other European countries.

**Utilitarian “market”-thinking  
versus rule of law and orientation  
towards the common weal**

The image of the US as a noble liberator of Europe from “brown” and “red dictatorship” and as an exemplary country of freedom, cultural openness and human rights has historically and politically long been demythologized as a chimera. Since the United States could prevail after the First World War as a world power, they have taken all the features of a globally operating political empire and also on the domestic front have realized little democratic culture values.<sup>6</sup> It is known that the gap between rich and poor in the US has always been inherent in the system and that it is only a very small minority for which the legend “from rags to riches” can at best become true. Ever since the “neo-liberal” policies of *Ronald Reagan* (USA) and of junior partner *Margaret Thatcher* (UK) in the 1980s, which “liberated” the international “capital” from its regulations – which had been established after the Second World War by the world community to ensure fair and peacemaking international relations – the Western world has developed from “societies with market economy” to “market societies” – as the philosopher and Harvard professor *Michael Sandel* characterizes in his latest book “What money can’t buy. The moral limits of markets”. This process is now often characterized by the term “commodification of society”. Pure “market economies” are characterized by the fact that all sectors of society, including the public, are ruled by the laws of the “markets”. Sandel illustrates that the “market”-principle, which is based on competition, rivalry and efficiency, must always remain committed to the common weal in a society, which can be called “moral”, and

**The problem of the Curriculum 21  
is that it sets the focus on “competences”**

“The problem is that – according to the Curriculum 21 – the focus shall be on the competences. [...] The term ‘competence’ communicates the impression of something that you can later, outside school, apply one to one. That claim is too high. School can’t prepare children for specific situations outside of school. [...] School is a secure space where you can learn to think and where knowledge is communicated. [...] The aim of education is to teach persons a knowledge that they can apply in a second step, for example, in an apprenticeship. [...] Let’s take the Pythagorean Theorem. You cannot apply it directly. First you have to understand it and learn how you can

prove it. If a child succeeds in doing so, it will be able to transfer it later. Applying the principle ‘less knowledge, more competences’ more consistently, you might omit the Pythagorean theorem in the future, because you cannot apply it directly. In my opinion that might be wrong because the theorem is an important tool for the development of mathematical thinking.”

*Prof Dr Walter Herzog, director of the Department of Educational Psychology at the Institute of Education at the University of Berne, in an interview with the newspaper “Der Bund” on 11.10.2013*

(Translation Current Concerns)

that the market principle should have no relevance in areas of public life, in which the values of cooperation, solidarity, ensuring public goods such as education and health for all apply. “Market”-thinking without moral binding would lead to corruption of the welfare principle and even to the erosion of democracy, as the “social contract” – the concern and responsibility for each other as a community – would be destroyed. With these insights Sandel emphasizes the justification of the above-mentioned critical questions that Michael Schoenenberger has posed in his article for the “Curriculum-21-makers” (concerning corruption and lousy educational level).

In a “market society” as it distinctly exists in the United States, the rule of law and the orientation to the common weal lose their absolute priority. Here the state withdraws significantly from its social responsibility and leaves it to the private initiative of the individual to protect his well being. When people in the US are in need, the US government does not see a responsibility to succor. This understanding of society bases explicitly on a utilitarian ethic that makes “usefulness” the highest maxim. “Usefulness” is a subjective and therefore relative term, so it can be interpreted differently depending on the opportunity; universal values in the sense of humanity (tolerance, respect for the person, mutual responsibility, “charity”, etc.) have little relevance. The motto that emerges from the utilitarianism of the “free market” is the individual struggle for existence (euphemistically transfigured as “freedom”), where the “hardworking” is lucky and he quite rightly thinks that he does not have to share his success, according to the well-known slogan: “The winner takes it all”. The others, the “losers” come away empty-handed and must attribute it to themselves that they did not achieve more. Therefore a development in the direction of US society represents the gradual departure from the values of common weal, solidarity with the weak and general legal equality in a democracy toward a so-

cial Darwinian-like “struggle for existence” in the total “market society”. This results in a two or three class system in all areas of the public service. Access to good education requires “substantial investments”, which just one (rather small) class can afford.

**“Competency-based learning” breaks  
with Europe’s humanist educational  
and cultural tradition**

It is clear that the view of man prevailing in today’s American society is the “homo oeconomicus”, whose character is solely shaped by a pursuit of self-assertion in the “elbow society”. This deeply reductionist anthropology is reflected in the way the school practice primarily works along US lines: the teachers, who with their acquired pedagogical and didactic skills would be able to challenge and support each student individually and as part of a class community (this is called “input orientation”), are not entrusted with the responsibility for the educational process – i.e. learning and development of personality. However, the responsibility is assigned to a purely economic control system (“output orientation”). The latter one consists of

- 1) benchmarking tests, which require a meticulous standardization of measurable school performance,
- 2) a “quality management”, based on permanent “controlling” of the school by students, parents, colleagues, school management, professional certification companies, etc. as well as
- 3) an understanding of the teacher as facilitator, coach and possibly animator, but under no circumstances as a guide and example in educational model, so that students are completely thrown back on their own resources and have to learn in a “self-organized” way and have to practice “self-control”, just to mention only a few basic elements of this concept. Everyone is responsible for his personal progress only and his own suc-

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# Constructivism: an assault on the achievement principle

by Willi Villiger, Secondary school teacher, Eggenwil (Switzerland)\*

For three decades now, constructivism has shaped cultural sciences. Its core message alleges: The world is a construct of the human mind. Supposedly there is no evidence for a truth which is independent of any mind comprehending it, but “reality” is described as something depending on and individually constructed by any spectator on his or her own.

Based on this theory certain people conclude that they could create new realities arbitrarily. Accordingly, the engineers of political correctness construct their “brave new world” by means of telling people how to think, talk and feel. And it is these very same foundations the authors of Curriculum

21 construct their new, unisex human being upon, by means of “Gender Mainstreaming” as an end in itself. This new human being is supposed to be able to de-construct and re-construct his or her gender arbitrarily. The “Program to Promote Alternative Strategies of Thinking” (PFADE) rests on the same foundations. As a so-called program of social competence, which has already been implemented in many places, it manipulates the pupils’ personalities without any opportunities for them to resist.

But the real grand scheme of constructivist pedagogy is no doubt Curriculum 21. Instead of just harmonizing the can-

tonal curricula for the sake of peoples’ mobility, as it was demanded initially, the *Classe pédagogique* seized its chance and set up a complete reorganization of the entire schooling system. Teachers’ training and continuous education, teaching materials and the classes themselves may now be streamlined centrally – bypassing those annoying regional structures – and moreover be made compatible with OECD and EU programs.

What exactly are these proposed innovations about?

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cess or failure, just as it will later be the case in the “market society”. Stimulation to make an effort – as a student, but also as a teacher – can only be gained by competition or by a prospect of rewards according to the “homo oeconomicus” view of man; it is not driven by inner motivation or interest (intrinsic motivation). Real pedagogy is obsolete in this concept. Accordingly, business economists are required as headmasters rather than experienced teachers acting with credibility as the focal point in challenging educational problems and issues.

In contrast to this concept of school, which lacks a mature educational theory and differentiated anthropology based on human science, Europe has a long educational tradition based on philosophy. It is founded on an interpersonal dialogical understanding of education. This understanding of education and schooling called “personalist” or “humanistic” considers the core of the learning process and the entire development during school time to be a relationship between students and teacher based on social trust, pedagogical and didactic skills and expertise. So far, high significance has accordingly been given to the personality and competence training in the teacher’s education (input) in Europe and a high degree of responsibility and self-determination in his work was assigned to the teacher. Therefore the freedom of teaching methods – and the freedom to select school books have been considered a high value that has to be protected. The humanistic understanding of education includes the conviction that the teacher must be made proficient to adjust to the concrete, always individual situation in his classes, to the social dynamics and to the personalities in them. In selecting the topics, he should

consciously address those works, topics and types of problems, which deliver the widest personal and professional development as well as the greatest enlargement of his students’ intellectual horizon.

Compared to the European understanding of education, we can only regard teaching in the US as an incredible impoverishment and degradation of the demands for the development of personality with the majority of the students; the actual pedagogical work which is based on a differentiated interpersonal dialogue between teachers and students or class, is literally taken away from the teachers and reduced to a kind of administrative operations where everything is already bureaucratically determined: textbook, exercises, ways of teaching, performance review, etc.

### The US system is not an option – it is time to return this scrap to the sender

The question of whether this development would be accepted among the Swiss population if the real agenda and consequences were disclosed and an honest public debate took place, is probably rhetorical. The consequences are too obvious. It is precisely the educational system that has contributed to Swiss prosperity and the functioning of a lively political culture “bottom up” and still is doing so, should give up on its proven, in-depth educational work in favor of operating on the economically inspired US concept? It must not be forgotten that the public schools in the United States have already provided desolate results for a very long time and that the work of the teacher is not highly regarded with respect of its social value; there is a saying that circulated in the United States: “If you can do something, then do it. If you can’t, then teach.” Therefore a reminder again to Michael Schoenenberger’s question to the creators of the Curriculum 21, which every-

one must ask who has realized, where the journey should go: “What is being done so that in this country the negative experiences, as have been made in the United States, will not be repeated fatally?” His other question, too, namely asking for the “corrupting effects (as a result of public benchmarking and ranking) on school management and teachers” is of utmost relevance; in the current phase of consultation on the Curriculum 21 we must insist on answering both questions. Even today, the American type of “market society” comes through in many sectors of Swiss society and is changing the character of the public service so that money, prestige, competition, profiling trends in the service market, etc. have been given ever more weight than taking care of the common weal of the citizens.

The ensuing question, why this degenerative “cultural change” according to US example is increasingly reflected in the entire Swiss education, without having had to face a democratic debate in Parliament so far or having been subject to a referendum, is still waiting to be answered. It will be discussed in further contributions. •

<sup>1</sup> “Bologna-Reform – Bologna ist nicht an sich besser”, *Die Zeit* of 19.12.2012

<sup>2</sup> “Bologna-Reform – Bologna ist nicht an sich besser”, *Die Zeit* of 19.12.2012

<sup>3</sup> Bieber, Tonja/Martens, Kerstin (2011): The OECD Pisa Study as a Soft Power Education? Lessons from Switzerland and the US. In: *European Journal of Education* 46 (1), 101–116

<sup>4</sup> “Der Lehrplan 21 als typisches Kind seiner Zeit“, *NZZ* of 13 August 2013, Opinion & debate.

<sup>5</sup> In 2009, the FIT Zurich published a study containing a ranking of German-speaking grammar schools with reference to their graduates’ study performance (at the FIT after their first year).

<sup>6</sup> On the occasion of the worldwide recognition of *Martin Luther King’s* legendary speech “I had a dream” 50 years ago (28 August 1968), everyone became aware of the fact that at that time the social relations in the US society were entirely characterized by racist violence.

**“Constructivism: ...”**

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Various teaching gurus are presently roaming the country and keep reiterating phony slogans such as “school of the future: development of potentials rather than culture of instruction”, or – “proceeding from the institute of instruction to a learning workshop”. You can smell the rat right-away: the little word “instruction” is obviously the thorn in the side of these anti-authoritarian-minded teacher-mislead-ers. Still they try to instruct us – in a rather authoritarian way – about what they refer to as “recent discoveries of brain research and teaching methodology”. However, this is all old wine in new bottles, because the changes demanded by the “New learning culture” are the same classical ideals of the old reform pedagogy from Summerhill to Odenwald. *Fratton*, a Swiss teaching entrepreneur postulates 4 pivotal pleas of children: “Do not teach me anything”, “Do not instruct me”, “Do not educate me” and “Do not motivate me”.

Accordingly, this is what the core didactic sentences of pedagogical constructivism look like: Learning is a process of self-organization. Therefore, the pupil should ideally choose his or her learning subjects, aims and methods as well as the pace on his or her own, since only data integrated into one’s self-constructed network of imaginary reality in self-motivation will later be available again, so far the theory. The orientation towards competencies which is essential both in Curriculum 21 and in the framework for professional education is deducted from these teaching objectives of active and application-oriented learning. The teacher is warned against interfering with this constructivist process, his or her role is supposed to be that of a coach, a mere chaperon for the learning processes of the pupils. Knowledge of facts is secondary; all that counts are competencies (with various definitions of “competency” floating around). School marks do not reflect the level of competence any longer and are being replaced by “portfolios”; ho-

mogenous classes are no longer aimed for, but integrated learning groups of pupils at different ages, all pursuing their individual learning objectives, working through their learning steps and ticking off required “competency levels”.

Will that work?

Fratton, who was summoned by the Green prime minister of Baden-Wuerttemberg for a total re-construction of their schooling system, answered that question in a hearing before the regional parliament with a joke: “I have no clue, but pretty wrong is pretty, too, isn’t it”! We on the other hand are pretty sure it won’t work:

Didactic monoculture – what Curriculum 21 explicitly claims as its “altered view of learning and teaching” is nothing else but constructivism; but the elevation of one single view to the sacrosanct state of didactic dogma will result in a didactic desert instead, it massively hampers teachers in their freedom of methodology and teaching, not least by their obligation to use new teaching materials.

Constructivism produces school failures: Sine qua non for any self-discovering and self-structured way of learning is rather high levels of intellectual independence and discipline. It certainly is the most ambitious way of learning. Less talented pupils will be in a state of permanently excessive demands when working in such learning environments. Their need for a structured framework and often for empathy, too, will be better satisfied by thoughtful motivation and instruction with a responsible teacher and education in a common classroom.

Achievement equals work divided by time: Striking time off the equation will leave you with work, but without any measurement of what has been achieved or not. This is exactly what happens if pupils are left to stroll along at their own pace through the school year. Efficient working would be banned from our schools that way. Moreover, independent learning instead of careful instruction by a teacher results in a massive loss of time and therefore an equally high loss of achievement: In recent years numerous learning con-

tents had to be cancelled in all important teaching subjects.

Teachers’ education: I think it is a an ex-orbitant exaggeration to make young aspiring teachers spend five years of their lives just for being allowed to teach two subjects in secondary schools afterwards. And if these teachers will just be expected to “coach” a little, like those nice senior citizens helping out in the class-room nowadays, the question arises – why educate them anyway? Will teachers’ education be a way to de-professionalize the ranks of teachers, defame the traditional reputation of the teacher and destroy the art of successful teaching for ideological reasons?

The myth of the “Noble savage”: Rousseau’s concept, that any human being is good in principle only to be spoiled by society later, lead to his demand for an education free of any pressures. This social-romantic specter has been haunting reform pedagogues’ heads ever since. No doubt especially the little ones go through a developmental phase in which they show a wonderful natural longing for knowledge and learning, but this phase will inevitably pass by and its downside is bound to take over: an inclination to sluggishness. He who has never learnt to practice self-discipline will find it hard to learn it later in life. Our youths who spend hours and hours in front of computer screens every day and think of life – and increasingly school, too – as just an opportunity to have fun, has been deprived of this very experience in recent years: to realize meaning and study discipline. However, discipline and self-restraint are civilizing achievements and indispensable virtues for any community of human beings living together. If we rely completely on pupils’ self-motivation, which is bound to be there only from time to time, we shouldn’t be surprised about insufficient results in the levels of achievement in our elementary schools at the end. •

\* Presentation given at the delegates’ conference of the Swiss People’s Party 2013

Source: *Homepage SVP*, “Bildungspolitik” (Translation *Current Concerns*)

### How to prevent learning by constructivism

*ds. Constructivism* is an umbrella term for various philosophical schools of thought. Most of them and especially the more radical examples postulate that a human being is not capable of comprehending reality objectively but will construct his or her own “reality” instead.

Transferring that concept onto the school, it means: the child should discover as much as possible on his or her own, in order to develop their individual “reality” without interference from the outside world. It constructs its own self and is more or less responsible for its devel-

opment. The teacher turns into a coach, learning companion and moderator. The child is no longer supposed to understand the world, all what is aimed for is that it can orient itself and function within it. Desirable behavior is focused upon.

In many schools the constructivist concept has already been implemented more or less completely by the reforms of the last 20 years. Learning contents were reduced and replaced by simple operational algorithms, referred to as “competencies”. The consequence: more and more pupils need support and assistance

measures. At the end of their school education they can neither read nor write appropriately and have no knowledge whatsoever about historical contexts. Curriculum 21 consolidates this trend.

Constructivism escapes rational argument by means of relativization of all values and factual knowledge. It feigns tolerance but constructs a world according to its concept where opposition is not tolerated.

*Such a load of crap should our elementary school be built upon?*

*That is a bad joke!*

# A child needs a good teacher, a person, not a learning facilitator

## A mother's report about her experience with individual/cross-class learning using the example of an elementary school child

by Sylvia Klotter\*

*cc. This report of a mother from Baden-Wuerttemberg (Germany) describes what can happen to a child in individualizing lessons, as dictated by the Swiss Curriculum 21. The Curriculum 21 does no longer assume that all the students in a class reach the same learning objectives together. Each student learns for himself. What the student will achieve academically is largely left to himself. The teacher merely acts as "facilitator" or "coach". Especially for the low-achieving, but also for average students, and especially for students with an immigrant background this means that they are not adequately supported and challenged and that they are no longer a member of a classroom community. Equal opportunities and integration are no longer guaranteed.*

The conditions seemed best when individualized learning was introduced in my son's inter-year primary school class at the beginning of the school year: the teachers knew the style of teaching very well and the parents and the school administration had a positive attitude toward the innovation; the premises and materials were adapted; the children were unprejudiced.

And yet, I can now just before the end of the school year say with certainty: Individualized learning is not a blessing for all children – on the contrary!

I made the experience that individualized learning is connected with many stumbling blocks that were not foreseen previously. I also do not believe that politicians who favor the "Gemeinschaftsschule",<sup>1</sup> which will make individualized learning an essential requirement, do foresee the consequences of this experiment, and I would hope that everyone making up for the abolition of a type of school and finding learning across classes a good thing can think about the following considerations:

It is nice when a child can determine the pace of work according to his or her abilities and even if it has a say in or may vary the sequence of his educational activities, if it can use materials flexibly – however, this is not everything. Learning and teaching is more.

It is also nice to see how the folders fill with worksheets, piece by piece, how a child pursues his so-called "learning street" – works his way up. However, I found out

that it is really only motivating and profitable and easy-going for the kids from the top third level of performance. The children of the other two-thirds of performance levels, who are not so fit, are soon wandering about as lost and disoriented souls.

The performance principle strikes hard and merciless, and at an age at which it is not yet necessary that the fittest win. And especially not if you had hoped that a child with a slower pace of learning finds its way towards personal success – thanks to individualized learning.

The disappointment is now correspondingly big, and you do not dare to think about the result of such experiment in cases where the external conditions are not equally optimal.

But now let me express my actual thoughts and experiences for you to understand why I consider individualized learning almost counter-productive to the development of young people.

Due to a slower pace of learning (which, however, is quite a normal speed for a not so high-achieving child in a regular class) my son was very soon behind the others with his material to be studied. You can easily imagine how a child feels that notices daily how far other children have advanced in their textbooks, how many more worksheets they have filled and how they were always able to write their learning checks days and weeks earlier.

And a child realizes that, no matter how quietly the teacher discusses with the child sitting next to him when to write the next test or which page number to do as a homework. The child always realizes clearly: I'm lagging behind.

That was not bad – they tell the child – everyone as well as he can. But how does a child feel if it visibly has to work on a pile of worksheets or other materials shortly before the school year ends? How should it cope with the work? Must it manage it? Will it manage? At least here you will realize that individualized learning and the curriculum are two components that do not mix well.

The education plan has to be managed, come hell or high water, or the child will take the failures with him into the following year. Again, it will not cope with the education plan at his own pace, let alone catch up deficits. And then what? Inner panic in the child, which I cannot describe here, fear of failure and helpless mothers and fathers.

One might say that children in conventional learning groups, e.g. in classes with the controversially discussed class teaching, reach their limits – by the grading itself. However, in individualized learning a child may have both, namely by the insufficient grade and by staying behind. The feeling that they cannot meet the requirements is doubled in individualized learning. The lacking ubiquitous presence of the teacher and the absence of educational guidance along with the feeling of being left alone with a problem may increase the child's precarious situation immensely.

But there are other problems that we encountered.

The feeling of being left alone. Sitting lonely in front of a task with the claim that you have to somehow reach the objectives alone. Lack of competent and pedagogical explanations of certain tasks are to be compensated by the child's own exploration. And if the child cannot manage it? Not every child is an explorer, an experimenter, has a creative think tank, or is well advised to be his own teacher.

However, the explanation of the teacher does not come. Helplessly brooding over a worksheet. Hours and hours in solitude with the subject matter, no opportunity to interact with classmates or the teacher, to connect to ideas of others or sometimes take over prepared patterns. Asking for an explanation is turned into begging for help. Such children are their own worst enemy; they already know that waiting for the flash of inspiration can be very tough.

There are in fact children who need more rules, more learning by heart, who, if the logic is missing, need more guidance and assistance to develop and structure a substance. School should meet the conditions to fulfill these children's needs.

At best, a "fit" child explains a "weaker" child how to reach the objectives. But what will stay in terms of emotional learning?

And then there are the children who have problems to get organized. Consider also the many children suffering from ADD/ADHD. In individualized learning, these children need all their attention and energy for structural work (how to organize their "office"), so that they can hardly turn to the subject matter. They cannot cope with all this at the same time. These

\* Pseudonym: Name of the author is known to the editorial staff.

**"A child needs a good teacher, ..."**

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are the kids who do not know what homework they have to do or how they are to do their homework at all; the children who left the book and the exercise book somewhere, who forgot the working date, for whom the worksheet is as a strange thing, never seen. In my eyes, a sign of poor teacher quality or an unsuitable teaching method.

In that case mothers can not even make a phone call and check with other mothers, because every child is learning something else. For this reason, too, children at school are not able to look for their classmates' help. There is no solidarity.

The only solution to this problem would be the consistent presence of the teacher as well as a very good educational and emotional relationship between teacher and child. A single teacher per child so to speak. If this condition is not met, things will get tough. The child is dependent on the teacher, even more than in classic teaching, and in case the chemistry is not right between them, the child is left entirely alone. Nothing and no one is there to support the child.

Another aspect: Children are communicative beings; they live on comparing themselves with others, from common action, from having fun in the group. Individual tuition is quiet and lonely. Instructions of the teacher can be given only in a whisper, for there are many children and the instruction is only for one of them – a clear message is missing.

In everyday life I teach my children that they should speak loudly and clearly, say what they have to say, behave themselves. If the child needs help in the classroom, instruction will be provided in a whisper, in a nutshell, and sparse. Both the educator and the instruction get a touch of something mysterious, something illegal. Knowledge is treated as a prohibited good without any claim of certainty.

However, it is just the teacher's model, which should convey the substance, take positions and provide the learned content with an emotional significance. A person who knows what to do and how it should be done. Don't we not all know that we learned things much better when they were embedded in a context? In a laugh, in a positive reinforcement, an encouragement, a joke, an example, an emotion, or facial expressions and gestures.

What a teacher provides if he operates his profession conscientiously and benevolently can never be provided by a worksheet or a learning companion, if you please.

A child, who has worked in an "individualized" manner for a certain time, will also lose the ability to accept convention-

**"We won't leave anybody behind!"****How a clever assistance model helps students**

by Rainer Werner\*

Even in heterogeneous learning groups there are students, who stay behind the performance level of the class in certain subjects. If there is an accumulation of such "deficits", they run the risk of having to repeat the class. The repetition of one class merely because of failure of performance is a waste of resources. Furthermore this measure takes the students away from their familiar social context. It would be better to effectively and timely recognize the deficits of the low-achieving students and to overcome them.

Here a godparent model has proved to be effective. The students register in a class list at what subjects they are doing particularly well and in what other subjects they worry about failures of performance. The class-teacher brings the students together, who then support each other. The "godfather" works with the low-achieving classmate on the respective subject matter and prepares examinations and tests with him. If the student's assistance is not sufficient, he tells the class-teacher. The latter finds a student for private tuition (may be from the upper classes of grammar school) or asks the teacher who teaches the respective subject to practise once more with the pupil in need of help.

This model has several advantages. It connects the students to each other even closer, because it turns lonesome fighters into students working together. It also reveals that the comparison

low – high-achieving students is not correct. Every student has one or several subjects at which he does well. Therefore the students change in their roles as learners in need or as assistants. This strengthens the self-confidence of the low-achieving students, because they experienced that they are definitely able to help other students in their strong subjects.

This model, if applied consequently, will generate the result that there is no student who has to repeat a class within four years (through all of secondary school). This inspires the self-confidence of a class enormously, because it experiences how successful solidarity and mutual support can be.

This model of individual assistance has nothing to do with the modern concept of individualized learning. The latter isolates the students by obliging them to work through a personally prepared schedule. The assistance model instead complements class instruction while the stronger students support the weaker ones in correcting their deficits. The one causes isolation, the other solidarity.

Two concepts – two pedagogic worlds.

\* Rainer Werner was a teacher in German and history at the John-Lennon grammar school in Berlin till his retirement. 2012 he published the book "Auf den Lehrer kommt es an" ("It depends on the teacher") in the AURIGA press (Berlin).

al explanation of facts. The child is well aware, that it should work out everything for himself and it seems a shame for the child to be given fixed explanations at home by mom or dad or big brother, so it cannot accept them.

This leads to his omni-present fear of failure; the pressure to perform grows; the feeling that you are a large scale failure is complemented by the fact that the claims of individualized learning cannot be interwoven with conventional thinking and acting of educational pedagogy. The child is at odds.

Democracy, discussion skills, expression of opinions, tolerance, teamwork, joint developments in the profession are essential in life and are practiced from an early age at school. In individualized teaching these concepts mostly just disappear because they are not needed and are not desirable. The smart ones will easily find their solutions, but will also proceed quickly. The slow ones will never reach their destination. It is like being on a journey. Whenever the last one, the slow ones

reaches the service area the vanguard is just settings off again.

You will certainly remember how it feels when you cannot keep up with the others. You develop anger, despair, stress and you are finally exhausted. If the walking pace is too different, even the wanderlust will ask "Where is the fun in that"? Staying behind will lead to aversion against those who are fast. Social injustices of both sides are the result of an inadequate dealing with one's emotions. At best, it will result in ignoring one's fellows. Would it not make more sense to split the walkers into groups? A quick group that might choose a longer walk, and a slower group, which does not lose the fun in comfortable walking, either, but chooses a shorter way?

And in times when children are increasingly and more often sitting alone in front of their various electronic media should we not increase the time, in which we deal with each other, get along together, solve mental and social conflicts, ex-

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# Memorandum “More education – less reforms”: Educationalists call for the emergency brake

by Roger von Wartburg

*In early May 2013 a group of renowned educationalists, psychologists and doctors issued a remarkable memorandum entitled “More education – less reforms”. The objective of the memorandum is “to launch a call for reflection in Swiss education policy in view of a growing reform rush” that increasingly “displays a lack of clear direction”. According to the signers of the memorandum, the “always faster cadence of reforms, the mostly non-existing coordination of the projects and their low sustainability” leads both to a “questionable supremacy of the experts in our democratic state education system” and to “excessive stress and fatigue of those responsible on site.” This makes us sit up and take notice.*

## Who is behind the memorandum

The list of signatories is most illustrious and includes a number of Swiss “educational renowned experts”: President of the “Association Memorandum on Educational Reforms” is Prof Dr *Walter Herzog* from the University of Berne Institute of Educational Science, Deputy President is Prof Dr *Allan Guggenbühl*, head of the group therapy department at the City of

Berne Education Councillings and Director of the Institute for Conflict Management and Mythodrama. Other prominent signatories are Prof Dr *Roland Reichenbach* from the Institute of Education, University of Zurich, Prof Dr *Fritz Osterwalder* from the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Berne, Prof emeritus Dr *Rolf Dubs* (formerly Institute of Business Education St. Gallen), Prof emeritus Dr *Kurt M. Füglistner* (formerly School for Teacher Education Basel), Prof emeritus Dr *Peter Grob* (formerly University Hospital Zurich) and Prof emeritus Dr *Urs Häberlin* (formerly Therapeutic Institute, University of Fribourg).

And on top of that: Even persistent critics of the Swiss “Volksschule” (community-based primary and secondary I education) signed the memorandum “More education – less reforms”: Prof emeritus Dr *Remo Largo* (formerly Pediatric University Hospital Zurich) and *Jürg Jegge* (formerly *Foundation Märtpplatz*).

## The explosive power of the memorandum

If you read the memorandum, one can easily get the impression that the text

### Curriculum 21 – “legislative process by consultation is a deception of the administration”

“The *Young Liberals Aargau* criticize the overloaded legislative process by consultation as a deception of the administration. The high complexity, the short deadline and the questioning, which reminds of suggestion, make a comprehensive statement impossible. That gives the impression of a conscious deception to push the bill easier through parliament.”

Source: *soaktuell.ch* of 4.10.2013

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

originates from a teachers organisation members’ meeting: For example there are claims for more “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” decisions, for a deceleration of the rampant reform mania and that greater weight is to be attributed to the know-how of “classroom practitioners” at the expense of “desk jobs”. But this impression is contrasted by the fact that there are no elementary school teachers among the members of the “Association Memorandum

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## “A child needs a good teacher, ...”

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change ideas with each other? Should we not at least educationally set a counterpoint of social development?

Why “Gemeinschaftsschule”? Why learning streets? Why inter-year classes?

When I look at the course of the school year and the experience I made, I am glad that, thanks to reflection, we may expect a change of course in our school in the coming school year. This will prevent my child from permanently slipping into an attitude of opposition. First signs of performance blockages and a feeling of reluctance towards school have already shown me the way.

In ordinary classes my child will at least no longer feel left behind, even though his scores will probably still differ from those of the classmates. However, abilities and talents might also come into play which have so far not been required. Social skills.

Satisfaction, compassion, solidarity and tolerance can only be formed when the emotions on the school hike remain in positive territory – and this objective must be accessible for every individual.

All of these skills are the basic cornerstones for a functioning democracy. These skills need to be practiced in vibrant and val-

uable educational lessons. Children also have their say, even if it is sometimes noisy. Children who do not learn this at school will later have difficulty in accepting these values and appreciate their fellows. Children who fall through the cracks of individualized learning will not become mature participators of a society. They will fight any suppressive mechanism; despise the performance principle, because they have never been part of it.

They will lack the confidence and stability to make healthy decisions.

I am also convinced that the quality of the classroom community in classes with individualized learning is far worse than in traditional classes, and the class community is the microcosm of the democratic state. Those who do not work together will neither party together. Simply because something is missing.

I also doubt that it is successful to simply impose new teaching methods on a teacher without having checked on his skills. Another new teaching method should find its way through persuasion, skills and training and at best should also be lived. What happens if you charge untrained people with a task that they have not yet internalized? Who trains the teachers, who trains them further? How many teachers are being forced to change their teaching style against their inner conviction? The overburdening of teachers will

increase; the number of children that can be accompanied into a stable future is dwindling. What is missing is a feedback system for all people involved, answering the claim: What makes a good teacher?

In fact all people, all parents realize what a child needs in order to learn effectively: a good teacher, a person, not a learning facilitator.

No new principle, no teaching method imposed from above, no reform of schools that eliminates their structure, but people who practice their profession guided by an inner vocation and are able to perceive the individual child. Therefore we do not need individualized learning; for that you need a big heart, a mind down to earth, teaching skills, love for the subject and courage. Courage against the reform rage and the blindness of the responsible people who bend to economic pressure and the obligation to save. Germany cannot afford to skimp on education.

We will need our children. Not only in professional life but also as guarantors for inner peace. •

Source: *www.arbeitskreis-schule-und-bildung.de*

<sup>1</sup> A type of school where ability-mixed and age-mixed groups of pupils learn together, however in an individualized manner, i.e. every one with his own special teaching aids.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

**“Memorandum ...”**

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dum on Educational Reforms” but university lecturers.

However, this is not by coincidence, but a deliberate decision, as Prof Dr Walter Herzog confirmed: “For us it was a matter of just setting an accent by the scientific respectively university side. So far, education research has largely non-critically supported education policy (and still does); criticism from academics went unheard or was deliberately marginalised by the reformers. [...] The goal is to stop for reflection on the essential tasks of education and school and to stop the rush for reforms that has recently taken place. [...] In our view, the basis in the schools is hardly taken seriously. We demand to take reform initiatives “from bottom-up” more serious and carry out educational reforms which are initiated “on the site” and not prescribed “from top-down.”<sup>1</sup>

**An alleged gulf is overcome**

What Prof Dr Herzog expresses in this interview is even more spectacular because it is able to overcome an alleged gulf existing between teachers and the teaching body which so far has shaped part of the discourse in education (reform) policy: on the one hand, sound researchers who allegedly have evidence-based exact knowledge on how it would actually work; the teachers on the other side with their “usual whining of a profession that is notoriously reluctant to any change.<sup>2</sup> But lo and behold: The attitude within the lecturing profession is apparently not as homogeneous as the impression has often been created. After the publication of this memorandum it can definitely no longer be claimed.

**No ideological rule in educational science!**

Educational policy makers decide their reforms with the blessing of educational

researchers or even with their active support. This situation is far from straightforward, as the former LCH-chief pedagogue Anton Strittmatter stated years ago: “Many educationalists have become involved in a kind of prostitution to some extent because they depend on permanent support by the educational directors.”<sup>3</sup>

The danger of the unholy alliance between policy and research should not be dismissed as negligible: Politics which is under public pressure to justify its aims wants to act and be perceived as active or even as pioneers; and science provides favorably slanted expert assessments as a allegedly convincing alibi. In turn, researchers are granted new contracts.

Prof Dr Roland Reichenbach doubts the overall quality of the scientific investigations in the alleged deficiencies that are to be remedied by the countless reforms and in this context he said the lapidary sentence, “For skepticism there is hardly any research funding in this area.”<sup>4</sup> However, the Zug superintendent of education *Stephan Schleiss* rightly stated in a recently published essay that skepticism is a must. “Truth and insight are man-made. Findings are dependent on space and time. Skepticism about scientific findings and scientific demands at the address of politicians is therefore mandatory.”<sup>5</sup>

**Phonetic spelling as a deterrent example**

As early as two years ago the German education critic *Heike Schmoll* described what may happen if politics implements reform cravings in educational science without reflecting them: “In the first four classes children are to learn the basic cultural techniques so that they can cope with a change of school – however, they do not succeed. [...] In all those places where phonetic spelling is practiced – even up to the fourth year – where children write exactly as they hear the words, where the misspelled words are even written on the board for everyone to remember and their correction only begins at the

end of primary school, they will have great difficulties spelling. In such a class in Hamburg only one pupil in the fourth year was able to read fluently. He had, however, not understood the meaning of the text neither. [...] Answering the question why they might be interested in newspapers, a grade-four pupil from Bremen wrote, “Be course man can learn about the newspaper. And I wood like to be a reporter. Indeed, it is clamped to read in the newspaper. Course clamped things in it are.” Another student wrote, “Be course it is fan.” These lyrics are not particularly wayward: In two grade-four classes from Bremen there is not a single student who writes flawlessly. We can only speculate about the method promising salvation that led to their doom. It is for sure that entire classes will fail in secondary school because of their incapability to read and write. [...] Among the most absurd avoidance strategies of learning to write in elementary and secondary schools is the misuse of the dyslexia diagnoses. This is especially true for Schleswig-Holstein, where high school teachers wondered years ago that in a seventh high school class almost a third of all students were acknowledged as dyslexic. That is, they were officially certified as being unable to read and write correspondingly to their age, and it is strange that no one wonders what actually went wrong in previous years at school. Their spelling skills in German and all languages are therefore forbidden to be included in their grades until the tenth grade, and afterwards tools such as “Duden” and spelling programs are allowed. The real dyslexics, who have a genetically caused permanent reading and writing disability, account for about four percent of the population and need such a rule. They have long enough been marginalized as stupid or incapable of learning. But they should be interested in a high threshold for officially attested dyslexia, and those who are seemingly incapable of writing or just unwilling must not get a dyslexia ticket. While in Bavaria, a certificate by an expert in child and adolescent psychiatry is required, the locally competent school psychologist must recognize dyslexia and specialist reports must be re-issued or confirmed when the pupils change to secondary schools, the schools in Schleswig-Holstein can provide a dyslexia ticket themselves. The dyslexic rate is correspondingly high. The Ministry of Education confirms that it is 13 percent of the pupils. That is more than three times as many as among the general population or in other countries.”<sup>6</sup>

This example shows why special care has to be taken before school reforms are realized: there is no such thing as a “second chance” for the affected students! Their time at school has passed irretrievably! And in the specific case outlined above, the in-

**The myth of easily available knowledge**

“The disdain of knowledge, which is displayed by various apologists of the competence concept, is often justified with the easy availability of knowledge through the Internet or its lower half-life period. And yet not all knowledge has the same half-life period! The data of historical periods or events are almost invariable; at most the assessment of their significance changes over the course of decades and centuries. Geographical names sometimes change, but also in this case the half-life period (i.e. the time within which half of all geographical names change) is in the range between centuries and millennia. This is similar to biological terms. It is exactly this long-term knowledge that we could already look up in a dic-

tionary or an atlas a hundred years ago. The additional comfort which the internet offers today is admittedly pleasant but by no means decisive. What we actually find a lot easier on the Internet is the knowledge that nobody would have memorized, even in earlier times. The fact that knowledge is the basis of skills cannot even be changed by the Internet.”

Source: “*Natur, Mensch und Gesellschaft’ im Lehrplan 21: So eben gerade nicht!*” (“*Nature, human being and society’ (the Curriculum 21: Just not in this way!*”) by Michael Weiss in “*lbv:inform*”, *Zeitschrift des Lehrerinnen- und Lehrervereins Baselland (Journal of the Teachers’ Association of Basel Country)*, August 2013 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

**"Memorandum ..."**

continued from page 16

stitution elementary school has been taken in by a bizarre heresy that perverted its actual mission into the opposite: Instead of bestowing the children, who were entrusted on it, with adequate education, the school spoils their educational opportunities.

It is precisely for this reason that we should not allow schools to become testing ground for every escapist concept, which was conceived in some educational science institute in the world.

**Praise of skepticism**

Thomas Mann wrote, "The positive thing about the skeptic is that he considers everything possible." Skepticism in this sense is not to be confused with a non-reflective, destructive querulousness, but rather with an attitude whose fundamental principle is to check on each message's actual content – and even if its rhetoric shines ever so nice.

In this sense: Trust in your reason, your own perception and your professional experience! Participate actively in the debates! Question those things in particular which are sold as immutable truth! And today you can even do so with broad-based academic support as the memorandum "More education – less reform" shows. •

<sup>1</sup> <http://schuleschweiz.blogspot.ch/search/label/Herzog%20Walter>

<sup>2</sup> Martin Beglinger. In der Falle – Wie die Schule von Reformwahn und Bildungsbürokratie erdrückt wird. *Das Magazin* of 15 May 2010

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Stephan Schleiss. "Wahrheit und Einsicht." *Weltwoche* of 13.2.2013

<sup>6</sup> Heike Schmoll. "Zweifelhafte Reformen vergrößern die Kulturwüste." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 1.9.2011

Source: lvb inforum 2013/14-01. *Zeitschrift des Lehrenden- und Lehrervereins Baselland*. [www.lvb.ch](http://www.lvb.ch)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

*The Memorandum verbatim:*

**More education – less reforms**  
**Stop the reform rush in the education system!**  
**Too much management at the cost of education!**  
**Sustainable education reforms need consensus!**

The education system is more and more standardized and engineered due to the administrations' over-zealousness for reforms. Many of the introduced reforms show the political rush. Such developments harm the historically grown education system in Switzerland. They seem to be prescribed "from above". Many citizens do not have the necessary understanding. The public control of the education system gives way to an expertocracy which is far from democracy.

Too often reforms are stifled by administrative interventions although they were desired by the teachers and lecturers. Their commitment and their experience as well as their professional knowledge and skills are largely ignored to the detriment of our educational institutions. The results are insecurity and resignation of the instructors.

The educational administration focuses on fashionable promises and trusts international organizations, such as the OECD, instead of relying on educational practitioners' experiences and testing novelties. Thus, proven characteristics of the Swiss education system get lost.

Moreover, different educational reforms prescribed "from above" seem to be increasingly aligned to the needs of the economy, which does not always lead to reforms that are reasonable in terms of pedagogy. Teachers and many citizens often have little understanding for that as well.

The signatories demand:

Stop the reform rush of the educational administrations!

Retain the good practice and develop it in an educationally sensible way!

Strengthen the teachers who are working in education! Provide space for educational reforms from below!

*Signatories:*

*Professor Dr Walter Herzog (President), University of Berne, Institute of Educational Studies (Department of Educational Psychology)*

*Professor Dr Allan Guggenbühl (vice-president) Head of department for group therapy at the cantonal child guidance office of the city of Berne, director of the Institute for Conflict Management and Mythodrama*

*Professor emeritus Dr Rolf Dubs, formerly Institute for Economic Education, St Gallen*

*Professor emeritus Kurt M. Füglistner, formerly University of Education of Basel (Didactics of Biology)*

*Professor emeritus Dr Peter Grob, formerly University Hospital of Zurich*

*Professor emeritus Dr Urs Haeberlin, formerly Therapeutic Institute at the University of Freiburg*

*Jürg Jegge, formerly Foundation Märtpplatz*

*Professor emeritus Dr Remo Largo, formerly Pediatric University Hospital, Zurich*

*Professor Dr Fritz Osterwalder, University of Berne, Institute of Educational Studies (Department of Educational Psychology)*

*Professor Dr Roland Reichenbach, University of Basel (Research and Study Center of Education)*

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Referendum rejects Community School

*In a referendum on the future of the school structure of their community last weekend, the voters of “Hirschberg an der Bergstrasse” voted with a clear majority against the Community School.*

The attitude of the population in Baden-Wuerttemberg towards the “Gemeinschaftsschule” GMS is largely against this untested school variation. This became also visible in the successful referendum in “Hirschberg a. d. Bergstrasse”. Around 52% of Hirschberg’s population reject the introduction of a GMS. Because of the remarkably high turnout the necessary quorum could be achieved. Previously, the people in Hirschberg had worked intensely with the concept of the “Gemeinschaftsschule”. “In a meeting with the education researcher Dr *Walter Korinek*, it became very clear to the participants that such a high financial risk to the community does not pay for such educational mish-mash”, said the chairwoman of the *Bündnis pro Bildung Baden-Württemberg Silke Sommer Hohl* and the deputy chairwoman *Dorit Wolf*.

The ever-growing number of members of the *Bündnis*, a lot of attention in the national media (see, e.g. the program “Night Café” for SWR TV) as well as a nationwide initiative for the three-tier school system which had been initiated by the alliance, are a proof for the actual will of the people as to school policy. “The citizens in their large majority reject the messed up education policy. The *Bündnis pro Bildung* encourages people in the cities and communities to defend themselves and reject this ideological education policy. We as *Bündnis pro Bildung BW* strongly oppose to the senseless destruction of a highly successful differentiated education landscape. The Federal Parliament election was also a clear indication that the people of Baden-Wuerttemberg demand a better education policy”, said both chairwomen.

*Bündnis pro Bildung*

Source: Press release *Bündnis pro Bildung Baden-Württemberg* on 25.9.2013

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### Curriculum 21 – State education not safeguarded any more

“The *Young Liberals of the Canton of Aargau* view the practicability of the Curriculum 21 critically, in that the overloaded presentation threatens to become an ineffective paper project. [...] *The Young Liberals of the Canton of Aargau* also criticize the dismemberment and dissipation of the state education elements haphazardly over at least three competence areas. The fundamental idea of an independent subject in the state education system was not taken into account. In future the pupils in state education lessons are even more at the mercy of the teaching staff’s discretion. This is because there is a high danger, that due to drawbacks in the teaching plan, individual dissipated elements of the state education would be completely left out of the curriculum. Therefore, the pupils are denied a coherent interrelationship in the state education system.”

Source: *soaktuell.ch* from 4.10.2013

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### Letter to the Editor

Thanks to the media, citizen learn that the several-hundred-pages-thick tome called Curriculum 21 has been drawn up behind closed doors. In future, the curriculum is going to dictate the 21 cantons the learning objectives and didactics at the elementary school level. A broad discussion among the people never took place, since it was not desired by those in charge. This, however, reminds us of the HarmoS procedure. Moreover, with this Curriculum 21, while leveraging out our democratic right to have a say, a re-structuring of the previously valid and proven is going to take place. The hopeless confusion, the lack of contents and senselessness presented therein is unparalleled. Never, but never ever one reads anything about a child’s personality that needs to be grasped, formed in spirit and soul as well as educated. No

mandate to the teaching staff, not to withhold any knowledge and skills from our school children to progressively enable them to lead a meaningful and responsible life in our society. No mediation of Swiss history and cultural heritage as introduction to the rights and obligations of us Swiss citizens. What is needed now, is the intervention of outraged parents, educationalists, teaching facilities and vocational schools as well as institutions of higher education, economy, politics and that of the citizens to reject this completely useless and ruinous paper in principal and to its full extent. Everybody in this country has the right to be able to rely entirely and certainly on the condition that our children are being taught to the best of knowledge.

*Claudia Meier, Oberkirch*

### The Trade Association expects a basic revision of the Curriculum 21.

“The executive board of the *Trade Association* in the Canton of Aargau (AGV) is disappointed with the draft of the Curriculum 21. [...] In the Curriculum 21 draft, the original specialized knowledge is being shifted repeatedly to competences. The AGV executive board expects the primary school pupils to be particularly versed in the core subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic. The apprenticeship trainings build on these core subjects and can no longer completely close the knowledge gaps in these areas. Naturally methods of working techniques, the search of knowledge and importance, as well as instructions to be able to work independently, also belong to the area of the primary school responsibilities. However, these competences must mandatorily build on the specialized knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic.”

Source: *soaktuell.ch* from 5.10.2013

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

# Learning from the experiences of Romandy

## The “Plan d’études romand” – The equivalent to Curriculum 21

an interview with Jean Romain\*



Jean Romain  
(picture ma)

In German-speaking Switzerland, the inter-cantonal Curriculum 21 is currently undergoing the process of consultation. The French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino have already made first

experiences with its equivalent, the Plan d'études romand (PER), which has been implemented in stages since 2011. They require an urgent reflection on what education is and what role the school has in our world.

Current Concerns had a conversation with Jean Romain, co-founder and first president of the Geneva “Association Refaire L'Ecole” (Association Rebuilding Schools), which has been working for the restoration of a school worthy of that name since 2001.

Current Concerns: For several years you have been involved in the association “Association Refaire L'Ecole” (Arle) and the Geneva cantonal parliament and have worked for the restoration of a school worthy of the name. How do you see such a school?

Jean Romain: A good school is primarily a school whose main aim is to provide knowledge. Placing the teacher at the center – that was the school of our grandfathers; placing the student at the center – that is the current school. I reject both, the one and the other form: Knowledge must be at the center of teaching.

Secondly, a true school is a school that imparts the material to be learnt step by step (I am an opponent of socio-constructivism) with increasing levels of difficulty, and this transfer of knowledge has to be evaluated regularly by grades relevant to the certificate. There is no point neither

“Common learning has many advantages, especially for the formation of will. It is often important to jointly tackle problems, because it allows the group to realistically assess their extent. The common inability to understand an issue softens the shock when reaching one’s own limits. The help of a classmate who finds the right words to explain the teacher’s line of argument again is of utmost importance.”

“Moreover, common experience creates a conviction that the pupils together are stronger. In fact, there is a classroom atmosphere. The best teachers know how to create an enabling environment and how to prevent a destructive one.”

to make the children feel nor to sensitize them, but to impart knowledge to them.

Thirdly, I want a school that allows the young people – because there are points of orientation of intellectual, literary, linguistic or other kind – to find their way in a complex world. The more the world is shaken to its foundations, the more solid the school needs to be. If it follows trends because it seeks to be in harmony with the world, it has lost its role as a solid tutor. Young people are lacking points of orientation since our society has succumbed to relativism in many areas. If a young person is to find his place in this world, he will succeed in doing so all the better the more he is in an inner harmony. School has to be concerned about ensuring him a solid backbone. The idea that “the school is a living environment” is mere stupidity; of course it is a place where we live, but in order to acquire a basis for our personal development. To provide a young person with solid knowledge means to enable him to find orientation in times of disorientation. I believe that school education plays this role. However, the current school does exactly the opposite.

*Schools should therefore provide the young people with the means to develop a solid personality?*

Exactly. It should offer to them an inner strength that, in the ideal case, is stable and resistant. Our youth will encounter the traps of the modern world such as drugs, pornography, fundamentalism, cults, etc.. This cannot be changed, but we can strengthen their inner attitude so that young people are able to take a stance. If they have enough solid points of orientation, they will respond appropriately to such inevitable challenges. Instead of doing everything to prepare this inner attitude by equipping the youth with knowl-

edge, contemporary schools are content with “raising the finger of morality” or to “communicate facts and figures”. Poor school that has forgotten about its mission!

*What place do you assign to a teacher, what role does he play, which task does he have?*

First of all, he is someone who masters his special field. He is neither trainer for methods nor a coach. Since he is master of his subject, be it Latin, literature, history, philosophy or another, he has authority. It is not his position as a teacher that gives him this primary authority, but rather the mastery in his field. You see, this is far from any authoritarianism.

Then the teacher is also a role model. He does not educate by using words but by evoking imitation. Since he masters his subject and knows how to adequately impart the substance, he can train the mental abilities of the pupil; however, the formation of will must be done in a different way. You certainly have taught pupils who you thought were highly intelligent, who however, did not show the will to terminate a project, and you bemoaned your powerlessness. Sports, for example, can also train the will.

The teacher must, however, be a role model; he is the adult reference person. For the pupils it is not a matter of imitating the teacher’s behavior, but the way he deals with the problems. The teacher, seen as a buddy, is a disaster, because he thereby obliterates the points of orientation.

So you can see that there are two complementary aspects of the teaching profession: the *magister*, the teacher (not the *dominus*, the little ruler), entirely devoting himself to scholarship; and then those who are a model by their way of living, of

\* Jean Romain was born in 1952 in Valais, received his classical education at the College of Saint-Maurice and then studied at the University of Lausanne (phil.I), Fribourg (philosophy) and Geneva (Hautes études international in history). For 37 years he was a teacher of philosophy, a chronicler for various newspapers and author of some 20 books, among others, “Lettre ouverte à ceux qui croient encore en l'école” (Letter to those who still believe in education), *L'Age d'Homme*, Lausanne 2001, ISBN 2-8251-1530-4. In 2001 he co-founded the “Association Refaire L'Ecole” (Arle) in Geneva, whose first president he was and whose speaker he was from 2005 to 2009. In the fall of 2009 and then in 2013 he was elected an MP to the Geneva Grand Council.

**“Learning from the experiences ...”**

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setting limits, of encountering difficulties. The balance between these two aspects makes the good teacher.

*The education reforms in recent years have focused on the individualization of the learning process. Each student works at his own pace, according to his individual program which is often supported by computers. The moments in which pupils learn together in class are becoming increasingly rare. What do you think about the significance of the class?*

The mistake is to forget that learning together includes great things. I do not mourn the class as we have known it, but it is crucial that a group learns simultaneously. The group may dissolve and re-group during the day in different compositions. Common learning has many advantages, especially for the formation of will. It is often important to jointly tackle problems, because it allows the group to realistically assess their extent. The common inability to understand an issue softens the shock when reaching one's own limits. The help of a classmate who finds the right words to explain the teacher's line of argument again is of utmost importance.

Moreover, common experience creates a conviction that the pupils together are stronger. In fact, there is a classroom atmosphere. The best teachers know how to create an enabling environment and how to prevent a destructive one. Of course, this is not always possible, but this class spirit is emerging and once created, including the class as a whole, temporary discouragement is sucked away in his wake.

Furthermore, the class is a socializing element, like any other group. Although the schools' priority assignment is not education but teaching, shared learning creates the basic human connections necessary for each school community. Good teaching, conveying the cultural heritage in a favorable climate, enhancing the authority of knowledge – all this together also educates for living together in a group, respecting limits, and it allows re-discovering points of orientation. This includes being a human person and not just a simple number.

Finally, the most important and most effective fruit of common learning in terms of education: In a group the awareness for the importance of the temporal dimension can develop. In a class, the life stories of the individual pupils are manifold. Our pupils are a kind of “neo-Noahs”: they believe that the world will begin with them, which is quite a usual at-

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“In the end, this is the difference between educating and informing. Our pupils are informed, but they lack education. Certainly you have to be informed, but to be properly informed, you have to have enough education to know what is important and what is not. Otherwise you are like a straw in the wind, unable to prioritize.”

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titude among young people. However, we must not increase it! Bringing together pupils of different origins means they have all had different pasts, even if they do not date back for a very long period of time. Seeing the mates, pupils discover values other than their own, values that originate in other families, other countries or other cultures. The fellow's universe often confuses in so far as it opens unknown doors. If the knowledge that school has to impart is embedded in a long-term perspective, it will be most effective for the pupils' formation because every student is “off-centered”. He is no longer the little Lord in the house, the family's world no longer revolves around him, but he himself goes on a world tour. In a conversation, in the mutual exchange about their own pasts, they gradually learn to understand that there is a past at all. And then the teacher's entire work is to make them understand that it is the past of them all: The Latin language is not the language of the Latinists, it is my own language. And the moment, in which we succeed in allowing the pupils to make this transfer, we will have won.

Common learning allows to confront these small individual stories of 15 years, 16 years, 17 years, 18 years with each other, i.e. to basically show the young people that there are pasts and they are part of some bigger time-related dimension.

*This opens the young people's view onto the world.*

My Greek teacher always said: “Teach them what does not concern them in the first place.” It is true, why should they be interested in the Middle Ages? If you succeed in opening up this dimension, it seems to me you have achieved a real opening.

In the end, this is the difference between educating and informing. Our pupils are informed, but they lack education. Certainly you have to be informed, but to be properly informed, you have to have enough education to know what is important and what is not. Otherwise you are like a straw in the wind, unable to prioritize.

*The more complex the world becomes, the more education you need in order to be able to find your way in this world while being conscious of the past and not to fall victim to manipulation. However, the*

*waves of school reforms over the last 20 to 30 years have not promoted this type of comprehensive education. How would you describe the change in the school over the last decades?*

Different axes have changed. People think they are profound if they are complicated! This is the trend in today's pedagogy: An art was transformed into a pseudo-science of those who are themselves unable to teach. These are the “pedagogists” who have abandoned the art of teaching properly and now construct theories – very clever and interesting theories – which are, however, far from any reality. Nevertheless, this basic trend has gained the upper hand, not only over the school but also over many other fields. It is inextricably linked with a creeping relativism and has abandoned common sense, the very simple common sense!

The second axis is the gradual shift from the right to education to the right to success. You must succeed at all costs, which is a right! The failure is not a part of human reality anymore, but a kind of disease that must be treated. What a strange society that made the winner the only valid model. And for the parents, the winner is the one who attends university. Hence a long period of study has logically been upgraded and the apprenticeship has been degraded.

The third trend is that the parents were no longer involved as a major partner, but as players at school which is everyone's matter. The so-called “Conseils d'établissement”<sup>1</sup> have turned parents into co-managers. They have become accustomed to telling the teachers how they should teach and what has to be included in the curriculum and then they correct their (always too strict) evaluation. The pressure has increased quite a lot. Then there is the loneliness of the teachers: School principals do not support them. Either from cowardice or for the sake of peace and quiet, school principals play the role of mediators between teachers and parents. No wonder that some teachers give free reins and give their pupils much better grades in order to avoid difficulties or even lawyers' intervention. From my point of view, a principal must defend his teachers against outside attacks; and if there is a problem, he will regulate it internally, not together with the parents. But

Jean Romain

**Lettre ouverte  
à ceux qui  
croient encore  
en l'école**

L'Age d'Homme

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**"Learning from the experiences ..."**

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where are the principals who still show the greatness to do so?

Finally, the inflationary bureaucracy must be deplored. Of course it is not easy; of course, there are special cases; of course, there are pupils who ... But you almost get the impression that difficulties were created to justify earning one's wages. You know hardly anyone, who was in an administrative job whatsoever, who was hired for a particular task, and who says after completion of mission to his superiors: "So boss, mission completed, I am leaving." No one says that. Everyone will find a new problem that no one else except him can solve!

I believe that these four axes have contributed to the changes in schools and the teaching profession.

*If you take a look at Germany or France across the Swiss border, the same trends can be observed everywhere. Do you see the influence of international organizations such as the OECD?*

Of course. This belongs to the chapter commercialization of education and knowledge. All those who are annoyed because the school allegedly teaches a too encyclopedic knowledge, those who castigate the human heritage for being nothing but the reproduction of the ruling class, those who prefer the method to the content (the pedagogists) and those who now want to equip each student with a tablet PC because you have to be so modern, they will all help to convert knowledge into a mere commodity.

This metamorphosis toward a commercialization of school which is based on slow processes of rationalization and

"The teacher does not have the intention to dominate the pupils through his recognized authority, let alone to keep them in a state of submission. He undertakes everything to enable his pupils not to be dependent on him any longer, to become autonomous. The relationship that he has to his pupils is not that of master and a servant: it is the relationship of a person who knows more with another person who knows less and thus makes himself a scholar of the former so as to learn."

standardization of the education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reaches its peak today – and that is essential in the transformation of the education into a commodity. Education needs to be calibrated to be comparable, measurable and relatively homogeneous in form. The mechanization of education, the primacy of methodology, the cross-cantonal curricula, such as the *Plan d'études romand* (PER), rampant individualism and international comparison methods are some of the practices that give the cost-benefit analysis an "objective" touch, necessary to commercialize education. Before education can be sold on a large scale via tablet PCs and software, they must, in short, take the form of a commodity, and the disappearance of the group/class is an important element of this project.

*You mentioned the inter-cantonal curriculum as well as PER (Plan d'études romand) which have been successively implemented in Romandy and Ticino since 2011. The Curriculum 21 which is subject to the consultation process at the moment is the equivalent in German speaking Switzerland. What are the experiences made in Romandy? How has it been worked out and implemented? What are the consequences that have already been noticed?*

Prior to the PER there was the PECARO Project, the *Plan d'études cadre romand*. The same idea: harmonizing lessons in the different western Swiss cantons. The "Association Refaire L'Ecole" (ARLE) in connection with political parties has clearly spoken against PECARO. They complained that it was not formulated properly enough what the youth needed to know at the end of each year. It would be easy to specify the annual goals. PER's precursor PECARO did not do so, but it prescribed the method. As a matter of fact, PECARO was a socio-constructive bible, which, with relation to its contents, intentionally remained vague. Many in Romandy said "We do not want that. Do the opposite. Explain in detail what pupils have to know at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades and refrain from prescribing a method." Due to the wide opposition, the plan was modified by transforming it into a large, opaque construction. It was so extensive that any-

one could take out of it what he wanted. It is totally impossible to take into consideration everything the PER suggests. Instead of a balanced curriculum which should have harmonized lessons, we have an extremely complicated oversupply. Where is the harmonization in that?

The PER takes language problems into account, too. But it is difficult, since these languages are only taught superficially, in any case in Geneva. The pupils learn German on the primary level from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and English from the 5<sup>th</sup>. In the upper levels, the secondary schools (12 – 15 years), they start from the beginning again because they have not learned any solid skills. And when they then go to grammar school they get into great trouble because they have not learned the basics. The introduction of two foreign languages in the elementary school, where they do not even master the French language, appears to me only little desirably. German yes, because we live in Switzerland. But English, they would learn that relatively quickly, incidentally, in the secondary school.

*What has to be done, which measures need to be taken to rebuild school?*

In 2001, we founded the "Association Refaire L'Ecole" (Arle). When I was elected its president, I announced 3 items which needed to be done: on the primary level we need to end reforms – that is this whole ideology, abolishing grades, no more grading from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. With our initiative we made the entire Geneva population express their opinion on the following question: "Do you want, yes or no, annual grades?" 76% of the people supported our cause. From left to right, across the party lines, we had won our first victory: the annual grades with selective and not formative character were introduced again.

Secondly, I emphasized that departments (natural science, literature, modern, etc.) need to be introduced in the secondary schools instead of performance groups, so that they would all have the same subjects and the better pupils simply do more work. In 2009, the people said yes to the reintroduction of the departments. However, with regards to the

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### "Learning from the experiences ..."

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first year of the secondary school (12 – 13 years), we had to agree on a compromise and continue with the performance groups. That is too bad. As a member of Parliament, I will try to correct this mistake.

Finally, I requested a simplification of the high school diploma in Geneva for the purpose of establishing clear structures. I was granted this simplification last month in the Geneva parliament. Twelve years of work for that what I had said in 2001. That is the outcome.

To get back to your question, what needs to be done: at the very first, authority must regain its position. Authority in the broadest sense is the power to get someone to do something without physical or psychic force. *Hannah Arendt* added a second definition: authority not only excludes force but is also incompatible with conviction, which assumes equality and works with arguments; authority is hierarchical in its being: the moment where one resorts to arguments, *Hannah Arendt* observed, is the moment in which authority no longer works. As soon as authority is reduced to arguing and defending oneself, this is the moment where we lose it which is quite contrary to a widespread opinion. Authority as such only exists when it is spontaneously recognized and respected: it occurs "naturally", as if taken for granted. That means at the same time, the one who obeys to real authority does not have the feeling of being forced; he considers everything legitimate that authority prescribes. The pupil obeys his teacher because he possesses knowledge.

Pedagogical authority has to do with the above described definitions of authority in the broadest sense. It is a hierarchical power of the teachers, which is fundamentally accepted by the pupils. But this power is paradoxically hierarchical. It is about an unequal relationship, which works on its own dissolution. The teacher does not have the intention to dominate the pupils through his recognized authority, let alone to keep them in a state of submission. He undertakes everything to enable his pupils not to be dependent on him any longer, to become autonomous. The relationship that he has to his pupils is not that of master and a servant: it is the relationship of a person who knows more with another person who knows less and thus makes himself a scholar of the former so as to learn.

For the authority of the teacher to unfold, to educate and to disappear little by little, it needs the support of the parents; it depends on the parents to accept it inherently as well. This support, however, is no longer available and in the cantons the consensus is missing about what their own schools should represent.

*Do you have some memories of your best teacher?*

Well, I had an uncountable amount of such teachers. I only had the best teachers! It is true. I went to school in Valais to a boarding school in Saint Maurice. Our teachers showed us how to delight in learning. The teachers who impressed me most were those who taught me the sense of the great things. I learned Latin and Greek and like all the teenagers I asked: "What does it do for me?" One of my teachers said to me: "You shouldn't ask what it does for you; you should ask, what does it free

you from?" He had asked the right question. Later I understood that it was about freedom through knowledge. The teachers who impressed me most were teachers who spoke with me like an adult, not as if they were speaking with a stupid child, and in their words; I needed to make an effort, not them.

*How would you describe in summary, the current duty of the school?*

The real defenders of school education want it to be in the service of emancipated, free, cultivated and educated people who are capable of reflecting and asking about their own roots. Picking up a book means using a weapon against the neo-modern confusion.

*Mr Romain, thank you very much for the interview.*

*Interview Susanne Lienhard and Andreas Kaiser*

<sup>1</sup> In 2011 the former schools' commissions were replaced by these "Conseils d'établissement". They embrace representatives of parents, pupils, the administration and the teachers.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

### Association Refaire L'Ecole (Arle)

The Association has the following objectives:

- to strengthen and to defend the institutional, republican and democratic character of the Geneva school, i.e. its mandate as service provider;
- to transfer the lessons above all other considerations as the primary task of the conveyance of rational knowledge, humanitarian and civic education;
- to strengthen the position of teachers by recognizing their evidence of performance, their status as experts, their authority and their pedagogical freedom;

- to strengthen the neutrality of the school as an institution against any interference, be it of religious, ideological, economic, or "psycho-social" nature;
- to maintain the good quality of teaching by appropriate means (applicable curricula, the evaluation by obtaining grades, respect for the law, the teaching and materials, etc.);
- to contribute to helping disadvantaged students (through targeted support) and to enable all students to unfold their full potential.

Source: <http://www.arle.ch/statuts>  
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

## Current Concerns

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## Dialectics

### An address on the occasion of the graduation and awards ceremony of the Medical faculty of the University of Berne

by Prof Dr med Felix J. Frey, *Département of Nephrology, Hypertension and Clinical Pharmacology, University Hospital Insel, Berne*

Dear students, do you like dialectics?

In case you don't, you won't like my remarks. This should not be a problem, since within 15 minutes you will see the back of me. However, if you don't incorporate the dialectic three-step process first formulated by *Heraclitus* in your life, with relish, your future may present itself as one-dimensional, maybe oppressive but surely confusing. Because the progress of mankind happens in antipodal steps which sooner or later will arrive in the middle again; whereas taking into account today's acceleration of developments you can't expect to walk through your life based on one single thesis.

Actually I should first congratulate you because you have reached your goal, you have successfully got your studies and your research work over and done with; that is the tradition. Now you have become a dentist, biomedical engineer, master of medical education or physician and are decorated with a Master-, PhD or Dr med title. For this you have slaved, suffered and hopefully scolded and gossiped about your professors and the university for many years. Therefore you earn respect and thanks for your commitment. That's how you are thinking, the graduates as well as the valued guests and also my old comrade-in-arms, the Dean.

Certainly you have noticed it in the media. Lately, fellow students in Greece are suddenly sitting in a lecture without a lecturer. Without notice of departure the professor has head over heels accepted a professorship in another country. In the auditorium the students are shivering with cold, because the heating costs were cut. The infrastructure of the schools is decaying, expandable items for practical trainings and research are becoming sparse, only dreamers still believe in research positions; this all because lacking financial resources.

Better off are the American students. They have excellent teaching conditions. But at the end of their studies most of them are burdened with a debt of 50,000 to 250,000 US-dollars. That was what it was like when I worked in San Francisco in the 1970s and it is still the same, because the high school and the university students must finance the teaching themselves. Therefore it is totally inadequate to congratulate you, students of Berne, on your achievement, or even thank you. The state and your parents deserve the congratulations and thanks, because they provid-

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“To my mind education is a common good. Education is a common right as is the entitlement to water, food, clothes, medical care, and freedom of religion and opinion. The free access to education is essential for the development of young people. In the past it was indispensable for the social development and economic progress of Switzerland.”

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“And with respect to the biomedical sciences' pecuniary usurpation you are probably hardly aware of the dimensions, because you have been indoctrinated – since the fall of the Wall in 1989 – with a historically unprecedented audacity that only personal profit makes man efficient. Helpfulness, the 'acte gratuite', the categorical joy of art and creativity, once supporting elements of human society, and above all of the doctor's acting in the service of the sick people, were treated as non-existent.”

\* \* \*

“During your professional life you will have to go more profound with respect to your specialisation once more, otherwise your impact will remain marginal. [...] In spite of this, however, you will have to develop a wide horizon – and that is challenging – in order to never become a cog in a fatal totalitarian development.”

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ed lecturers and infrastructure and above all space for the studies of your choice.

Well, you, as you are successful graduates, have now hopefully turned up your noses; for you may think: “What sense does a university make without students? The university itself depends on our existence. If we hit the wall, nothing works any more.” Yes, you're right. You, the students, and the university have been a community of common destiny. Have been? No, please try to continue being part of this community! If you, as you are now part of the “Swiss elite”, do not stand by the university (as it works in Switzerland) anymore, as your parents did (whom I want to thank for it), your children once will suffer from Greek-American conditions. And the danger, ladies and gentlemen, is real. This results from the disproportional growth of the number of students within the last 20 years in relation to the financial input provided by the State. Due to the “emergency” the rectorate already raised the registration fees, minimally, symbolically, as they said. I was and I am an oppo-

nent. Please, do not forget: “l'appétit vient en mangeant”.

The rectorate postulates a model in which financing of education by the state, so called “provider”, shall step by step be replaced by the students themselves, named “education seekers”. The fact that the rectorate of the university claims itself titles as “Swiss Future” or “Avenir Suisse”, does not make it any better! It is suggested that the students themselves may pay 15 per cent of the costs of high school lessons and 100 per cent of the costs of master studies and the doctorate. Due to this model, the financial potential of families becomes an essential determinant for the choice of fields of academic study. It is an extremely serious matter that the pecuniary prospects of any working place in future will become more relevant than the personal interest and the individual skills of a student concerning selection of an academic subject and intensity of studies.

Under these circumstances education becomes increasingly a privilege of chil-

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**“Dialectics”**

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dren of wealthy families. The contents of education will degenerate to pure products, which are only chosen because one may make money with them later on. Noteworthy, the demand for the financing by the “education seekers” instead of the “providers” is written in the same table as the demand for better framework conditions for Hedgefonds, as recently published (“Bund” of 17 January 2013, p. 7).

You may have noticed: to my mind education is a common good. Education is a common right as is the entitlement to water, food, clothes, medical care, and freedom of religion and opinion. The free access to education is essential for the development of young people. In the past it was indispensable for the social development and economic progress of Switzerland.

Dear students, however, your privilege to be allowed to study due to the university being a common good does not mean less than a real responsibility towards the society, which has made this possible. You may think: “Why should the concept of the common good or ‘bien commun’ be my business? Sociologists and academic lawyers shall deal with this, why me?” Well, we were trained to understand the normal function of the human body. Last not least, the objective is to help, when the balance of the body homeostasis is disturbed. The knowledge about this is to a large extent logical, universal, and empirical apart from a few aspects of the esoteric branch. Due to this, they are explainable and there exists a surprising consensus concerning their application. Therefore, we, the bio-medically working physicians, fulfill more and more *Max Weber’s* postulate to be scientists free from value judgements. This is practical, because there is nothing that guides rationally acting human beings to joint action as well as facts. Not surprisingly, the biomedical economic sector has therefore spread extremely in all of its sectors within the last 50 years, and it has done so globally. It will continue this way. You will be in the right boat.

However – empirical sciences have a crucial limit. Although they are extremely efficient when it comes to achieving a practically relevant intended goal, but from the established or recognized facts you cannot derive any norms. Perceptions and facts of the empirical sciences, however, include power. This power sometimes manifests itself impudently pecuniarily, or even worse, military-warlike. As examples of the latter point, you may remember from your history lessons of the last

century the strategic “successful application” of the findings concerning the effects of inhaled gases or radioactive irradiation on the human body. And with respect to the biomedical sciences’ pecuniary usurpation you are probably hardly aware of the dimensions, because you have been indoctrinated – since the fall of the Wall in 1989 – with a historically unprecedented audacity that only personal profit makes man efficient. Helpfulness, the “acte gratuite”, the categorical joy of art and creativity, once supporting elements of human society, and above all of the doctor’s acting in the service of the sick people, were treated as non-existent. Maybe that will change now, because even the most narrow-minded citizens believing zealously in the free market, realize that annual salaries for singular doctors/managers in the biomedical field at the scale of annual university costs of 500 medical students and 200 physician assistants working in the clinics could lead to social instability and could bring the liberal market organization on the “scaffold”, even for the areas where it is undoubtedly useful. (*Philipp Müller*, President FDP).

Now you will rightly argue: such grotesque situations will hardly occur in my life, and if this, should be the case nevertheless and contrary to all expectations, I am also convinced that you will orient yourself towards a deontological ethics. However, the question remains, whether one will realize as a small cog when the all-encompassing wheel is drifting into a – for the community – potentially disastrous direction. This becoming aware was difficult in the past, as *Hannah Arendt* formally demonstrated by means of a historically traumatic example, and is becoming even more difficult nowadays, which probably, among other things, has something to do with specialization in modern times. Professional specialization was and is undoubtedly an essential mechanism for mankind’s progress.

All of you have already experienced as individuals this phylogenetically relevant restriction of your professional activity radius. Think back to the wide range of subjects in elementary school and in grammar school up to the Matura and its ongoing containment at the university from bachelor to master and PhD. During your professional life you will have to go more profound with respect to your specialisation once more, otherwise your impact will remain marginal. Sarcastic people say you are condemned to become a one-track specialist. That is what nobody really wants to become. But be careful: he who is not competent in a special discipline, may not become a one-track specialist,

but an idiot in his or her specialist discipline. Therefore, unavoidably you have to work in-depth. In spite of this, however, you will have to develop a wide horizon – and that is challenging – in order to never become a cog in a fatal totalitarian development. Such farsightedness may get lost. With today’s burden in regard to profession and family and self-realization, there is the temptation to merely care for the scientific findings and their application, aiming at optimizing one’s own small existence. This way you will become a kind of a small sole entrepreneur, essentially a “self-company” in the health-care market.

And this is where I currently see the greatest of all dangers, when you will now enter professional life. The situation of the invalid human being, who suffers or even dies without biomedical help, is a priori not an object, around which a fair, free trade in the neoliberal sense may develop. The totalitarian claim that everything has to be financially profitable, including the investments of dubious provenance in the health system, will inevitably lead to a conflict between your personal standards, the investor and the patient. The patient is the weakest in the alliance. It is about his existence. You are his advocate.

We’ve heard it, already Heraclitus recognized that our society develops in antipodal steps. This tendency of wanting to develop oneself seems to be an essential part of man’s nature. As *Karl Jaspers*, physician and philosopher, aptly put it (*Karl Jaspers*, “Kleine Schule des philosophischen Denkens”, Piper, 1974, p.65): Man is in motion. He can not remain as he is. He is constantly changing his condition and is not – like the animals – a being that in his well-formation repeats himself from generation to generation. He pushes beyond that what is given to him. Man is, according to *Nietzsche*, the “non-stated animal”. Animals repeat what was before.

You and me, by our nature, can not remain as we are. You are now dentist, doctor, master of medical education, biomedical engineer or scientist with a master, PhD or Dr med title of the University of Berne. Congratulations once again. But that is not a static condition, because it will go on, inexorably, dialectically, and I can tell you: your future is exciting, assuming you commit yourselves as academics, that is you take up this wide responsibility for yourself, your neighbour, your family; but do never forget, especially for the community; because it has taken you so far. •

Source: *Schweizerische Ärztezeitung* 2013 (Swiss Medical Journal), Annual 94 (29/30) 1139-41

(Translation *Current Concerns*)