

Thoughts on Education: Lifelong Childhood

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Nowadays we often talk about lifelong learning. Sometimes it sounds like a life sentence – as if we have to sit on a hard school bench for a lifetime. Sometimes it sounds like an indispensable duty. Otherwise we would be wolfed down by the global competition. I think these connotations are not only dangerous, but wrong. There is something inside of the idea of lifelong learning that is a gift that is made to us. In my opinion it is a fantastic game for our whole lifespan. Therefore for me lifelong learning signifies **lifelong childhood!**

Will and ability

What do I mean by this? If we talk about lifelong learning it means that a person will learn during his or her whole life. For this she or he requires two qualities. The person will need the **will** and the **ability** to learn.

Ability

I would like to start with the latter, the ability to learn. In the beginning of life the cognitive capability is underdeveloped. Children need attendance to develop their abilities to understand and comprehend. Here education institutions can play a vital part.

In kinder garden we use to play and discover. But this has mostly an end at the first day in school. Now the standard mode of learning is being taught. It is a passive and very formal way of communicating content. Even tertiary education institutions mostly use lectures to teach students. Here I would like to cite the reformer and pedagogue Kurt Hahn who formed the saying: *I hear. I forget. I see. I remember. I do. I understand.* This shows the understanding is more than a passive and receiving mode of life. It is something that involves the whole person. Both the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* are necessary to gain knowledge. This also corresponds to the idea of *Bildung* of Wilhelm von Humboldt who said that learning means to bind the world at us as close as possible.

When we look inside of schools and higher education institutions we can find aspects that consider this deeper insight. For example in laboratories students become explorer of the unknown. Other students

learn by business games. These instruments of teaching need to be strengthened.

Finally, the active involvement of students into the process of teaching and learning activates the imagination and fantasy. I do not completely agree with the famous quote of Albert Einstein: *Imagination is more than knowledge*, but it is right that both are important. Ex-cathedra teaching destroys the imagination and fantasy of the students. Therefore, we have to find new ways of teaching and learning that communicate knowledge und vitalise our imagination. This can and should be also in a playful mode. Teaching and learning need not be always that serious. Games – real or virtual ones - also allow testing new ideas without severe consequences. This gives us more courage in inventing new visions.

This means that we have to introduce quests, explorations and games into secondary and tertiary education. We should approve the image of a school class on a quest, of an exploring university seminar, of a group of playing senior citizens. This means that we should say “Yes!” to our **lifelong childhood!**

Education institutions teach how to learn and communicate basic knowledge about the world. They are important for these first steps, but also for a lifelong communication of new knowledge and ideas. However, there is going something wrong. In the beginning I used the picture of the hard school bench as a metaphor for the failing of our education system. Institutions not only teach. They also destroy. They destroy the curiosity of a child and the will to strive for the unknown.

Will

But I said that both the ability **and** the **will** are needed to learn. So our current education system tends to endanger the lifelong learning. When a person is involved actively into the process of learning she or he not only gets the answers. She also understands the questions that correspond to the answers. This link between question and answer is necessary to classify information. And classifying information becomes more and more important in a knowledge based society. There is an equal link between searching and finding, between exploring and discovering. By these interconnections the result of learning will not be only dead and unconfirmed information, but relevant and proved knowledge. It means the shift from information to knowledge. The latter we need.