

# Can schools still be saved?

by Ursula Felber\*

*Finally, the media is starting to take an interest in the topic of schools. However, today the ball is also being kicked back and forth and the obvious grievances in schools are often blamed on migration.*

*As a retired teacher who taught for decades at primary and special education schools, I can look back on many years of school reform. What has been the outcome?*

“The first step to learning is loving the teacher”: Erasmus of Rotterdam was always my guideline. As a teacher, you need empathy, patience, foresight and the certainty that children can learn anything. Successful teaching consists of guided instructions in dialogue with the students. Also, a combination of persistence and confidence that children can overcome difficulties by being challenged and practising, practising and more practising are a prerequisite for a successful school career. The most important thing is that the students can develop a secure, reliable bond with the teacher.

I obtained my teaching certificate at the end of the eighties in a second-chance education programme. I learned all of this during my education. At that time, free choice of teaching method, little administrative effort, and control by the school board and parents were a matter of course. There was a great deal of personal responsibility.

Later, one reform followed another, with more and more regulations, meetings, administrative work, controls, etc. As a result, the reputation of the teacher also suffered, and authority was undermined. Teacher training was only possible at the University of Education, and teacher training colleges were abolished. In addition, English and French were introduced as foreign languages at primary school level. The introduction of *Curriculum 21* was the final straw. Self-discovering learning, every child should learn individually, the teacher is demoted to a coach. Many teachers have expressed criticism. It was of no relevance.

At the beginning of the nineties, we had visits from teachers from England. They wanted to learn how children in Swiss schools are taught in whole-class lessons, how to run a class so that all children learn as much as possible and form a community. The English had already abolished

this and noticed that academic success was rapidly declining. Soon after, schools in Switzerland were reformed as described above. It was now frowned upon for a teacher to stand in front of the class and discuss a topic on the blackboard together. Arranging the desks in rows was old-fashioned. Not everything was better in the past. Of course, our world has changed and some changes in schools were necessary. But with the isolation of pupils, with self-organised learning, with the teacher as a coach, the soul has been taken out of teaching.

Today, it is unfair to blame the difficulties in schools only on the large proportion of foreigners. At the beginning of the years after 2000, I had only foreign-language children in my class. Most of them studied hard and their parents supported them. Of course, there were very difficult situations, and not always was there an immediate change or progress.

Today, I occasionally meet former students. I accompanied a Tamil woman through her A-level exam, she wants to become a teacher. Recently, a young man from the Balkans approached me. He was in my preparatory class (1<sup>st</sup> class in 2 years). He later completed an apprenticeship for roofers and a construction foreman school. He is an officer in the Swiss army. Another one became a professional footballer. Most of the former students have found their way.

Since the introduction of school management, integrative schooling, the Curriculum 21 and digitalisation as early as kindergarten, school is unrecognisable.

This is where the causes of the plight lie. In this way, neither the native nor the foreign children are treated fairly. The relationship between teachers and children, the concept of man, empathy and commitment are still crucial today. The issue of migration is a challenge for all of us. For the school, for the neighbourhoods, for traffic, for the housing situation. The discussion about how we want to live together concerns everyone.

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