

The duty to be confident

The Ukraine war is entering children's rooms and classrooms. What can schools do?

by Carl Bossard,* Stans, Switzerland



Carl Bossard
(Photo pma)

Images are powerful. Teachers are particularly aware of this when talking to their pupils these days. Children and young people are directly confronted with the Ukraine conflict via *YouTube*, *TikTok* and other social networks. Often they are on their own. They bring what they have seen into

the classrooms. "Is war also coming to us?" they ask and want to know: "why is there such fighting?" At home, they often get no answers to their questions. Teachers and educators are the only contact persons for some children.

But what can teachers say? How do they react? The philosopher *Immanuel Kant* speaks of a duty of confidence. It applies especially in precarious times. Children must have an example set by adults, also at school. Confidence is something different from naive, illusory optimism. It has nothing to do with the quickly conjured up positive thinking or even with the kitschy view through rose-coloured glasses.

No, confidence is an enlightened confidence, mental resilience as a basic human attitude. For young people, it is a kind of mental life insurance and thus a fundamental resource in life. Mental powers live from this driving energy of confidence.

Perhaps teachers remember Kant's famous question these days: "what may I hope for?" The philosopher from Königsberg describes history as a qualitative progression that allows us to hope. I may hope, he says, that there will be a development towards better life, towards less atrocity and war, towards more life chances.

Kant's basic idea aims at this: human evolution is the developmental process of a species that can learn. We humans are capable of learn-

ing, he emphasises. This is the hope of the Enlightenment. At the same time, however, he also makes clear that this learning goes through terrible ruptures, through horrific catastrophes.

What can we hope for in the face of this existential and historical experience? Kant says: we may hope that things will turn out well. He holds fast to this despite the fact that history also knows setbacks, ruptures and tremors, as we are dramatically experiencing today in Ukraine. Man is a being who also has predispositions to evil.

It is not for nothing that the political philosopher *Hannah Arendt* speaks of the twofold responsibility of parents and teachers. Both have to protect the child from the world and at the same time the world from the child. Every human being has two sides in him or her, the good and the destructive. That is why educators "take responsibility for both, for life and the development of the child as well as for the continuity of the world". And both require protection, the world as well as the child.

"By no means does this twofold responsibility coincide, it can even result in a certain contradiction", *Hannah Arendt* further emphasises, thus pointing to the inevitable ambivalence of the educator's task. One thing remains important: "the beauty of the world must be shown to the child." In this lies the hopeful.

"What may I hope for?" asks Kant. Hope is a way of looking at the world realistically, of having confidence in spite of everything. Perhaps the French poet *Romain Rolland* hits the nail on the head with his phrase from the Michelangelo novel: "there is no other heroism than to see the world as it is and yet love it." – How trivial that is. And yet so difficult. Especially in these times.

But it is precisely this confidence that children need. In the face of the horror of events like the war in Ukraine, schools must also take a stand against it and educate them to be confident; they must stand firm and provide a foothold. That is part of its educational mission. Strengthening people, clarifying things, as one pedagogue put it.

Source: *St. Galler Tagblatt* from 15 March 2022

Reprinted with kind permission of the author.

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

* *Carl Bossard*, 1949, former principle of the cantonal college in Nidwalden, director of the cantonal college in Lucerne, founding principle of the college of education Zug (PH Zug), lecturer at the college of education in Zug. Today he is active as a course instructor, speaker and school councillor. Carl Bossard regularly comments on education policies and pedagogy.