

What is a good education for the future?

(excerpt from the Abitur Speech, 2015)

[...]

That is more than the Bavarian Curriculum and, to my mind, it is best epitomized in *Five Minds for the Future*, an educational and knowledge concept on the part of the cognition and intelligence researcher Howard Gardner.

Education is disciplined, synthetic and creative thinking complemented by a respectful and ethical way of acting.

Disciplined thinking means being able to concentrate on learning, to acquire factual knowledge, and to practise the same thing again and again, in monotonous fashion if necessary: the same calculations, the same vocabulary, the same movements. Without basic knowledge you cannot make any progress. A quick presentation at the end of the year will not be able to make up for a lack of knowledge here. To be disciplined means to use learning periods well, to be able to renounce distractions like the mobile telephone or the Internet, and appearing punctually for lessons.

Synthetic thinking means grasping the essence of things and developing an understanding of the whole. And for this reason you must continue drawing up those unloved tables of contents and explain the relationships between things.

A blinkered specialist is someone who only learns factual knowledge off by heart, you should, however, organise knowledge in terms of its full context of meaning and be able to communicate this. Being able to extract knowledge from, for example, texts, and to reassemble it anew, or writing texts oneself and correcting these time and again costs time and requires concentration, perseverance and effort. However, the more one understands, the more fun the acquisition of knowledge begins to make!

Creative thinking means discovering new things, going beyond what one knows, asking unusual questions, developing “another” way of looking at things, opening up new paths of action. It is a central form of ability for the future and has nothing in common with learning things off by heart, copying things from the board and consuming knowledge in fast fashion.

Only those, however, can think creatively who have previously acquired basic knowledge in a disciplined way and are able to network this. You can only think outside your own “pigeonhole”, should you have one and know your way around it.

With the help of these three skills – disciplined thinking, synthetic thinking and creative thinking – one can achieve top performances, but this is not enough for the simple reason that we are social beings. We must have respect for other people and behave in a decent fashion.

Respectful thinking means that no one lives for himself but for and in a community of people who can look different, think differently and who can experience different or equivalent forms of joy or pursue similar or other goals. Respect and appreciation are essential for constructive cooperation, also where learning is concerned. And this also means accepting the guidance of the person conveying the knowledge and not entering into discussions as to whether something should now be learned or not. It is, as a rule, still the case that young people learn from older and more experienced people who process knowledge in such a well-structured fashion that efficient acquisition is possible.

Ethical thinking, finally, is required as an orientation and value system. How can I live decently? What responsibilities and duties do I have?

Ethical thinking in a school is not based on a catalogue of sanctions but on dialogue, discussion and insight. And this has, as its premise, the ability to engage in constructive discussion and to acquire sensitive insight.

For my part, for example, I wish that certain norms here should be a matter of course, such as respect for foreign property – school property: that furniture is not destroyed, or that paper ends up in the waste bin and not somewhere on the grounds. I would also consider it self-evident that older pupils should be role models for younger pupils when it comes to smoking.

We have to take many steps away from egoistical thinking to ethical thinking in terms of the well-being of each individual in the community and only those who succeed when it comes to thinking and acting ethically are truly “mature”.

[...]

(Carmen Mendez, School Principal)