

Hope, a Tonic for the Future

Laurie Clark

"What is awakened in the human being in a time of difficulty is the predisposition to make contact with the spiritual world, the invisible guidance within one's destiny."

Orland Bishop

As we begin to find our way into the future and decide the best way to re-open our early childhood classrooms, what is it that is really needed? There are the practicalities that are being planned for as the governmental guidelines are laid out. But, what will the children essentially be needing now that they have experienced isolation from friends and have faced a dramatic shift in the world as they have known it? What are the healing gestures that teachers can provide so that they can feel safe and secure as they navigate their way back into the classroom?

The cultural biographical destiny that we all find ourselves in during this pandemic is calling for us to awaken and meet this unprecedented situation with strengthened inner capacities.

Sometimes it feels impossible to find the way and yet traversing through the unknown is the only choice. We live with uncertainties all of the time that are not under our control and this most certainly, prominently faces us now in the most profound way. How can we learn to live with so many uncertainties?

Rabbi Moss suggests a path in a Sabbath blog that he composed. "It is not that we have lost our sense of certainty. We have lost our illusion of certainty. We never had it to begin with. We never know what the future holds. We have to admit our vulnerability. Close your eyes and feel the uncertainty, make peace with it, let yourself be taken by it. Embrace your cluelessness. Wash your hands well. And every time you do, remember whose hands you are in."

The children who will return to our care after the quarantine will need the teachers to provide an inner atmosphere that will be restorative. Can we find the way to set our hearts on fire with enthusiasm so that we can make discoveries in what is being presented to us during these times and bring the distilled essence that will bear fruit for the future?

In a lecture entitled, Faith, Love and Hope, Rudolf Steiner implores us to embrace and permeate ourselves with 'spiritual hope'. Steiner goes on to say, "The forces of hope are life-giving and brings confidence for the future, we cannot take a single step in life without the force of hope. We actually know nothing about the following day, even whether or not we will be alive. We know about the future just as much as we need to know. Life would be impossible in the physical world were not future events to be preceded by hope. Would anyone sow seeds if he had no idea what would become of them?"

Hope counteracts uncertainties, it provides a powerful antidote to despondency. It enlivens us to take steps towards the future knowing that our plans might need to completely change before we get to where we thought we were going. Flexibility and adaptability at every turn now is what is needed. To bathe one's soul, with 'spiritual hope' provides an inner gesture of healing and will be a gift to the children in our care when we return to the classroom after this long absence from the pandemic. It gives us the potential to courageously face the circumstances that the unknown future might hold at any given time.

The 'spiritual hope' that we hold in our hearts can be infused through the advice that Henning Kohler describes for children that have experienced anxiety, trauma and uncertainty. Protecting attentiveness, comforting trust and accompanying interest are the qualities that work together to provide the faculty of understanding that the child so desperately needs at this time.

Protecting attentiveness requires the teacher to be creative in their understanding and with deep devotion and reverence 'listen in' to what it is that each child is needing. The teacher adapts a quiet and alert attention without a lot of talking about it with the children. This kind of inner listening gives a picture of what is needed, initiating a sense of "listening acknowledgment" that embraces the children, they feel held and supported.

Accompanying interest involves being there for the child and patiently "standing at the child's side with a waiting attitude." Trauma and anxiety do not disappear quickly, but accompanying the child creates the quality of being deeply interested and involved. It will give the child the gift of time without expectations to hurry through their ordeal or to change. This kind of participation from the teacher is subtle, but powerful and follows the process of the child's development without demanding results.

Comforting trust is perhaps the most important of all. The emotions that the child carries need to be met by the teacher with empathy and confirmation. One of the most important ways to establish comfort and trust is providing all of the healthy things we know to do for the young child. A strong and predictable rhythm, nourishing food, homelike activities and being in nature create security and well-being. In these times, simplifying and reducing our transitions could be helpful, asking less changing from one thing to the other for the sensitive children in our care. However, the most comforting way to establish trust, is to ask for help from the child's angel, this is the key that opens the door to true comfort and will instill the deepest trust between the child and teacher.

Henning Kohler describes 'healing' as not "an elimination of illness but rather a guidance to the essential. Healing means giving hope, to give hope means to have hope. A person's hopeful thinking about a person is loving thinking."

Spiritual hope brings the warmth force that is needed in these times. Carrying hope in our arms as an offering to the children will gracefully pave the way into the future, whatever it brings.

