

What a topsy-turvy world!

Responsibility for educational success shifted from adults to children

by Christine Staehelin*



Christine Staehelin.
(Photo ma)

The survey data from the check tests carried out in north-western Switzerland and other performance tests in Switzerland speak for themselves. The decline in performance in German is particularly noticeable at primary level, and there are significant differences in performance between chil-

dren. Social background – however it is defined here – clearly plays a major role, even more so than mother tongue, as was previously assumed. However, the data does not reveal the causes.

If, as the evaluations suggest, schools are contributing to reinforcing the effects of social background, they are failing in their compensatory role and helping to perpetuate social inequalities.

This is where free interpretation begins. In general, it appears that the reasons for this can be found on the one hand in the individual circumstances of the pupils and on the other hand in the school system. However, these two aspects cannot be considered separately. In a democratic society, education is seen as a key means of ensuring that everyone can participate and enable them to play an active role in public life, regardless of their social background or limitations.

However, if schools contribute to reinforcing the effects of social background, as the evaluations suggest, they are failing in their compensatory role and contributing to the consolidation of social inequalities. If this trend can be observed over the last five years, the question arises as to what has changed so fundamentally in schools in this short period of time that these immediate effects are becoming apparent.

The curriculum no longer describes what should be taught, but what must be learned. This is accompanied by teaching methods that increasingly focus on so-called self-directed learning. What a topsy-turvy world!

In my opinion, the most significant change in educational institutions is the shift in perspective from teaching to learning. This is evident first and foremost in *Curriculum 21*. The curriculum no longer describes what should be taught, but what must be learned. This is accompanied by teaching methods that increasingly focus on so-called self-directed learning: “From teaching development to learning development”, as stated in the vision for primary schools in the city of Basel. Teachers provide learning opportunities that pupils can take advantage of – or not. This shifts the responsibility for educational success from adults to children. What a topsy-turvy world!

If schools are to fulfil their role as educational institutions, they must take responsibility for teaching. It is not children who choose learning opportunities, but adults who teach what is important and meaningful. They introduce children to the world by inspiring the younger generation, promoting the joy of understanding, familiarising them with what already exists and awakening their curiosity about new things. However, this does not happen through so-called learning opportunities, which are increasingly only available digitally; it is teachers who convey this – teaching is a human practice.

In summary, it can be said that teaching must be regained as a guiding principle for schools as educational institutions and that questions of pedagogy, didactics and methodology should be placed at the centre. Shifting responsibility onto pupils is unreasonable, reinforces existing differences and ultimately leaves children and young people on their own. Why should they continue to learn if we as adults no longer convey to them our enthusiasm for the important and the beautiful things and the commonalities of our shared world?

Source: <https://condorcet.ch/2025/08/was-fuer-eine-verkehrte-welt/?print=pdf>, 24 August 2025

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