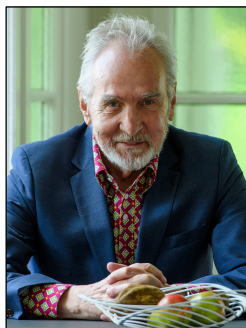


“You can do it, Franz!”

About luck that is sometimes life-deciding, of finding a good teacher

by Ludwig Hasler*



Ludwig Hasler.
(Photo ma)

What does it take for a country lad to study at the ETH Zurich, get a doctorate in biochemistry and successfully run a medical company? It takes good teachers, said Franz Käppeli.

He grew up as the eleventh of twelve children of a poor farmer's family in Muri, Aargau,

built up the “medica medical laboratories AG”, one of the leading medical laboratories in Switzerland, became a wealthy man and donated millions for the renovation of the Muri Abbey – on the remarkable grounds:

He owed his rich life to the good fortune of having found teachers back then as a boy who encouraged him, trusted him to embark on university studies, and assured him at all times what he could not possibly have achieved out of himself: “you can do it, Franz!”

Franz Käppeli died at the end of January. He lives on in the splendidly renovated monastery building. I want to refresh his memory of the teachers here.

Yes, it is fortunate to find a good teacher. A good teacher not only teaches the pupils all kinds of things, he or she opens a door to the world for them, takes away their fear of school, their fear of growing up in general, encourages their curiosity, awakens their self-confidence, strengthens their will to achieve. The good teacher acts according to the insight: education is not what you stuff down, education is what you get out of it.

Of course, it is also luck to find a good teacher, a good manager. In parts it is a coincidence. The teacher is fate – at a stage in life when we are still on the way, as children, young, not yet developed, unfinished.

Parents sometimes tend towards the attitude: this is my child, it belongs to me. But it belongs, if anything, to itself, and school has no lesser noble purpose than to do everything possible to make the child belong a little more to itself every day, to become more and more noticeably a self, a real person, the subject of its life, an actor who transforms himself from the addressee of social educational efforts to the author of his own educational biography. The school as a hothouse for freedom.

The children themselves have to grow. Unlike with plants, the art of gardening alone is not enough. What it takes is the teacher's gaze, which tells the child: “I see you. You can do it”.

School structures and didactic concepts are worth their weight in gold – it is the relationship that makes the difference. Neurologists speak of “resonance”. The human brain likes to bob along, but as soon as it feels noticed, as soon as it realises that the teacher is interested in me, he or she likes me, believes in me, it can take off. “The strongest motivational drug is the other person”, as neuroscientist Joachim Bauer says.

Learning is anything but a mechanical activity. It depends less on individual mental operations than on personal attitude. For example, students were observed solving maths problems. The factors of success were investigated – and lo and behold: contrary to the widespread view that mathematics is the domain of wizards, it turned out that the purely intellectual share in success is modest – and much more important is what learning researchers call the “ego concept”, i.e. self-confidence, “hey, I can do it after all”, plus curiosity, the desire to get to the bottom of things, and a little cheekiness also helps.



“Für ein Alter, das noch was vorhat – Mitwirken an der Zukunft”, Rüffer & Rub Publishing House, 2019 ISBN 978-3-906304-53-3

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There you are. And for all this, pupils need more than suitable learning materials and clever methods. They need a highly personal counterpart who turns to them, who trusts them, who coaxes them. This still applies to us adults, we too only get into shape when we are

aware of being noticed, challenged and recognised. Only – at school, it can make or break your whole life.

Franz made it.

Source: St. Galler Tagblatt, 15 February 2022

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