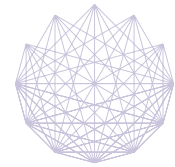


Innovative pedagogical methods in support of the mental health of the youth

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It can be said that there has never been so much attention paid to the situation of adolescents as today even though that throughout history this transitional period of life has always been seen as a challenge. Way back in 400 B.C. Socrates famously criticised the youth of the day when he commented that “Our youth love luxuries. They have bad manners and do not respect the authority of their elders.” It sounds familiar.

However no one could have imagined that a book about the mental problems youth of today entitled *The Age of Anxiety* written by the American Jonathan Haidt would still top the best-selling book charts world-wide one year after its publication. It has contributed in bringing added attention to the worrying level of mental health problems in adolescence. This is not only due to the escalating financial implications involved in dealing with the problem for the authorities but also brings to the table renewed questions as to how schools can build a resilience to these psychological disorders. It has become evident for the general public that we not only live in an Age of Anxiety as Haidt suggests but also in an Age of Therapy. On the one side the attention this brings is welcome but on the other it has made adolescents more aware of their vulnerability.

The question of how society should form and curb what is seen as the exuberant, unruly and sometimes delinquent young first came into focus at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. It was believed at the time that the youth reflected the state of society as a whole. At the time society was undergoing tumultuous changes that signalled the end of an age of stability and the beginning of new era of uncertainty. Old points of reference in society such as religion and cultural traditions that had for centuries been the glue which had held society together were fast disappearing. Today, it can be argued, they have almost disappeared. Young people in particular found themselves in a vacuum. The solution at the time was to introduce a system of secondary school education – in the form of what was to become the German ‘gymnasium’ and the French ‘lycée’. But what indeed was to be the content of the curriculum and to what end? The Emperor Wilhelm of Prussia launched his school reform of 1890 by announcing that: “Schools should not overwhelm pupils with useless knowledge so neglecting modern skills to prepare the young for life. They should be prepared for the ‘struggle for existence.’” He wanted fewer bespectacled boys. The solution would be more physical exercise and training and a greater emphasis on German history and culture. “I need soldiers,” he proclaimed, “I need a strong generation that is fit to serve the country.” The object of secondary schools was to educate for “The demands of the present.” In following up Wilhelm II’s demands Wilhelm Leopold Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, a general in the army, formulated an influential manifesto to this end. He proclaimed that “the strength of the nation lies in its youth” and that “their love of adventure arouses their eagerness for battle. He announced that “It is only youth that depart from life without pangs.” As a result at the turn of the nineteenth century juvenile education concentrated on physical prowess and a strict discipline backed up by corporeal punishment rather than their intellectual and emotional development. It serves as a grotesque example of how the materialistic demands of society

influence the content and aims of schools. Almost one hundred and fifty years later many of the same questions as to the reasons for educating the youth remain. Of course we find ourselves in a completely different situation than earlier in that we look to psychological rather than physical solutions. Our task today is to take care of young souls in times of change. This again further implies that the question today is not only what should be taught and to what end but also how the young should be taught.

For governments the present situation is unsustainable – we cannot live with the alarming high drop-out rates in schools and the growing numbers of NEETS (not in employment, education or training) in both cases in several European countries bordering on 30% who are deemed to become a burden on the welfare state as lifelong social clients. In recent times one of the main directives assigned to schools has been to mitigate the ills of society and their level of success becomes a political issue.

In trying to analyse the causes of the plight of many adolescents it is necessary to ask as to the root cause of the problem - are we witnessing a developmental crisis or a cultural crisis? Only when we start to answer such basic questions are we able to define the role and responsibilities of schools and the health system in alleviating the state of affairs.

In 1898 the genetic Psychologist Granville Stanley Hall held a conference in Boston with the sub-title 'Life's Second Decade'. It was based on this 1894 book Adolescence with the subtitle The Study of Soul Evolution. In two volumes, 1500 pages and half a million words it was to be a groundbreaking document because it attempted to explore the inner life of the young from puberty to maturity and in so doing to delineate the developmental needs of the young i.e. teenagers (a term Hall himself conceived). The book contributed to the emergence of the new science of the soul -Psychology

Hall criticized over-intellectualization in schools at the time which he felt ignored the urgency to address the emotional side of teenage life, a period that is characterized by emotional turbulence. He writes: 'Intellect was the beginning and end of an old philosophy, the heart is the beginning of the new. Who has made history? Not the great intellects but the great hearts -it is the master key for everyone who is trying to solve the problems of the human will, the emotions and feelings. Young men and women as I have learned from my experience from teaching in all these years need first emotion – they must tingle, burn!' ¹
(emotion= émouvoir' = to stir up; to move)

The Quest For Meaning In Our Time

If the youth mirrors the society in which they live a key question is: -how do adolescents today differ from previous generations, if at all. For anyone working with adolescents it quickly becomes apparent that young people today find themselves on a quest for meaning, from the most existential questions such as 'What is the meaning of life'? and 'Why am I here now?' to questions of a more personal nature such as why am I compelled to learn Algebra and 'What hat does it mean for my personal development'? For the generations 'Z'and 'alpha' (those born between 1995 and 2009 and those born between 2010 and 2024 i.e. most of those who now attend an upper school and those who are in puberty) motivation and interest are synonymous

with meaning. Teaching and learning needs to be pregnant with meaning for both pupil and teacher. It seems obvious that If there is no deeper meaning there is no point in working hard.

‘The Disturbing Guest’ is the title of a book by the Italian sociologist Umberto Galimberti, who we have had the privilege of meeting here in Ljubljana in recent years. He believes the youth of today are confronted by a new, uninvited guest with the name nihilism that brings a lack of meaning and direction in life to the agenda. Galimberti criticises schools for their inability to provide a means by which the young can make sense of their lives and the world which has dire sociological and psychological consequences. Galimberti believes there is little promise of overcoming this problem. Society offers them entertainment and consumption but these give young people little support for the future. Therefore they choose what for them is the only alternative -to live with maximum intensity in the present, in the here and now. This provides them only with a short-lived joy which they find in loud music, mega stadium concerts and consumerism. The first signs of this disgruntlement is seen in a discontentment with school which has the task of educating them for a future life. Adolescents create their identity foremost by way of face-to-face acknowledgement by others rather than objective evaluation in numbers. Lack of a deeper appreciation by teachers as to the needs of the young forces pupils to seek recognition elsewhere. They turn to find it in the street. Thus renouncing school can be seen as a way of seeking self-actualization elsewhere. On a more positive note an inspiring side of Generation ‘Z’ is their awareness of what it means to grow up, to make headway, to progress and mature. Many are aware of what they need. To my mind two hindrances stand in their way. One is the nature and structure of their education and the other is the demands of society (and in many cases those of parents) to conform to often outdated, conventional norms which often hinder their personal development. These factors contribute to a culmination of an existential crisis which usually plays out at the age of seventeen, at a stage in their school careers when an unmasking of the self often is thwarted by the meritocratic, standardized, competitive system of evaluation that produces winners and losers.

We perhaps can seek advice from Janus, the god of youth? Janus has two faces- the one looks to the left backwards towards the past. Once coated with silver it symbolized reflection and the moon. The other face, coated with gold, looks in the opposite direction, forwards into the future, with a sense of anticipation of what can be, contrary to living in memories, of what has been. The maintaining of a balance between past and future was manifested in the figure of Janus. This temporal equilibrium was seen as the key of life which Janus holds firmly in his hand. Even today a European tradition is upheld whereby, in a celebration of the coming-of-age, a young person is presented with an image of the key of life on some form of greeting card, (or perhaps a driving licence is more common today!)

When it comes to education teaching is based on a legal document -the curriculum, a plan of what should be taught, comprising of a selection of what has been thought, written and said in the past. But we are educating for the future. The whole idea of a curriculum, conceived in the past in the days of Janus, was built on the Roman philosopher Cicero’s idea of ‘*Historia magistra vitae*’- the idea that history, experience and the past conveyed the notion of ‘life’s teacher’. This is largely dismissed in education today in a time when we are subject to an acceleration into an uncharted future and where the curriculum is based on what is desirable in the name of progress. We see this in the demise of the teaching of History and classical

literature in schools. But we cannot escape from the fact that we learn from experiences both individually and collectively and that we constantly look to the past for guidance. In this way Cicero's hypothesis served as a model for the present and as a path into the future. When I grew up the elder generation were valued for their life experience, as beholders of a collective identity who were assigned with the responsibility to serve as models for us and as such we respected both the teacher, the local policeman, the doctor and the plumber. They conveyed an unquestionable authority. We looked up to them. Our relation to the past has changed dramatically in recent times and in my opinion this is a contributory factor to mental instability in older pupils today. Society has distanced itself from the norms and values that the parents of today's students and many teachers upheld. We call it the 'generation gap' (from Hall). This is seen in our relation to authority. The first class teacher still has its natural authority, the children hold her hand but we live in a time largely devoid of natural authorities as any secondary school teacher will readily testify. Idols are the new authorities for our youth, the football and pop stars. The gradual degradation of authority in Europe culminated in the period at the turn of the twentieth century with its focus on the challenges in the adolescent years, the rise of secondary school education and the dawn of Psychology. It was the time of the collapse of four great authoritarian aristocratic empires. At the time the English authoress Virginia Woolf describes how on or about December 1910, human character changed. She wrote: "I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was nevertheless and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910." 2 Importantly she observed that it first could be seen in the way human beings related to each other, not only between masters and servants, leaders and workers but also between adults and children. Virginia Woolf was in no doubt that this change in human relations would have the hitherto greatest effect on upbringing and education. She asked: "where can we find the sanctuary where we are able to withdraw to an inner world of thought and feeling?"

Therefore it is appropriate to ask what indeed is an authority today? For the breakdown of authority has a significance for the theme of this conference, for today authority is often seen as the antithesis of freedom.

Janus as the God of youth not only represented the dichotomy of past and future but he was also the God of beginnings (as seen in the word January), of archways ('jani'), doorways and gates ('janae') as well as rites of passage. In other words he was the guardian of thresholds, of borders between the outer and the inner. Today we can still see his remains at the entrances and exits of some walled Italian cities.

Friedrich Nietzsche writes in his *Twilight of the Idols* that "if one wishes to outline the architecture of the soul it would be in the image of a labyrinth." 3 Labyrinths are found in the majority of cultures the world over. The pedestrian walks from an exterior entrance to a centre following a winding path that skirts the circumference and then suddenly is lead towards the centre and so out again. When walking from the periphery to the centre in a labyrinth a focus of 'inwardness' becomes apparent with a focus on the centre which gives one the feeling of introversion. In reaching the centre the pedestrian follows the winding rhythmical path in reverse with a focus on the entrance which is now the exit which fosters a sense of 'outwardness', of going out into the world.

A young person's soul life develops in a reciprocity of worlds without and worlds within, worlds past and worlds of the future, when in finding the balance between polarities there is a possibility of finding a balance in oneself which gives life meaning. Moreover for a teacher it offers the possibility of unearthing a latent potential embodied in the individual. This is in tune with Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy and in Carl Jung's concept of the self.

In a Waldorf school the curriculum is not seen as a way of amassing information that perhaps can be of use in the future which is then tested to see if it is retained sufficiently (but which is mostly forgotten after three days), but as a vehicle by which attributes and qualities can be developed in the pupils. Attributes are never forgotten. 4

When mentoring both upper school and university students I often find evidence of such an imbalance, in that the young often complain that they struggle to maintain an independence of mind against the weight of sometimes overpowering external forces and that they strive to find a way of resisting being swallowed up by the social-technological mechanisms of our time. All too often it is too easy for the young of today to feel like a cog in a universe of wheels, a situation described already in 1931 by Henry Adams in his autobiographical book *The Education of Henry Adams*.⁵ It saps their energy and motivation and, as a result, they fear they can easily become a no one, an anyone rather than a someone.

The humanist Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1469?-1536), commonly known as Erasmus of Rotterdam, once referred to an old legend attributed to the Roman author Gaius Plinius Secundus (AD 23/24-79) otherwise known as Pliny the Elder. It refers to baby bears who are born as formless clumps that are licked into shape by their mothers. This is exactly what many adolescents fear, of being licked into shape by external forces.

In order to overcome this quandary, a certain freedom of expression is vital in these formative years. I firmly believe that a well-educated youth is one who can express him or herself in a variety of ways. If he can make good sounds he is a good speaker, a good musician; if she can make good images she is a good painter or sculptor; if he can make good movements, he is a good dancer or craftsman. All faculties of logic, memory, intellect are integrated parts of such artistic processes. When the inner comes to a visible individualized expression then a young person will have no need to feel he has been licked into shape by outer forces and will therefore have an authentic sense of the self due to the fact that an otherwise hidden inner world reveals itself and is presented to the world for all to see or hear. A unique personality starts to come to light (person= 'mask'; personality= 'that which shines through the mask i.e the physical).

In a time of robotics and artificial intelligence it makes sense to carefully consider ways in treasuring the skills and attributes that make us human. In the modern world we are witnessing a self-amputation of the human body. This is by no means new, it has always been the case when it comes to technological innovation. Just as the invention of the wheel was an extension of the foot and the telephone of the voice, today the latest devices can be seen as an extension of the central nervous system. In other words we carry our brain in our hand, outside our skull. Everything is effortlessly and immediately available at hand by tapping on a device wherever one is, whenever one needs it. We need to ask -is it necessary to develop memory in the classroom and if so, how? Alzheimers is the fastest growing illness in the world. According

to the statistics the number of registered advanced cases has passed fifty million worldwide and it is estimated that in twenty-five years time the figure will have tripled. These mental disorders were, until recently, seen as serious ailments confined to old age in which people lose not only their memory but also their identity. Another worrying trend is that a growing number of young people suffer from amnesia. The numbers vary widely from country to country. At the same time more and more people attempt to hide in a crevice in the past, in order to escape from the social acceleration into the future. We call it nostalgia, (Greek='love of the home'). One hundred years ago this was also seen as a mental disease. This is also a mental health issue to be addressed in education for in my study groups with upper school pupils many dream of returning to their childhoods which are unrecoverable.

The absence of a method to maintain an 'inner-outer balance' in order to build mental stability, is seen in many phenomenon, not least in higher education. In August last year students in the U.K. received the results of their GCE 'A level' examinations which are comparable to our matura. In addition to the compulsory subjects there is a choice between about nineteen optional subjects. Traditionally the favoured optional subjects have been History and English Literature (about the past). In 2024 the favoured choice was Psychology. Of 825,000 eighteen-year-old examinees 78,556 chose Psychology (approx. 10%). Of these 25,000 were later accepted to study the subject at university. No health system can absorb so many psychologists into the health system each year. In 2025 the trend continued. 89,106 chose Psychology, 31,000 had an offer to study the subject at university (a rise of approx, 10% on 2024). In 2026 it is predicted that the figure will again rise, at an estimated 18-19% increase.

The figures are symptomatic of inadequate measures to build resilience teaching children. The choice of university studies in Psychology is not a question of a mere choice concerning financial and future prospects in a career, something the students openly admit in their university interviews.

Causes

When addressing problems of mental health in teenagers it is often too easy to place the blame on social factors, on the problems in the home and on upbringing. Intriguing and sometimes baffling research in the last decades has shown how some people are able to adapt to their negative personal situations and in so doing build pseudo-resilience. Alfred Adler's Theory of Compensation from 1930 showed that abnormalities such as illness, poverty, the absence of cultural activities and so on can serve as a springhead for greater motivation and higher achievement. The idea is also rooted in Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Will to Power'. 6

Nancy Andreason's research of four hundred eminent personalities from the twentieth century showed that 85% came from troubled homes particularly novelists (89%) and poets (83%). Kay Jamison's research from 1990 on the lives of famous British writers, artists and scientists showed that 23.4% suffered from periods of depression and 38.3% had been treated for long-term illness. As the research reflected in a positive way the lives of writers and their lively

imaginations the role literature in education caught the attention. 7

Reading as the Mirror of Life in Search of Meaning.

Both the fore-mentioned G. Stanley Hall and Umberto Galimberti embrace the significance of the reading of classical literature in the adolescent years. The widespread concern for the fall in levels of literacy in our children is well-known- statistics, for example in the U.K. show that in the decade 2014-2024 the number of secondary school pupils that read one book a year fell from 38.1% to 18.7%. The reading of classical literature in schools throughout Europe has largely disappeared from the curriculum. Any seventeen-year-old who reads Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' meets human nature in a range of different characters who display a variety of emotions. Adolescence is a period of turbulent emotions predominately fear, hope and humiliation. These emotions have in common that they are linked to the question of confidence. Fear is the absence of confidence. If a pupil who is born with a love of learning becomes fearful he becomes apprehensive and as a result his or her future becomes precarious. This is one cause of depression in our youth. One could argue that education has in itself become a fearful enterprise, not only are pupils under pressure to succeed but also their teachers live in the fear that they do not live up to the expectations of parents and the authorities. Parents also live in fear that they will not live up to what is expected of them. Humiliation is battered confidence and hope is not optimism as such but a feeling that a young person is in a process of becoming. As Ernst Bloch wrote in his treatise on hope "Hope is when a pupil throws him/herself into a state of becoming, giving oneself over to the future." 8 Hope is the expression of confidence as Paolo Freire writes in his 'The Pedagogy of Hope' and is seen in Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'The Ministry of Fear.' 9

Reading and digesting such literary masterpieces sixteen to eighteen-year-olds are drawn into the narrative and are able to identify themselves with the situations of the main characters because for the first time in their lives they are able to step into the shoes of the other.

In teaching English, for example, the contribution of William Shakespeare is part of the curriculum but not just as general knowledge but as a source of meaning in the lives of the pupils. For example, Hamlet's destiny is very much connected to the situation in which adolescents find themselves today, namely the inter-relationship between past and future as described earlier. Hamlet's statement that "the time is out of joint" inspires the prince to attempt to address his personal dilemma. He suffers from indecision and a weak sense of judgement and as a result is capable of swift actions when outer motives compel him to act. As the Prince of Denmark he is subject to outer social pressures, conventions and expectancies that have their origins in the past. He is heir to the throne which is not of his own choice but has been bestowed on him as an inheritance. He is expected to think and act in a certain manner and to submit to a conformity in the Danish court based on tradition. In this way past society exerts intolerable pressure on him. He represents a society governed by the dead. As a result the most famous scene of the play is when Hamlet meets the ghost of his father on the ramparts of Elsinore castle. He has no future as his life is presided over by the past. Hamlet was published in 1603 and Don Quixote by Cervantes two years later in 1605 in a period marked a transition from an oral culture of storytelling to the written word of the book. Don Quixote's world is very different from that of Hamlet. He lives in a small village on the Plain of La Mancha. He has no duties to perform and there are no expectations as to how he should live

his life. No one is there to observe, to advise or influence him. He has few friends except a priest and a barber -the opposite of Hamlet who is surrounded by his court. Quixote is not a man of action, he is an idle dreamer surrounded by a social void. As a result he is free to create his own life. He reads tales of chivalry and dreams of becoming a person of note. Hamlet seeks freedom from society whereas Quixote seeks society for his freedom. Hamlet shuns the people around him whereas Quixote reaches out to people who could help him to find himself. Both Hamlet and Quixote are tortured souls and epitomize the situation of many young people in our own time.

A further example is the use of biographies common in Waldorf education. Here we see a connection to my earlier comments about pseudo-resilience and the theory of compensation. Again in teaching English for fourteen-year-olds, Charles Dickens is a central figure in connection with History and the Industrial Revolution. Again he introduces us to a multitude of characters who represent the wealth of human nature. Dickens' experiences in growing up contributed to the themes and characters in his books. The pupils wonder: how did Dickens become Dickens, a world-famous author? He had a miserable childhood, poverty-stricken, hungry, traumatized by inhumane work in a blacking workshop, a father who was sent to a debtor's prison where the young boy lived for some time, followed by a dull period as a shorthand writer in the English courts. He tried several different occupations but found none of them were 'him'. But in 1836 aged twenty-four he bursts on the world stage and people become infatuated with his work the world over.

At the beginning of this lecture we became acquainted with Janus, the god of youth. We will conclude by meeting a goddess -Psyche -the goddess of the soul, a beautiful young woman with butterfly wings, a wedding gift from the highest of all gods Zeus. She has given her name to the science of the soul. Psychology. Psyche was immortal, blessed with eternal youth and perfect health. She never tired, needed little rest and was not subject to disease. Janus was the god of youth and of thresholds and openings, Psyche was the goddess of development and metamorphosis. With her beauty and butterfly wings she epitomizes stages of development as seen in four stages of development of the butterfly from a heavy, bound, caterpillar to a free and colourful, mature thing of beauty and freedom. All children and youths want to grow up -if this is not the case it is a very serious mental disorder known as Peter Pan syndrome. A pupil who stagnates in his or her development is a problem that needs to be addressed at once. Adolescents need to feel they are in a constant state of becoming, if not they easily become depressed. In teacher education this is, or should be a major issue: what is the line of development, of growth throughout the period of adolescence?

On December 27th, 1902 the character of 'Peter Pan' was first made known to the general public at the same time as Stanley Hall made his breakthrough and when the period between childhood and adulthood became widely acknowledged. Peter Pan was "the boy who never grew up." The theme, of eternal youth, was an immediate success for its author J.M. Barrie. Peter Pan tells us that "I ran away the day I was born, because I heard mother and father talking of what I was to be when I became a man. I want always to be a little boy and have fun, so I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long time playing amongst the fairies," (where he grew wings). As a result Peter Pan found himself in a state of suspension, he was cryogeni-

cally frozen in childhood and although he still had his first teeth he had the manner of an adolescent. There is nothing that Peter Pan feared more than becoming an adult. Peter befriends Wendy Darling who has a distaste of childhood due to negative experiences with her angry father. At first she also chooses to avoid growing up but then reverts to a normal life. The use of the name 'Pan' was no coincidence. 'Pan' in Ancient Greek mythology is the half-goat god of nature who was abandoned as a child and became the guardian of music, play and dance.

In conclusion we can summarize this contribution to an important theme by asking what is the overall task in educating the adolescents in a challenging time?. To my mind we need to educate life artistry. In today's world we are all life artists because in contrast to earlier times we are expected to give our lives meaning and purpose by using our own attributes and capabilities. My use of the word 'artist' is appropriate in this context because an artist has the capacity and will to shape something which otherwise would be formless, haphazard, chaotic and without colour.

But the quest of this grail lies first and foremost in the hands of schools and their teachers.

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