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## Self-Worth and Meaning-Oriented Education

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### Introduction

ARE WE NOT PROMISING TOO MUCH when we speak of a meaning- and existence-oriented education? Indeed, perhaps we are: there is no education that guarantees children will grow up to become adults who possess a strong sense of self-worth and lead a meaningful and, therefore, existential life. But in trying to find possible paths through the thicket of education, existential education is on a good course.

Existential education demonstrates a theoretically founded praxis knowledge that aims to be precisely this: a self-worth and meaning-oriented education. In a time of depersonalization and massification through various media worlds and in a time of value diversity and devaluation, an acceleration of lifeworlds, globalization, and social change, it is especially challenging to assert oneself as an independent person.

### Existential Philosophy and Existential Analysis

The theoretical substantiation of my observations is based on existential analysis and logotherapy, the so-called third Viennese school of psychotherapy. What do we mean by existential analysis? Existential analysis is one of the most important schools of psychotherapeutic thought of the twentieth century. It is based on existential philosophy and phenomenology. Viktor Frankl initially

1. Quotations from German sources for which there is no English translation have been translated by the author in notes found throughout this chapter.

developed it between 1926 and 1933 as a complement to psychoanalysis and individual psychology. Later it became its antithesis. His theory, existential analysis, and logotherapy are not geared toward an analysis of existence but an analysis *for* existence. Existential analysis aims to show to the individual human being personal freedom and responsibility. It wants to enable the person to live free and responsible in accordance with personal values. Logotherapy has become a therapy that is focused on meaning.

Viktor Frankl (1905–97) was a Viennese psychiatrist and psychotherapist. At first, he intensively dealt with Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. After a committed exploration, it became apparent to him that Freud and Adler neglected one important question: namely, what moves a person in his or her innermost; one may also say: the question of the meaning of life. Frankl criticized this reductionism of psychotherapy during that time. Initially, he only wanted to add these topics to the existing schools of psychotherapeutic thought. Yet, from these reflections, the third Viennese school of psychotherapy eventually grew. Frankl was also a philosopher and was, therefore, involved with one of the most important schools of philosophical thought of the twentieth century, namely existential philosophy. The philosophers Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, as well as Edmund Husserl influenced him. The central question for him was: what helps a person to come to a meaningful existence?

But first of all the following question must be answered: what does existence mean? Existence means to create something valuable out of the present conditions and to mould oneself as a person within these conditions. “Existence, in the framework of existential analysis, means a meaningful life, formed freely and responsibly; a life that the person experiences as his own and in which he understands himself to be a cooperator.”<sup>2</sup> To attain this, we need a twofold dealing-with: an inner dealing with oneself and an outer dealing with the world.

To put it simply: the person who more and more reaches him- or herself and is in a meaningful exchange with the world leads an existential life. This, indeed, is the aim of existential education: to become more and more like yourself within and through the world. This is valid for children but also for educators. Existential education is oriented toward the child developing an appraisal and a feeling for him- or herself as well as for others. Therefore, the main concern is not to prescribe a path of life for children but to help them find their path and accompany them on this path.

2. Längle, *Lehrbuch der Existenzanalyse*, 99.

Frankl's existential analysis focuses on the spirituality of the human being. Frankl has taken over this term from Max Scheler.<sup>3</sup> With his theory he, above all, wants to counterbalance the "spiritual" deficit in psychotherapeutic treatment.<sup>4</sup> He wants to go beyond a perspective of humanity that is purely based on natural sciences since such a perspective can—according to his viewpoint—never do justice to the whole person. Thus, Frankl understands existential analysis as a process in which the person becomes aware of his or her spirituality and in particular of his or her freedom and responsibility. The aim is to live as free and responsible as possible.

### The Implications for Education

Existential education focuses on the spirituality of the child; it neither sees the person as a result of psychological or inner-psychological processes nor as a result of an environmental influence, but as a being that can take charge of oneself and mould oneself. Existential education wants to enable children to "freely become themselves."<sup>5</sup>

Existential analysis also focuses on the persons that are involved in the educational process, namely the child and the educators. This pedagogy lays claim to existentialism because it also aims to contribute to a successful and fulfilled, i.e., an existential life. Another aim is implied, namely the aim to strengthen children in their self-worth. This implies that the educators also deal with their own existential questions. Yet, the main concern is dealing with one's own questions of value. Through this process, educators become clearer about their educational attitudes and actions and, therefore, about their authenticity.

Existential education is a pedagogy that takes young people seriously; it promotes dialogue, relationships, and encounters, and develops the person in the sense of unfolding him or her. This education primarily attends to the potential of the children and not to functionality. The person is to live as him/herself—just as he/she deeply is—but even more than this: as he/she ought to live and is able to live. Fundamentally, existential analysis extricates itself from theory in a twofold manner as it demands personal responses from the two parties involved in the educational process: the person to be educated and the educators.<sup>6</sup>

3. Henckmann, "Geistige Person," 150.

4. Viktor Frankl, quoted in Längle, *Lehrbuch der Existenzanalyse*, 5.

5. Jaspers, *Origin and Goal*, 88–96.

6. Waibel, *Erziehung zum Sinn*, 161.

### The Spirituality of the Persons Involved in Relation to Each Other

At least two people are involved in education, the educator and the child. Every pedagogical action has effects and side effects on the other person. This implies that not only the educator influences the child in a very specific way but also that every child has an effect on the educators. Thus, education takes place in a multilayered reciprocity between educators and the individuals to be educated. It develops through the persons involved and reacts back toward them. A further consequence of spirituality is this: nobody is able to control another person's way of thinking or acting.<sup>7</sup>

### The Self-Formation of a Person

Therefore, any change a person may undergo is not possible without his or her cooperation. Besides a possible stimulation from the outside, a person's self-formation most certainly requires an inner cooperation. Whether education sparks the forces of self-formation in children cannot be clearly determined. We can try to work toward this. The more the forces of self-formation are mobilized in children, the greater effect education will have. To this end, it is necessary to include the child's will to decide for him- or herself. Yet, one way or another, the person cooperates in moulding himself. Even when a person drifts along and does not participate inwardly with ongoing events, this is nonetheless a form of self-formation, albeit a passive form. The more actively someone forms his or her own life, the more this person is able to unfold his or her real person. Existential education, which aims to attain a fulfilled life, has always required the consistent integration of the child and the strengthening of the child's will.<sup>8</sup>

### The Lack of Predictability and Feasibility of Education

Life, our entire Dasein, is—when viewed existentially—not feasible and not plannable, and therefore, it is not predictable. The same is also true for education. Education is only an offer. How children and adolescents receive this offer is beyond our capabilities. In the end, it is always uncertain how children and adolescents will respond, whether the answers will be active or passive, conscious or unconscious. At first glance, we wish, for the most

7. Ibid., 160f.

8. Ibid., 162f.

part, that a person would implement the things we deem important for him or her. Yet, what would the consequences be? Thus, at a second glance, we see that the entire responsibility for the life of this person would have been transferred over to us. Power as great as this could corrupt us. And what would happen if we, aware of it or not, used this power? Fortunately, the spirituality of humankind is the decisive counterweight for such possible encroachments. Education is not feasible or plannable since we cannot control the spirituality of another human being.<sup>9</sup>

Parents enable the Dasein of the child. Yet, they cannot compel the child to be as he/she is. The child must accomplish this being as he/she is. Yet, how a person deals with an impulse or stimulation is unpredictable. The addressed children or adolescents determine what they accept, seize, or discard. And it is good that this should be the case. Plannability and predictability in education would otherwise mean that young people function like robots upon being given a command and react without having a will of their own. They would be at the mercy of the educators and unable to develop themselves. They would be rubbed out by the conflicting demands from the outside. There would be no instance that allowed them to see themselves. Thus, they could not develop into independent persons. An educator who takes the spirituality of a child seriously cannot combine education with making, manipulating, and creating a person according to one's own images and ideas but must pledge allegiance to the idea of "paring the person" from obscuring and possibly hindering their unfolding. Thus, the dilemma of education often lies in the discrepancy between intention and effect. Education—from this viewpoint—does not always go according to plan. It is an open, unplannable, and complex phenomenon. It not only produces effects but also side effects. On account of all these reasons, education always includes a risk and requires courage and patient endurance.

### Education Is More than Knowledge Acquisition

When we seriously consider the singularity and uniqueness<sup>10</sup> of the child, and when we realize that no child or educational situation is like another, it becomes apparent that formulas will not help us here. First and foremost, we would not be doing justice to the person of the child and also not to ourselves. Our actions would be apersonal instead of personal. Yet, these questions also reveal that although there are some guidelines in existential education the main concern is to align oneself according to the concrete child person and

9. Ibid., 164ff.

10. Frankl, *Der Mensch auf der Suche*, 99.

its situation. From this viewpoint, education and in particular existential education is always a renewed creative and existential action. It includes a clear admission and agreement to subjectivity. Education can never be objective. The more “objective” it is, the less it aligns itself according to the respective person. Education—just like life itself—again and again proves to be like a sphinx.<sup>11</sup> Both are not truly palpable; they constantly change and, thereby, divest themselves of being accessed by humans. No educational methods are always valid, and no means and aims are valid for all children and in all situations. On account of this, it also becomes clear that existential education is not a dogmatic or enclosed system. It is open to new insights and has a fundamental attitude that is continuously developing.<sup>12</sup>

### Educators are not Perfect

As educators, we do not have to be perfect. People who tend toward perfectionism often suffer on account of excessive and unrealistic demands toward themselves. The problem is: others suffer with them. Perfectionists not only put themselves under great pressure but also transfer this pressure onto others. They are frequently impatient with those who refuse to function like clockwork and question them. They are impatient and unforgiving with those who make mistakes or fail at something. For people who desire to act perfectly, a smooth process and superb workmanship are always the top priority. The other human being as a person is only secondary. Thus, perfectionism creates personal expectations and demands on the environment and is harmful within education. We could state the following: The more we want to be perfect, the more we distance ourselves from other persons and from ourselves. We do not have to be the best parents or educators. It is sufficient if we engage the child’s person and potential. Educators must not and should not be perfect, but they must be truly present. Above all, educators are allowed to be and should be human.<sup>13</sup>

### Education Is an Unfolding Development (German: Ent-wicklung)

There is a close reciprocity between development and education. Education should be a pacemaker for the development of the person. It is the aim of

11. Bollnow, *Existenzphilosophie*, 12.

12. Waibel, *Erziehung zum Sinn*, 167ff.

13. *Ibid.*, 171ff.

existential education for the increasingly emerging person to grasp himself more and more and, thereby, to cooperate in moulding his or her life. At times, educators must accompany, encourage, or confront. Sometimes they are needed to provide an incentive for overcoming fear, to give feedback, to clarify a choice, to challenge a choice, to provide an impulse by challenging someone to attempt individual activities.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, in summary, it is necessary on the basis of the spirituality of the child to mobilize the forces of self-formation within the child and to support it in leading a life with consent, agreement, and respect for himself, i.e. an existential life. Therefore, education always means—as Romano Guardini expresses it—“to encourage this person to be himself. So that his task may be shown to him, his path revealed, not mine.”<sup>15</sup> Karl Jaspers sees it as the following: “Nurturing as an aid to becoming fully human and education as the fruit of nurturing are carried out by taking the whole person seriously.”<sup>16</sup>

### The Human Image in Existential Education

The term “person” first appears with Seneca.<sup>17</sup> Yet, only Christianity shifts the importance of the individual toward the center of reflection since, according to this point of view, every person “was not only wanted and created by God for his own sake but also freed and redeemed through Christ for his own sake.”<sup>18</sup> In pedagogics, the school of thought that orients itself along the lines of the person is initially found with Friedrich Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century and then more prominently in the pedagogical personalism of the twentieth century.

The person, the spirituality within human beings, also forms the hub for existential education. It is the active and visible expression of the spirit. Personhood can be described as what constitutes the person in his or her innermost. It is the human being’s existential core and what makes up the person in his or her singularity and uniqueness. This essence of the human being is invisible and expresses itself indirectly through the body, the psyche, and the spirit. For the most part, it divests itself of any access through rationality. Personhood can also be seen as what is unconditional in a human being, what does not stem from outward conditions. Therefore, it transcends every role. It

14. Ibid., 173.

15. Quoted in Krieg, “Romano Guardini’s Theology,” 457–74.

16. Jaspers, *Origin and Goal*, 88–96.

17. Böhm, *Geschichte der Pädagogik*, 31.

18. Ibid., 33.

is difficult to fathom, and, when possible, it is understood via encounter and comprehension. Yet, a residual mystery always remains.

Thus, the methods of natural science only provide a limited access to personhood. From the viewpoint of existential analysis, personhood cannot be grasped but can nevertheless be understood. In existential analysis we define personhood as that which can choose, confront, distance, and deal with something. Personhood can therefore also be understood as that which is “free in a human being.”<sup>19</sup> As the source of freedom on a deep and final level, personhood is responsible to itself. It deals with the world, with hereditary factors and with its own fate. It establishes a relationship with that group of parameters. What does it do with it? What does it make of it? How does it do it? It not only cooperates in being moulded by education but also moulds the environment. The changing of a person originates from it and leads back to it. Therefore, personhood also incorporates the alterable in and through the human being. Each person can be seen as his or her own possibility. In these possibilities also lies his or her potential. That potential describes what the person is capable of, a potential for both good and bad. It lies idle within as something the person is spiritually unaware of, until it is brought to life.

Personhood, therefore, is that which is able to deal with the world and with itself and that which brings it into relationship and enables encounters. Alfried Längle widens Frankl’s understanding of personhood by his work on dialogical ability.<sup>20</sup> In existential education it is necessary to feel and understand the other person, to be in a relationship and in an exchange with him or her. What does the child need? What is necessary for his/her development? But also, which chords does the child strike in me? Which wounds of my own educational biography are affected? When do I react out of a sense of injury or prior deficiency?

### *In Summary*

- Personhood is that which is free in a human being.
- Within the person, there is an inner counterpart.
- Personhood cannot be grasped but may always change.
- Personhood can behave in one way or another.
- The person is given over to himself through his/her capacity for choice.

19. Frankl, *Der leidende Mensch*, 173f.

20. Längle, *Lehrbuch der Existenzanalyse*, 31.



### The Fundamental Motivations from a Pedagogical Perspective<sup>21</sup>

In the fundamental motivations developed by Alfried Längle,<sup>22</sup> all essential themes of humankind and, thereby, of existential education are illustrated. These are:

- The world—its conditions and possibilities.
- One's own life—one's own nature with its "experienced vitality."
- Being one's own person—being oneself, realness, and distinctiveness.
- The future and its prompting for active participation.

The four fundamental motivations—to put it simply—deal with one's own being, one's own values, one's own person, and one's own meaning. As stated earlier, they therefore revolve around life's central and vital questions. They illustrate the essential focal points along which people move. They can also be understood as existential queries to humankind, namely as life questions we encounter repeatedly if we have the mind to pay attention to them. They can also be interpreted as developmental steps for human beings. They are, furthermore, the structure of the person. They can likewise be seen as a foundation for human existence, and "based on these observations, personal maturity and psychological health appear to be contingent on how well the fundamental motivations can be lived out in relation to oneself and in reciprocal relation to the world."<sup>23</sup> If the fundamental motivations are fulfilled, the human being will experience meaning in his or her life. If these conditions are not fulfilled, emptiness, loss of orientation, existential vacuum, despair, and addiction may ensue. In the following section, the pedagogical aspects of the four fundamental motivations will be described.

### The First Fundamental Motivation

The first fundamental motivation deals with Dasein, with one's own being in the world. It deals with the question of how a person copes with his or her own life. Existential education is geared toward offering *support*, *space*, and *protection* to children.<sup>24</sup>

21. Längle and Holzhey-Kunz, *Existenzanalyse und Daseinsanalyse*, 29.

22. Längle, "Was bewegt den Menschen? Die existenzielle Motivation des Menschen"; Längle, "Was bewegt den Menschen? Die existenzielle Motivation der Person"; Längle, "Die Grundmotivationen."

23. Längle and Holzhey-Kunz, *Existenzanalyse und Daseinsanalyse*, 29ff.

24. *Ibid.*, 37.

A person experiences *protection* when he or she feels accepted. This is true for every phase of life, from youth to old age. For children it is especially important to feel accepted by their most prominent attachment figures. Up to a certain degree, one can make up for a deficiency in unconditional acceptance later in life. In this regard, the aspect of self-acceptance, which identifies a mature person, becomes increasingly important.

Children need sufficient *space* on a multitude of levels. Space is needed for one to be allowed to move physically, psychologically, and mentally. To be allowed to think and act freely is just as much a part of it as having sufficient space for one's own development; space is needed for one's own ideas and thoughts but also for the world as a living environment. Space also means not to be constantly "occupied" by educators. But for educators to take space means to stand up for their own values and convictions. Children should also have the possibility to appropriate as much of the real "world" as possible in order to "grasp" it.

Where it is necessary, children experience *support* through the assistance of others. For the most part, this happens through a regular daily schedule, clear rules and values, a dependable attitude of the educators, educators who are at rest with themselves, educators who know what is important to them and who are not needy themselves, and quite frequently also through siblings. Opposition may also be supportive. It leads to an experience of firmness and stability. Support may also be found in oneself—and this is already true for children: one may experience support through one's own body; e.g., by depending on the ability to control the body, having sufficient strength and endurance for a venture but also having acquired a specific knowledge (athletic, musical, life-practical, intellectual, craft-related). Yet, ultimately, it depends on being reconciled to all of one's strengths and weaknesses, to one's biography and possibilities. In doing so, the person accepts the conditions to which he or she is exposed.

If the conditions for the first fundamental motivation are fulfilled, experiences of *trust* take place. Out of these experiences *basic trust* or *fundamental trust* develop—as we say in existential analysis. It is based upon a deep feeling of being held in the world. In this state, the adult or the child feels safe. Fundamental trust is not given once and for all but is constantly reformed through later experiences.<sup>25</sup>

In summary, the first fundamental motivation focuses on:

- *Protection* through being accepted.
- *Space* through places where we can dwell, where we have room for actual development, where we have distance and maneuvering room.

25. Längle, "Die Grundmotivationen," 5f.

- *Support* through everything that has solidity, rests in itself and provides resistance.

### The Second Fundamental Motivation

The second fundamental motivation revolves around the question of whether there is sufficient value in one's life and whether life is, therefore, viewed as valuable. In order to develop such an attitude children require *relationship, time, and closeness*.<sup>26</sup>

In the same way a bridge connects two shorelines, *relationship* forms a bridge and creates connectedness from one person to another. People draw strength for their lives from relationships. What measures can be taken in education to catch up on deficiencies in these experiences? Educators, who turn toward it deliberately, listen to it, are interested in its life, and try to understand it, fulfill this fundamental motivation. This means:

- Attending occurs within the framework of relationship.
- Relationship means to feel something that connects, something communal.
- Relationship enables access to other humans and objects.

Without the gift of *time*, a relationship is hardly conceivable. Only when we take time and give our time to another person is there room for feelings and their reverberations. "Time is the space for relationships."<sup>27</sup> This is especially true for the time in which educators fully turn toward the children, in which they are fully present to them.

- Having time means "turning toward someone."
- Turning toward someone means abiding.

Turning toward someone can be deepened by *closeness*. Through closeness we experience the other person, but also ourselves, more intensively. Thus, we become effortlessly aware of personal values (i.e., of what is important in our life). In all experiences of this kind there is an accompanying reverberation of the value of life. We feel finally and deeply touched by life and experience the so-called fundamental value.

Turning toward someone and being in relationships makes us come alive. Through such experiences, children view life as valuable. "The

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 6.

experience of life includes information about the value of life . . . and represents the background for what the person feels to be valuable.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, this experience forms the foundation for one’s own feeling of value, for the ability of a person to be aware of value in the world. We orient ourselves according to this fundamental value; it includes an assessment of the value of life as well as previous value experiences and culminates in the following questions: Is it a good thing that I exist? Is life essentially good?

### The Third Fundamental Motivation

Every person wants to unfold and develop, wants to become fully him- or herself. In the third fundamental motivation the child asks the question whether he/she is allowed to be as he/she is. There are three preconditions for this: *justification*, *recognition*, and *appreciation*.<sup>29</sup>

*Justification*—doing justice to oneself—includes an inner agreement of the person, allowing him/herself to be as he/she is. Only the person can decide whether something is good or right for him or for her, thus, the person becomes the final instance for his or her actions. It is very important to convey to children that they are allowed to be as they are, that they do not have to align themselves according to the wishes and ideas of the educators and may implement what is personally important to them. When educators discover abilities within the child of which the child has yet to become aware, it is especially challenging. A “just” treatment of the child, therefore, means that the child’s own must be seen and conceded to the child. The human being who is aware that he/she means something to others by being as he/she is and with his/her values comes “alive.” He or she develops a feeling for him/herself and for his/her essence. This is the foundation for authenticity.<sup>30</sup>

Through *recognition*, a person and his or her values can be observed. When the child is recognized in his/her distinctiveness and uniqueness, he/she is noticed for his/her otherness. To be noticed in such a way helps “in finding one’s own and delineating it from the other.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, it can never be about a conformity-oriented education. To like children only when they “behave,” when they comply with the norms of society or the norms of the parents, indicates that we do not accept the child as a person. Through such conditional love, the child learns conformity instead of courage for independence.<sup>32</sup> Also,

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 7.

31. Ibid.

32. Längle, “Was bewegt den Menschen? Die existenzielle Motivation der Person,” 28.

when we only attend to the child lovingly after it performs well in school, in music, in sports, it means that our acceptance is conditional. The same applies to parents who would much rather have had a boy instead of a girl or vice versa. Getting to know oneself, therefore, requires respectful recognition (German: *Be-Achtung*) from others; one's own recognition may attach itself to this recognition from others. This being-seen-by-others connects with self-experience to form the image of the self or the self-image.

Through recognition, the person receives *appreciation*. This takes place when we perceive the child as something special for its own sake. To have such an attitude toward the child especially promotes the ability to find him/herself. If these preconditions are fulfilled, the child feels that he/she is allowed to be him/herself. The third fundamental motivation forms the basis for self-worth. At the same time, personal encounters are enabled since encounters presuppose that we leave the other person as he or she is. What makes it now possible for a child to be as he/she is, to say what he/she thinks, to follow his/her own values? How can appreciation be expressed to the child? What does appreciation consist of? What does the child receive appreciation for? What can the child value him/herself for? In summary, self-worth can be defined as follows:

- Self-worth forms on the basis of justification, recognition, and appreciation.
- Self-worth is a personal position toward one's own person, which includes recognition of oneself; it integrates ability and feeling.
- Self-worth is the sense of "being someone" and "letting oneself be seen."

### The Fourth Fundamental Motivation

Humans want to view their *sasein* within a larger context; in other words, they want meaning in their lives and are searching for their own connection to other people and to the world. Here also, three preconditions must be fulfilled, namely *structural context*, *field of activity*, and *future*.

*Structural contexts* such as family, school, circle of friends, clubs, nature, etc., link people to each other and illustrate the value an individual has for others. In existential education it is therefore important to let children experience a variety of structural contexts, communities, and nature. In doing so, they learn from each other and view themselves as part of something larger.

A *field of activity*, in which children complete a task and carry responsibility, also forms the foundation for an existential life. For children it can

be decidedly helpful to be confronted with tasks and carry responsibilities (e.g., for a pet, for class duties, for tasks within the family).

Duties that are particularly exciting to children are ones that do not involve helper tasks they dislike but esteemed tasks or even tasks that only they can perform in their unique way, like being in charge of the family's computers, providing a meal once a week, performing supervision tasks for younger siblings or grandparents, and so on.

In this way, children learn for their *future*. Yet, it is crucial that children can orient themselves according to what is important and valuable for them and according to activities in which they want to invest their own time. In this way, even children can already live with inner consent when they are permitted to carry out activities that seem worthwhile to them. In the fourth fundamental motivation, we realize our personal meaning. From the existential analytical viewpoint, meaning is the most valuable possibility in a given situation.

Existential meaning is something that is possible here and now (not tomorrow or under better circumstances) on the basis of the present facts, something that is possible for *oneself* (not for others or a theoretical possibility), and something that is needed right now or what is the most urgent, valuable, interesting object at the moment.<sup>33</sup>

### The Characteristics of Existential Education

Education is subjective and situational. It is good that this is the case, otherwise it would not orient itself according to the child. The wishes, ideas, and needs of the educators take a subordinate role in a child-oriented education. Education, therefore, is not "pulling" someone along but accompanying someone in a sensitive manner. Informed guides accompany someone on the path of life. Paul Moor expressed it as follows: "Education consists in taking our children along on our path to maturity."<sup>34</sup>

Here it is apparent, once again, that education is not a one-sided event. Education always means questioning oneself, reflecting on one's own actions as well as being open and ready for one's own continued development. In concrete terms, it is about training and expanding one's own perception of the child, of oneself, and of existential living situations. Educators are to let go of their own wishes and ideas and fully involve themselves with the child. They are not to orient themselves according to a superficial purpose but according to their own values and the values of the children.

33. Längle, "Was bewegt den Menschen? Die existenzielle Motivation des Menschen."

34. Rotatori et al., *Special Education International*, 257.

## Conclusion: The Aims of Existential Education

In summary, is the aim of an existential education to enable children to lead a fulfilled life. This means in particular:

- Children and adolescents are strengthened in their person, in their self-worth, and in their access to meaning.
- They are strengthened to lead a self-determined and fulfilled life, to give themselves over to themselves.
- They learn living by experiencing what is important in life.

## Reflection Questions

1. What are some of the real roadblocks to existential education that come to mind?
2. Imagine some of the likely consequences if you approach your teaching with an existential philosophy of education.
3. From your own experience as a student, think of one notable situation in which you were not able to lead a self-determined life.
4. Take time to record some notes on your understanding of the human condition. Do they reflect the arguments given by the author for the importance of existential education?
5. Think of some of the consequences that your philosophy has for how you educate children?

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