



My name is Christoph Schiebold, I work as a teacher at the international Montessori School in Brussels. I am executing this profession since 16 years.

1 I have been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 1999, since then I do live with this open and shut, helpless case. But helpless, I never accepted and changed my perspective upon this matter. I made it part of me, I incorporated it in my daily life, taking one step at a time.

To start to accept is the hardest. To start to live with the unknown, the unknown that you can't control, is nerve wrecking, ... It is all about those nerves. I was sad when I got the diagnosis, sad and lost. I was only 20 years old at that time. I did not know what this is all about. At the beginning, for still a while, I was able to walk as anyone else yet slowly it became more difficult and I felt that 'here, something is changing'.

After around 5 years after the diagnosis, I bought my first cane. It became helpful and a necessity. For some years, actually many years, That was me. Over time, I added braces to support my feet, so now I have a cane and braces on my feet. That also, became me.

At that time, my representations, pictures made by my students, were, me, two legs, no cane. After, it became, two legs and a cane.



Now I am drawn in my chair.

Since three years now, I decided to use a wheelchair, outside to commute and also in my classroom, because walking, even though I have a cane and braces, became harder and harder, so now, four wheels it is. And that became me.

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Now I have it all, Cane, braces and my ride, but I don't complain, yet I do admit, that it is hard by times.

I have secondary progressive Multiple Sclerosis, the process is slower, yet consistent, but that became good news.

I started to look at all the positive aspects that I found, understood and learnt throughout the years. I focused on all the things that I actually CAN DO and not on the one's that I CAN'T DO, and I realised that there are many!!

All this did not hinder me to have two fantastic children, a beautiful wife and a profession that I like.

Nevertheless, at the beginning, when I got the diagnosis, I did not know, in what way I will be able to have a career at all and do what everyone else does. This was one of the unknowns and I was scared and lost. Where do I go and where will I end up?

That's quite heavy when you are 20 years old and you are ready to start your life, be ambitious and ready to conquer. You have the impression that something pressed the slow-motion button, everything loses a sense and your life changes. What now?



Time is what I needed, time is what I got and time is what I took and I always had promised to myself, that that additional 'cargo' will not take over my life, become the ruler of my existence.

It is my legs that do become gradually weaker. It is a life-long journey, with ups and downs, moments of profound self-questioning and despair. Answers, I do not have, but the will to continue and don't give up, I do. So I continued as normal as it can be.

It is the way one approaches the challenge. It is good to tell oneself, that this one does not take over the other one, no matter how hard it is.

It is the same approach in teaching! The difficult shall never take over and rule the strength! It is the focus on the strong side, the strength's that build confidence and self-esteem.

If one continuously only points out the weaknesses, motivation goes away. One needs to use the STRENGTH, which will then support and help to tackle the weakness.

You might think, yes, makes sense, but I am talking about one's personal weakness, because not all have the same strength nor the same weakness.

Time is an essential factor in that approach. I always give the example of you, the adult, taking an airplane.



You know at what time it will leave, so you leave the house at an appropriate time to do check in, if not done online, get through customs etc. Let's say you leave at 11.00 a.m. We know, that to be stress free, you need to be at the airport 2 hours earlier (domestic flight). If not being late because of other factors, that is ideal.

You take the time you need, to have all sorted and set, to have a smooth and pleasant, stress free flight (of course there are always unforeseen surprises, but even that you count in and are, some sort, prepared for).

So you take your time, no questions asked. Why do we not do that with our children? Why do we frame them all under the same parameters? We need to start to give the needed and relevant time to our children too!

They are dependent on us, for having and receiving the time they need to develop and learn, obtain the help and protection, to have a smooth and pleasant ride during their educational travels until they have reached the stage of development, where reasoning and understanding of one's own thinking will allow them to meet the expectations. Expectations they are confronted with during their life and learning.

Their journey needs to be prepared in many aspects within their development, emotionally and physically. Each child is different, each child develops differently.



Our aim should be to create self-confident and emotionally strong children, hence future responsible adults.

Therefore, a child needs to develop and unfold to her and his own pace, so the right amount of time needs to be given and provided.

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That brings you back again to the factor TIME.

Time leads to individualized education, time gives room for discovery. Discovery of oneself, the environment, hence the world, what brings them to the important facts and figures, also known as academics. It is these academics that often are the hurdle in a child's life. As mentioned before, every child is different and hence the approach needs ideally to be adapted to the child's developmental moment. For all, the main aim is to become an independent human being.

Teaching is all about reaching their personal perfection. Teachers can help to seek these opportunities to help them grow towards their personal perfection.

In its essence, every child is perfect. It is our responsibility to help the child to its utmost, to unfold this perfection, that is omnipresent within all of them.

Being confronted with this unfortunate health situation, has influenced my way of teaching. It has put many things in perspective. I did, as all the teachers are doing, take myself out of the equation. I do not need to be a part, that balances the



equation out. I need to be the part that helps the children to create and balance their own equation, gives them their solutions, what helps them further and will please them and gives them the good feeling of achievement and hence pure fulfilment. The role of the teacher is to guide the child in its endeavours and learning journey.

I would like to finish with an anecdote that as happened not so long ago. It was one of those 'rock-bottom' moments that can happen. It was a hot day and my legs weren't in the mood to adhere to my wants, getting up a step. I fell, all was good, and there I was, lying on the floor, being disappointed with my-self. At that moment, my son Tristan came around the corner, not commenting anything, handing me a key chain that lingers around our house, saying 'Keep Calm and Carry On'. This is how I live my life. There are so many wonderful and nice days to cherish, no need to give up.

And this is also how one needs to look at education. We should keep calm and carry on. Help our children to become creative decision makers, critical thinkers and most of all empathetic and caring global citizens. If we manage to help to do that, this world will stay a beautiful pearl within the universe, the perfection within the imperfection.

Thank you very much,

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Full speech video online / Copper Hall: https://ec.europa.eu/education/summit_en