

Education for Life

Our Way of Teaching and Learning at EGS

Herbert Eberhart



In autumn 1974, Paolo Knill worked as a guest professor with my students at the Zurich School of Social Work. I remember well how impressed I was by his way of doing it. Instead of speaking about the principles of using the arts in social contexts or teaching the students some special techniques for engaging in artistic work, he invited them to participate in concrete activi-

ties, leading the group process in such an animating and inspiring way that everybody in the room was not able to doubt the fact that we all have possibilities of expressing ourselves in any artistic form, whatever it might be.

Ten years later, in May 1984, Paolo and I founded with others EGIS, the

European Association of Interdisciplinary Studies, with its institute ISIS Switzerland, and again twelve years later EGS, the European Graduate School, with its first summer school program beginning in 1996.

Since the beginning of our collaboration, several decades have gone by, and we have developed together new educational programs and ways of doing therapy and coaching. In all of these professional activities, one can find a number of the same or at least similar principles that are predominant in our teaching as well.

Due to the limited space here, I will only name five:

1. We have learned to be at ease in a *not-knowing position*.
2. We dare to let ourselves *be guided by the evolving process*.
3. We structure this process in what we call a *work-oriented* way. That means in all our professional activities we try to be concrete instead of general, to be with the senses instead of abstractions.
4. We are curious and *attentive to surprises* and love them.
5. Our art making is based on playfulness, awareness, openness and on a *resource-oriented basic attitude*.

Looking at these five principles, it becomes clear that our teaching in the Arts, Health and Society Division at the European Graduate School differs greatly from that of a traditional European university. The most striking aspect for me is the changed relationship between professor and student. Instead of standing before a large group of students and reading a lecture, I am sitting in a circle with them asking and answering questions and searching together for whatever we are looking for. This demands presence, an honest openness, joy about

and eagerness for surprising discoveries. It may be a linguistic formulation that opens a door for new insights or a part of an artwork that fascinates or touches us in one way or the other and that takes us in a new direction.

The frequent use of art-making activities, often uniting teachers and students both as explorers and participants, adds to the sense of being together in the flow of a common learning process. In this way the learning and teaching processes at the Arts, Health and Society Division have the potential to help us get in contact with surprising aspects of our lives and our ways of thinking. Often the learning is so powerful and clear that it not only makes a difference from everything that most of us have experienced in other institutions of higher education but also produces a real change in all those who participate. The effects of what we do together can then lead students beyond the classroom to help others in creative ways. Our way of teaching and learning at EGS is truly an education for life.



Herbert Eberhart is a social worker and clinical psychologist, and Professor Emeritus at the Zurich School of Social Work. He works in private practice as a therapist and coach and teaches at several institutes of higher education. His special interest is to discover and activate the hidden resources in people.

