

REVIEW

EDUCATING FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE

Louisa Greathouse Amador*
Luz Anyela Morales Quintero**

Weil, Z. (2016). *The World Becomes What We Teach: Educating a Generation of Solutionaries*. Lantern Books: Brooklyn, N.Y.

How do we bring about change in a world that is in desperate need of resolution and help before it is relinquished to the fires of hell created by the human race? During these times of great global challenges it has become more and more evident that the problems of today cannot be solved by the same kind of thinking that was characteristic of the time when they were created. It seems that going “back to the drawing board” is the best and perhaps the only tangible, viable option we have. Thus, referring to the sentence “education is what remains after one has forgotten everything learned in school” Zoe Weil’s newest book addresses the issues revolving around what type of education is relevant for the complicated world we live in today, especially for children from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

So, what should we be teaching in these times when the stakes are high and our entire planet is at risk? How can we ensure that we are effectively educating our youth for living in a culture of peace and non-violence? What should today’s education look like and what should it include? In Zoe Weil’s (co-founder and president of the Institute for Humane Education) most recent book “*The World Becomes What We Teach*” she proposes a schooling system that endorses and creates an educational program that focuses on the creation of a more just, sustainable, healthy, unbiased, peaceful and humane world. In this challenging and thoughtful book, Weil draws from 30 years of experience as a humane educator, as well as from a review of the latest research carried out by experts in various fields and the fundamental stakeholders themselves, young people. Weil begins her new book by presenting an overview of the educational system at large in the United States of America (a common model found in schooling systems worldwide) and examines its many, serious shortcomings. Weil points out that while schooling programs today concentrate primarily on content knowledge of different subjects, they leave

aside the development of essential abilities for youth such as collaboration, self-management, effective communication and creative and critical thinking skills (only to mention a few). While acknowledging that content knowledge is still essential in our schools today, she draws attention to the importance of evaluating and reevaluating *what* content should be included in the educational programs.

The author carries out an analysis around the question of what should be included, changed, and reinvented in today’s primary and secondary education to ensure the ethical, planetary, technological, individual, and sustainable demands during this very complicated time when the world’s population has increased by leaps and bounds and natural resources are being exhausted with no end in sight in a very rapidly approaching future. In this book, Weil proposes that education be reimagined and designed so that a generation of what she has termed, *solutionaries*- young people equipped with the tools, knowledge, awareness and enthusiasm-, will be empowered to create a future that will promote what this world so desperately needs to survive in the most intelligent and humane way. This book describes the educational transformations that need to be undertaken to assure that a generation of *solutionaries* be educated.

Weil’s main concern in this book, and in all of her work, is for the world to be as just, peaceful and humane as possible for all of its inhabitants (human and non-human alike). Weil advocates adapting education to the needs of our times and not just for passing standardized tests that end up measuring proficiencies as is done today. Weil is convinced that the only way that this can happen is by bringing about a shift in the current educational paradigm. In order to achieving this objective schools need to adjust to the real world and focus on problem-solving as much as possible by taking into account the world’s needs and the different social contexts that live side by side on it.

Children need to be educated in a way that they commit and motivate themselves to solve problems, to identify with clarity the existing unjust, unsustainable, and inhumane

* Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), Instituto de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales “Alfonso Vález Pliego”. louisa33@mac.com.

** BUAP, Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales. luzanyela.morales@correo.buap.mx.

conducts, and accordingly, help to change them. To achieve this, teachers also need to be trained and prepared so as to ensure new ways of teaching that will best enable students to find substantial solutions to problems. Students need to learn to be truly critical and creative thinkers and come to differentiate facts from opinions, so ultimately they may find ways of solving the many problems they will be facing throughout life.

According to Weil, this change of paradigm is urgently needed since the world will face an even grimmer future in which rainforests, coral reefs and glaciers will continue to decline and half of all species may disappear. A world of growing inequity and access to necessary resources could very well create even more conflict than ever before.

Examining today's educational practices through Weil's lens, the reader is left with a feeling of urgency to bring about major changes to a system that clearly does not correspond to the needs of today. Putting in practice what has been carefully outlined in *The World Becomes What We Teach* would surely be an important step in helping to enlighten

educators and children to become respectful, creative, critical, responsible and active citizens of today's world.

Sometimes it takes courage, talent, and heart to say what everyone already knows, but dares not express. Weil clearly says it for us in this book and does it so brilliantly and sensitively while maintaining hope in our often seemingly hopeless world. Weil's considerate and unpretentious style makes for a smooth and palatable read. This inspirational and hopeful book provides us with tools to integrate humane education into the standard school curriculum and it offers ways of empowering educators to become even more effective and dynamic in their teaching. *The World Becomes What We Teach* is a declaration for the future of education, filled with very clear and well-designed guidelines for teaching children that a humane world is not only possible and urgently necessary, but it is also inevitable. This book serves as a guide to action and will help schooling become more meaningful, joyful, and *solutionary*. Zoe Weil asks the questions we need to thoughtfully answer, not only for our educational system, but also for our future on this planet.