

Human Capital – Commercial Value or Creative Potential?

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In the most recent political campaign, all of the parties were in agreement that Germany should prioritize education. Sounds good. But whoever followed the discussions could not avoid the fact that almost no one spoke about education. The topic was the economic situation in Germany. The current debate on education “is unusually blind for values” writes Hans-Peter Waldrich (“The Action for Human Schools”) in *Blättern für deutsche und internationale Politik* 9/09. Using a quotation from Paul Liessmann, he criticizes the practical, educational nihilism of the day. The science of running businesses has been elevated to the leading science. New liberal think tanks deliver the theoretical justification for unsuccessful political decisions in education. Consider, for example, the Bertelsmann-Stiftung. In a commission for the federal state government of North Rhine-Westphalia, the text states, “The abstract demands for idealistic individualism are not sufficiently replaced by the context of society.” Education must be oriented to “the given economic and social orders.” The new humanistic paradigm must be overcome in the tradition of Wilhelm von Humboldt.

In addition Waldrich emphasizes that the ideal of “bringing forth autonomous individuals” continues to live in the reform educational spectrum. Some Waldorf educators have distanced themselves from the reform education movement. I find that not true. One should not deny the historical ideas we have in common, but we should nourish them. *The time is ripe to stand together against the ventures that turn schools into factories for well-adjusted people who serve the vague prognosis of an economic career.* Rudolf Steiner warned: Never should the economic advantage become the decisive factor when we develop individual abilities. Keeping capital and politics from mixing in the affairs of education provides the optimal awareness for economic productivity and social progress. (Steiner)

“Human capital” is a two-sided concept. In the jargon of educational nihilism, it stands for the opposite purpose, namely to judge human beings according to their economical value. Or one can understand the concept “human capital” as Steiner does: the authentic, untarnished creative potential of our youth, protected from any manipulation or mechanization. Indeed they are our true human capital. The continual flow of new youth into society must be accomplished. “At any level there is no education other than self education.” And further, “As teachers and educators we are no more than the true environment for the self-educating child.” (Steiner) These maxims, taken by word could create a “grassroots revolution” against the trend to tie education to the economic system.

