

Transformations

Abstract:

Higher education as a mass phenomenon and some of its impact on early childhood and school education. How a more holistic picture of the human being could reshape the view of future education?

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Not long ago, higher education used to be reserved only to a very small percentage of society. Over the last twenty years, this has changed dramatically. Higher education became increasingly, at least in Europe, a mass phenomenon with a huge impact on our ideas about early childhood and school education.

In addition, the system of higher education underwent a breath-taking global process of standardization and formalisation based on quantitative measurement of outputs and the relation between inputs and outputs. The quantitative turn in education recommended and pushed forward by organisations like OECD is meant to overcome ideological and rather fruitless discussions in favour of an optimistic and pragmatic view bound to enhance the welfare of humanity in general. Although this development looks at first glance like a harmless, neutral stance towards education and seems keen to avoid any type of metaphysical and ideological frictions, it comes along with rather gross ideological assumptions about the human being and his role in life. For a deeper scrutiny, it proves actually laden with tacit materialistic assumptions and the worth of life and impacts strongly on political decisions about how education ought to be designed in order to be adequate for the best future of humanity. One of its underlying assumptions can be expressed in the equation: $\text{education} + x = \text{welfare} + x$. The more education a society provides the more welfare it will harvest, since welfare depends on technological progress and the development of new products and services, which in turn require skilled white and blue collar labourers with proper education. Education has in this view above all the role to prepare for the market.

The impact on early childhood and school education of this attitude that bolstered the rise of higher education is tremendous. Since higher education gives access to the labour market and the value of life is determined by the position someone achieves in it, school education becomes a mere preliminary exercise that prepares for the decisive step afterwards, that is, to higher education. In Germany these hidden assumptions are, for instance, palpable in the fact that early childhood teachers and educators are paid much less than schoolteachers and schoolteachers in turn less than lecturers in higher education. Their importance for the human and societal development seems to be less decisive. The valuation of education is also visible in

the fact that parents in Germany are obliged to pay for early childhood education but students are exempted from tuition fees.

I would like to discuss that the streamlining of education along the lines of so called prosperity, harmless and pragmatic though it seems, risks to undermine what it purports to attain: the welfare of the human being. It doesn't ask and investigate anymore what the human being requires in order to develop its whole potential but simply presupposes it. I will therefore attempt to outline some a different perspective.