

A patron for sceptics

An obituary of the educationalist Hermann Giesecke

by Michael Felten



Hermann Giesecke
(Photo ma)

I first met him a quarter of a century ago: the left-liberal educationalist was about to retire and was beginning to challenge the educational zeitgeist; I was a common grammar school teacher who had gained his first routine and now found time to marvel at the errors and effects of reformist educational thinking in regular schools.

Hermann Giesecke (1932-2021), best known for his standard work "Didaktik der Politischen Bildung" (Didactics of Political Education), had just caused a stir with his book "Wozu ist die Schule da?" (What is school there for?). In it, he castigated the overloading of schools with environmental, sexual and other educational tasks as an aberration of the times.

The principle of teaching was the serious and true task of school – for which parents had to prepare their children adequately. In the following volume, "Pädagogische Illusionen" (Pedagogical Illusions), Giesecke demonstrated – keyword "maternalisation of schools" – that the expansion of education after the Sputnik shock had its de facto price – namely the dismantling of the idea of education itself.

What impressed me most about Giesecke was that he was – by his own admission, thanks to his origins in modest family circumstances – immune to being taken in by reformist educational platitudes. School was by no means a prison for adolescents, but rather their liberation – namely from ignorance.

Even before 2000, his ideology-critical analysis of the anti-educational zeitgeist culminated in a fundamental scepticism about the then

widespread euphoria for openness and playfulness in the classroom: "almost everything that modern school pedagogy considers progressive puts children from educationally distant backgrounds at a disadvantage".

That was spot on then – and is still true today, by the way. And Giesecke continued to be an active retiree: as early as 2003,

he saw the risks of an impoverishment of the public school system as well as the expansion of private educational interests: "possibly [...] a 'pedagogical-industrial complex' could emerge, in which considerable resources and their distribution [...] are at stake." In terms of digitalisation, at any rate, this was an early strike home.

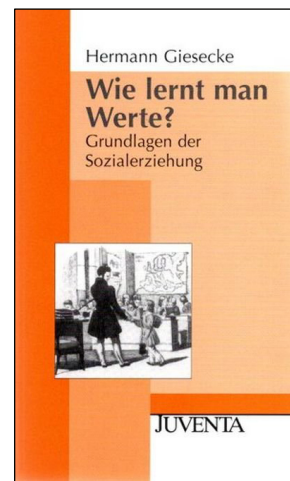
To this day, Giesecke has not been shy, indeed felt obliged, to put the golden calves of the pedagogical guild to the test. "Why I am against inclusive education. The destructive naivety of ideologically motivated school reforms" was the title of his 2015 critique of ill-conceived savings concepts. Most recently, he devoted himself to the conquest of the school system by key figures and evaluation: "Im Kompetenzen-Wahn" (2018) (In the Craze of Competences).

As of recently, Hermann Giesecke is no longer among us. All the more reason for us to separate the wheat from the chaff in the education debate and not to fall for pedagogical kitsch. Giesecke believed that one of the reasons why the problems in the education system are so profound is because there is a lack of reflecting, undaunted practitioners.

All texts by Hermann Giesecke can be found at www.hermann-giesecke.de.

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