

Digitalisation and individualisation

An unholy alliance that prevents education – 7 theses

by Prof. Dr Jochen Krautz*



Jochen Krautz.
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(CH-S) German scholar Jochen Krautz outlines the contradiction between digitalisation and education in succinct and apt theses.

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Even before the coronavirus crisis, there was a widespread trend in schools to tackle the problem of heterogeneity among pupils through so-called “individualisation”.

The classroom community is effectively dissolved, and each pupil is given differentiated work assignments that they are supposed to complete in a “self-directed” manner. A misguided approach.

Digitalisation, which has been accelerated by the coronavirus crisis, now seems to make this even easier: Now everyone can work “individually” and “self-directed” on their own device, whether at home or at school.

However, both undermine the role of schools and jeopardise the constitutional educational mandate. Why is this the case?

Here are 7 concise theses:

1. Strengthening the teacher instead of “learning assistance”

Heterogeneity is nothing new, it is a matter of course. It is not solved by breaking up learning groups and lowering standards, but by strengthening the class community and bringing weaker students up to higher levels. However, this requires a teacher who leads the class educationally and professionally. In other words, the exact opposite of the trend towards “learning assistance” (cf. Rudolph/Leinemann 2021).

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2. “Self-direction” is not independence

Those who only carry out work assignments from learning software or worksheets do not develop independence. Rather, they only control themselves according to external instructions. They learn to adapt, but not to think and reason independently. This requires a lively and interested human counterpart – i.e. teachers and classmates. Adaption, however, contradicts the educational mandate of the constitutions, which is aimed at maturity.

3. “Individualisation” does not result in individuality

Therefore, external “individualisation” does not create individuality, but promotes conformity. To become an individual self, young people need social contact, dialogue, contradiction and challenges to be overcome together. However, the formation of individuality is pedagogically challenging because teachers must face children and young people as whole persons, not just as administrators of learning processes.

4. Digitalisation is whole class teaching of the worst kind

Advocates of “digital” and “self-directed learning” like to distance themselves from “whole class teaching”. In fact, digital or analogue “self-directed learning” is whole class teaching in its worst form, the likes of which can hardly be found anywhere else. The worksheet and the algorithm do not answer me, do not discuss, do not perceive me, have no expertise, do not know what education is, know no didactics and have no pedagogical empathy. They rule over the heads of the pupils – or rather: enter them.

5. Digitalisation is based on lobbying

The supposedly “no alternative” digitalisation of schools has no pedagogical reasons, but rather banal economic ones. It is based on massive lobbying by the IT industry and its adepts. In the crisis surrounding coronavirus, politicians, the media, parents and many teachers have fuelled the staged hysteria. However, digitalisation will

not solve any educational problems; it will not automatically improve teaching. Rather, the meaningful integration of digitalisation into the school's tasks requires very precise and clear pedagogical, didactic and subject-specific thinking (cf. Krautz 2020).

6. Neoliberalism and reform pedagogy celebrate a marriage

But why is all this so popular and seems so modern? Two older lines of discourse are merging here:

Reformist pedagogical thinking stems from the opinion, or even just the subconscious feeling, that children should rather “develop freely”. Teaching is somehow contrary to freedom, the content and demands of our culture would have a negative impact on children’s “naturalness”. The idea that learners are “entrepreneurs of themselves” and would acquire the “skills” and “competences” they need as a flexible and adaptable workforce in “learning environments” that look like open-plan offices stems from neoliberal thinking.

Both ideas are factually incorrect and anti-educational. In fact, both leave young people in the lurch: on the one hand, they are left to their own devices, and on the other, to the adaptation imperatives of the neoliberal economy (cf. Krautz 2017).

7. Taking pedagogical responsibility seriously

What is the outlook? By taking pedagogical responsibility and by teaching, learning, educating and practising again. It’s exhausting, of course. But if we were to turn our collective attention to these questions again instead of experimenting

with unfounded concepts on children and young people, we could spare them and ourselves the foreseeable and bitter failure.

Source: <https://bildung-wissen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Krautz-Digitalisierung-und-Individualisierung.pdf>
(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

Literature for in-depth study

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