Abstract


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To this day, Georg Picht's diagnose of a major crisis of German education in 1964 (he stated a „deutsche Bildungskatastrophe“) is seen as a beacon for the subsequent massive reforms in the education sector. Using several statistics in his analysis he linked the state of emergency in education with the prediction of economic decline („Bildungsnotstand heißt wirtschaftlicher Notstand“). In the course of his argument the pupil's body subtly became a cipher of potential achievement and efficiency (der Abiturient als „Kapital“ und „geistige[s] Potential“). Just ten years earlier, this kind of linking educational items to economic categories seemed not only to be marginal but more or less banned far beyond the educational discourse. At that time, e.g. Hellmut Becker, a close friend of Pichts and since 1963 director of the newly founded Max Planck-Institute for Human Development in Berlin, which should bring forward the so called “empirische Bildungsforschung“ (empirical education research), had interpreted the perceived crisis of the school system as a result of a bureaucratic world („verwaltete Welt“) and had propagated the educational goal of the ‘free human’ („freier Mensch“) (1954).

So, what happened between 1954 and 1964? How can the hinted change in the politics of knowledge be explained and how was it linked with body images (individual and collective ones)? This talk explores those questions focusing historically on the formation of “empirische Bildungsforschung“ in Western Germany since 1945. Furthermore, it pursues to some extent the relation between “knowledge” and “body” as historiographical categories.

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