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Our request to education policy makers regarding the need to have choices available



Wir wollen erreichen, dass echte Wahlmöglichkeiten erhalten bleiben:

- Kindergartens, nurseries and primary schools must retain the right and have the freedom to work purely with analogue media. Screen-free institutions should not be neglected by having less financial support. The autonomy of kindergartens and schools must be strengthened by granting them the greatest possible local decision making power.
- Public resources should also be invested in high quality teacher training and the design of child-friendly teaching environments. Educators need to be competent users of IT so that they can offer support to families where digital media use has become a problem.
- It must remain possible for pupils and parents to choose a form of media education that accords with child development such as for example analogue methods like 'CS Unplugged' (a teaching programme where the significant elements of information science are taught without a computer). Basic elements of information science such as analytical thinking (chess) can also be taught before the age of 12. Thereafter work with the principal functionality of information technology can become more complex – those interested could for instance also be introduced to the language of programming.
- The subjects of hardware and software are only introduced in a comprehensive way in the upper school (media studies – design, use, analysis). This is because from a developmental point of view, pupils are then ready for the intellectual challenges of the technology. Digital tools are then best introduced within the context of an educational concept. The emphasis should always be on using the digital media in an active way, for example by editing videos, creating websites or writing online texts.
- Account should be taken of research showing the side effects of pulsating, polarised microwave radiation that is emitted from WiFi routers, smart phones and I-pads. Research into the health risks associated with electro-magnetic WiFi radiation (2450 MHz) is unambiguous. There is no excuse for installing WiFi in kindergartens and schools and exposing growing children to this avoidable harm. It must remain possible for schools to access the internet via cable connections.(4)

4 Vgl. Wilke, Isabel (2018): „Biologische und pathologische Wirkungen der Strahlung von 2,45 GHz auf Zellen, Fruchtbarkeit, Gehirn und Verhalten“, in: umwelt-medizin-gesellschaft 1/2018. Wilke analysiert mehr als 100 Studien, die die Gesundheits-schädlichkeit von WLAN nachweisen.

Why is this petition and a citizen's initiative to support human focused education necessary?

The 'Alliance for Humane Education' (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/>) and ELIANT (www.eliant.eu) has joined forces to launch this petition together with our educational ELIANT partners ECSWE and IASWECE in Brussels. Why are we all calling for a stop to a digitalisation programme which is currently being brought seemingly unhindered to kindergartens and schools?

It is vital that at the beginning of the digital age education focuses on human beings. This means in the first place making sure that primary school children learn the classical skills of our culture – reading, writing and arithmetic. These provide the foundation for all further learning including competences connected with digital media. For the sake of brain development it is important that reading and writing are taught using analogue techniques (paper, book, pen). Only in later classes should pupils work with a keyboard.

An age-appropriate humane education will in this way provide the later adult with the opportunity to make use of the free time that modern technology is creating. This new-won freedom must not be allowed to get lost in the increasingly dominant world of digital technology.

What is absolutely clear is that:

Whoever wishes to master an intelligent technology must first have developed his own intelligence if he is not to become dependent on that technology.

This approach reflects older European ideas of education in which the free, self-determined individual is placed at the centre. When and how does this individualisation process occur? A significant phase in the development of the brain begins around the age of twelve, one which is particularly important for emotional

maturity. The frontal lobe is the part of the brain responsible for forming judgements and exercising self-control. Its maturing process continues through adolescence. From about the age of sixteen the restructuring of the brain is so far advanced that the capacity for independent judgement is to a great extent available to that person. Independent thinking and the capacity to take responsibility for one's own actions has developed so far that independence can be tested out for oneself – also in the digital world where the negative consequences of an action may appear at a much later date. This is why law makers for example have set a minimum age for voting or driving a car. During this sensitive period when the brain is maturing it therefore makes sense, and is indeed necessary, to engage with digital media and information technology both theoretically and practically in a way that suits this age group.

Goal – being responsible with media

Taking responsibility for one's own actions in relation to the media is a clear expression of maturity – this applies to all forms of digital and analogue media. Paula Bleckmann describes the concept of media maturity: 'Media maturity means in the first place not losing control over the precious time we have for living. (pp14) ... We don't want to make our children accomplished slaves to the machine but bring them up as independently minded human beings who are able to determine for themselves the extent and type of media to use. (pp34) (5)

What stands in the way of this important route to individualisation? An image should make this clear – human beings are not able to train their muscles by riding motor cycles. Intelligent technologies are equally unable to train our thinking. After all, independent thinking does not develop in the context of intelligent software that functions according to pre-determined rules. These allow no space for original creative processes because – in terms of behaviourism – processes of conditioning (compartmentalised feedback) are frequently activated along with the need for instant gratification. This can lead in turn to a corruption of intrinsic motivation. (6)

5 Bleckmann, P. (2012): „Medienmündig - wie unsere Kinder selbstbestimmt mit dem Bildschirm umgehen lernen“, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart

6 Eine ausführliche Darstellung findet sich bei Lembke, Gerald / Leipner, Ingo (2015): „Die Lüge der digitalen Bildung“, Redline, München.

Active engagement with time and space

Independent thinking evolves through an active engagement with the real world of time and space. Time must be needed for this and for an existential reflection on what is important in life. It is after all about one's own – spiritual – existence, which the digital entertainment industry is very good at deflecting us from. There remains one simple yet significant fact about digitalisation:

The human body is not digital but belongs to the real world. It is abused when it is required to adapt itself to the virtual world before the developing human being has been able to unfold its soul and spiritual potential. That is what concerns us about the digitalisation of of pre and primary schools.

No person can satisfy his hunger with 'bits' and 'bytes'. In the same way no child can ever come to a maturity of body, soul or spirit in a virtual space. Catchword – sensory-motor integration: In the first years of life the human being develops capacities of movement, speech and thinking as well as developing the senses. What is important here, is that simultaneously as part of this process, a basic structure is being given to the brain that will have a life-long influence.

Screens devour time

How can the healthy development of children be encouraged? By moving the body in play and through art, through intensive spoken contact and by encouraging imaginative activity. TV, I-pads and other digital media and their contents, keep children away from this real life development. They hinder the physical and soul development of children by 'devouring' time. Many studies demonstrate how time in front of a screen harms childhood development and for example also curtails learning achievement later at school.(7)

These risks connected with early digitalisation must be considered in today's media education. It must be orientated towards the evolving development of the human being – and have the clear goal of enabling a person to live in dignity and freedom. Under no circumstances should the purely economic or political objectives be pursued that all to frequently dominate public debates about digital media.

Information technology currently represents the largest growing market. A growing trend can also be observed whereby global education and IT concerns are seeking to privatise the schooling system. The 'education market' has a global value of more than five billion dollars. Almost one fifth is now in private hands. "It is steadily increasing" writes the chairman of Bertelsmann AG, Thomas Rabe. "The demand for education is growing throughout the world. And digitalisation will make it more accessible and affordable" (8)

Discussion about a genuinely future focused education

Programmes for e-learning and the setting up of appropriate systems for delivering them, is seen as being unavoidable if we are to meet the future through digital media (instead of a digital future). Age dependent child development is dismissed, protected zones are given up and children are even being seen as economically important consumers. We want to offer a real alternative and present our concept of a media education that is orientated towards the real developmental needs of children and young people. We want to have an extensive public discussion about a future focused education under the motto: "Everything at the proper time!" This concerns the entire spectrum of analogue and digital methods which – if used at the right time – will encourage the healthy development of children and young people.

7 Die American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) gibt in ihrem Statement eine gute Übersicht: American Academy of Pediatrics, AAP (2011):

Policy Statement: Media Use by Children Younger Than 2 Years, in:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/10/12/peds.2011-1753> vom 31.08.2014 / Aktuell aus Deutschland, eine

Studie im Auftrag des Bundesgesundheitsministeriums: Die Drogenbeauftragte der Bundesregierung (2017): Factsheet zur BLIKK-Studie, in:

<http://www.drogenbeauftragte.de/fileadmin/dateien->

dba/Drogenbeauftragte/4_Presse/1_Pressemitteilungen/2017/2017_II_Quartal/Factsheet_BLIKK.pdf vom 16.09.2017

8 Rabe, Thomas (2015): „Bildung – die dritte Säule von Bertelsmann“, Vorwort, in:

<https://www.bertelsmann.de/media/strategie/education/finale-dateien/education-bertelsmann-whats-your-story-de.pdf> vom 11.12.2017

To achieve this goal we need a cultural movement for a humane education – please support us!

SIGN HERE

Criticism of digital infatuation

Why is the 'Alliance for Humane Education' campaigning for this petition?

We need a humane education system - in our nurseries, schools and colleges – rather than one dominated by digital technology.

Many of those representing science, politics and the economy declare that – there is no alternative to going digital. Without 'digital education' Germany will be left behind, the country will be an international loser. Yet no one learns digitally. No route is without alternatives. We are convinced that education itself cannot be digitalised, only the content. That is why in 2017 we founded the 'Alliance for Humane Education', so as to develop future-focused alternatives to the digital learning factory.

Chance for a democratic future

Our demands: Education policy needs a new direction. Instead being fixated in a one-sided way on digital technology, the human being must once again be placed in the centre with all its many education and learning possibilities. Let us give our children the chance of having a humane and democratic future. There are always alternatives – especially when we consider all the 'digital hype' around us today.

Selection of material for further reading "Bündnis für humane Bildung":

- **Keine Strategie, sondern Ideologie** (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2017/08/keine-strategie-sondern-ideologie/>)
- **Zwischentöne statt Schwarzweiß** (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2017/07/zwischen-toene-statt-schwarzweiss/>)
- **Ein anderer Blick auf die „Digitale Bildung“** (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2017/09/ein-anderer-blick-auf-die-digitale-bildung/>)
- **Rückfall ins Mittelalter – dank Big Data** (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2016/06/rueckfall-ins-mittelalter-dank-big-data/>)
- **Ein Bauherr beginnt auch nicht mit dem Dach** (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2017/07/ein-bauherr-beginnt-auch-nicht-mit-dem-dach/>)
- **Lehren und Lernen im Zeichen der Digitalisierung** (http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2017/06/lehren_und_lernen/)
- **Trojanisches Pferd "Digitale Bildung" / Trojan Horse "Digital Education" / La formation numérique, un Cheval de Troie** (<http://www.aufwach-s-en.de/2017/08/das-trojanische-pferd-digitale-bildung/>)

Securing choice in Europe

Why is ELIANT involved with this petition?

ELIANT was founded in 2006 in order to fight not only for freedom of choice but especially also to maintain and extend the choices available. (ELIANT-Memorandum (<https://eliant.eu/de/über-uns/memorandum/>)). ELIANT describes itself as the European Alliance for Applied Anthroposophy.

The impulse for this activity was the EU Vitamin Regulation that required the removal from the market of Demeter baby food. Because Demeter standards prohibit the use of artificial vitamins, this ruling meant an erosion of consumer choice. And this despite the fact that analytical results showed the vitamin B content of Demeter cereals to be above average. The authorities acknowledged that the quality was very good but that this was in itself not sufficient to warrant a rule change. The group of consumers was simply too small for them to make an exception. "The critical mass is missing" is what was said.

Securing a diversity of possibilities

This taught us that we needed to create a wider network and make the quality of certain products better known so that they could continue existing and be developed further – even if they weren't considered mainstream. Apart from uniformity, human culture also needs a diversity of possibilities.

This diversity is being threatened in a number of sensitive areas by a growing number of official regulations and economic interests. Education, medicine, organic agriculture and ecology are all affected. There is now also the need for a more human focused education in terms of screen-free play groups, kindergartens and primary schools.

The first successes of our work

- In 2001 ELIANT handed a petition containing one million signatures to the Commissioner John Dalli in Brussels calling for choice and cultural diversity in Europe. (Charter <https://eliant.eu/de/ueber-uns/charta/>). (9)
- ELIANT gave significant support to an earlier petition: "No to digitalised play groups, yes to a positive investment in education". (<http://www.waldorfkindergarten.de/aktuelles/auf-ruf-nein-zur-digitalen-kita.html>). It was started by the Association of Waldorf Kindergartens in Germany and Prof. Manfred Spitzer. Nearly 70 000 signatures were gathered between 19.11.2016 and 20.05.2017.
- On 28.11.2017 a conference took place in Brussels entitled: "Towards a Healthy Digital Ecosystem" (<https://eliant.eu/de/aktuelles/konferenz-nov-2017/>). This conference addressed the whole field of digital learning. See: <https://eliant.eu/de/aktuelles/wissenschaftliche-referenzen-und->

[materialien-zur-konferenz/](#)).

9 Vgl. o. V. (2011): „ELIANT bei der EU-Kommission“, in: http://www.themen-der-zeit.de/content/ELIANT_bei_der_EU-Kommission.1451.0.html vom 6.2.2018

European background

This is about making a positive contribution to the current education debate in Europe:

On 17.11.2017 there was a meeting of European heads of state in Gothenburg in Sweden, to discuss ways of strengthening the European identity through education and culture. On 14th December 2017 the EU Council of Ministers then shared this with member states and recommended that the European Commission follow through and implement their formulated objectives for a **“Digital Education Action Plan”**: (<https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/digital-education-action-plan.pdf>) Attention is drawn to three key priorities in this plan:

1. More use of digital technology in teaching and learning
2. Development of digital skills and competences for the digital transformation of our society.
3. Improvement of the education system through better data analysis and by pre-empting key trends in the digital revolution.

These objectives form a part at least of the essential vocational preparation needed by young people, adults and especially teachers in schools and colleges. Of this there is no question. It also applies to Steiner Waldorf schools. (10)

10 Bund der freien Waldorfschulen (2014 + 2017): „Struwwelpeter 2.0 - Medienmündigkeit und Waldorfpädagogik“, „Struwwelpeter 2.1 - Leitfaden für Eltern durch den Medienschwung“, beide Broschüren in: <http://www.waldorfschule.de/waldorfpaedagogik/medienmuendigkeit>

A choice of further reading material from Waldorf education:

- „Struwwelpeter 2.0“ - Broschüre zur Mediennutzung (http://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/Blickpunkte_Reader/Medienbroschuere_Struwwelpeter_2.0.pdf)
- „Struwwelpeter 2.1“ - Broschüre zur Mediennutzung (http://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/Blickpunkte_Reader/Stuwwelpeter_2.1_Eltern.pdf)
- Medienkompetenz - was ist das eigentlich? (<https://www.erziehungskunst.de/artikel/medienkompetenz-was-ist-das-eigentlich>)

It was clear however at the same time that European leaders were following the interests of the IT economy and employers organisations - and not educational imperatives or didactic knowledge. We believe that it is fair neither to the child nor its development, for there to be such massive public promotion of a digitalisation programme that begins in nursery and early years education and to see it as a 'sensible addition' to traditional analogue teaching regimes (11). Quite apart from this, numerous professionals have shared serious doubts about whether a digital format can be applied in every school situation. The OECD report of 2015 for instance reported that pupils showed no significant improvements in reading, maths or science in countries that had invested strongly in the educational use of IT (12)

Against this background we want to work hard on behalf of our children to ensure that member states implement the action plan in a more differentiated way. How that could work was also demonstrated in our ELIANT congress of 28.11.17: “A Healthy Digital Ecosystem”. (13)

We are concerned about the freedom to decide whether to use or not to use digital media. That is why discursive and constructive thinking should be trained rather than the capacity to primarily serve machines. Children and young people should learn to act responsibly with digital media and not merely know how to use it. IT systems are growing ever more complex and opaque. This means that it is not only the systems of usage that are important but also the analyses and feedback programmes.

11 vgl. Dubois, Laura (2018): Wann darf mein Kind ans Tablet?, in: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/diginomics/wann-darf-mein-kind-ans-tablet-15405098.html> vom 6.2.2018

12 OECD (2015): „Students, Computers and Learning: Making the Connection“, in: <http://www.oecd.org/publications/students-computers-and-learning-9789264239555-en.htm> vom 6.2.2018

13 vgl. ELIANT (2017): “Wissenschaftliche Referenzen und Materialien zur Konferenz vom 28. November 2017“, in: <https://eliant.eu/aktuelles/wissenschaftliche-referenzen-und-materialien-zur-konferenz/> vom 6.2.2018

Recommended books:

- Paula Bleckmann (2016): Medienmündig: Wie unsere Kinder selbstbestimmt mit dem Bildschirm umgehen lernen, Klett-Cotta.
- Manfred Spitzer (2014): Digitale Demenz. Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen, Droemer TB.
- Ralf Lankau (2017): Kein Mensch lernt digital. Über den sinnvollen Einsatz neuer Medien im Unterricht, Beltz.
- Edwin Hübner (2015): Medien und Pädagogik: Gesichtspunkte zum Verständnis der Medien, Grundlagen einer anthroposophisch-anthropologischen Medienpädagogik, Pädagogische Forschungsstelle beim Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen (Hrsg.)
- Gerald Lembke, Ingo Leipner (2018): Die Lüge der digitalen Bildung. Warum unsere Kinder das Lernen verlernen, Redline Verlag.
- Paula Bleckmann, Ingo Leipner (2018): Heute mal bildschirmfrei. Ein Alternativprogramm für ein entspanntes Familienleben. Knauer.

- Alexander Markowetz (2015): Digitaler Burnout. Warum unsere permanente Smartphone-Nutzung gefährlich ist, Droemer.
- Bert te Wildt (2016): Digital Junkies. Internetabhängigkeit und ihre Folgen für uns und unsere Kinder, Droemer.
- Christoph Möller (Hg.) (2015): Internet- und Computersucht. Ein Praxishandbuch für Therapeuten, Pädagogen und Eltern, Kohlhammer.
- Gerald Lembke, Ingo Leipner (2018): Die Lüge der digitalen Bildung. Warum unsere Kinder das Lernen verlernen, Redline Verlag.
- Paula Bleckmann, Ingo Leipner (2018): Heute mal bildschirmfrei. Ein Alternativprogramm für ein entspanntes Familienleben. Knauer.
- Nicholas Kardaras (2016): Glow Kids. How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids - and How to Break the Trance Hardcover, St. Martin's Press.
- Jean M. Twenge (2017): iGen. Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us, Atria Books.

One alone does not help, but rather he who unites with others at the right moment.

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