

Creating Market-ready Educational Subjects: Care Challenges to the Narrow Cognitivism and Cultures of Competitiveness and Winning



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ONLINE via TEAMS



Registration

This presentation examines the role of education in producing and reproducing pro-capitalist and care-less human dispositions; it outlines an alternative care and social and ecologically-just-led ontology and epistemology for education.

The belief that education's primary purpose is to produce human capital is deeply integrated into nation-state and global policy-making. Not only is the human capitalist understanding of education embedded in a universalizing and colonialist mindset, it is also built on a narrow Cartesian ontological understanding of the human condition. Education is increasingly focused on developing a narrow range of cognitive capacities, while remaining deeply non-relational and disregarding of the interdependence of all forms of life on the planet.

To fulfil human capital objectives, students are prepared technically, socially and psychologically to pursue personal development through competitive human-capital accumulation, most notably in the form of acquiring more, and more, education credentials (bundles of human capital). In both cognitive and dispositional terms, competition and ambition are the reigning educational norms. Winning is what matters: the goal is not just to acquire educational credentials but to outcompete others in the process.

Through the universalization of individualised competitiveness, a core value of capitalism is institutionalized in schools and colleges. This precludes serious engagement with the deep relationalities of the human condition, while peripheralising the ethical dimensions of life, including love, care, solidarity, social justice and ecological concerns.

Drawing on the forthcoming book (Beyond Human Capitalist Education, Routledge, Summer 2026) the presentation explores how human capital-led education is embedded in a highly individualistic ontology and a competitively-driven capitalist morality, while driven by a narrow cognitivism devoid of ethical learning.