

# Salutations from North America: Human Resources and Education in the 21st Century

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In the premiere issue of HRD Journal, Kim (2010) posited that human resources or labor is “the most important and critical factor...required for the production of goods and services,” and that with attention to this domain, “...systems, institutions, or organizations can survive, sustain, and flourish,” (p.7).<sup>1</sup> In this second issue, I write to commend and second this ranking of human beings and human resources as primary, particularly in the fields of management and education.

On the occasion of this second seminal issue, for a journal soon to have local, regional, and international impact, I offer congratulations and impressions from the United States. As a teacher educator, preparing my current students to be on the front lines of a high-stakes testing battleground, I am at times overcome by the delusion of current policies that present learners as widgets, interchangeable economic products that will ebb and flow with the regularity of engine gaskets and denim blue jeans.

Teachers know better. That is, even the best-prepared teachers, with the best-prepared students, do not produce completely replicable results; in fact some of the richest opportunities to learn occur when we drop the delusion that any of us is perfect. However, with the abject focus on reading and math scores as the major, almost sole determinant of student achievement and faculty reward, much is lost, such as attention to the affective domain, elective courses, and even science, social studies, and foreign language offerings.

In the West, we are out of balance. The broad mandates of globalization and the seeming intractability of wars and terrorism make the focus on test scores seem overemphasized, if not outright pedantic. Elementary and Secondary School students in the United States are caught between good intentions: those of their teachers, who want them to be successful, contented members of society; and those of education leaders and policy makers who, in theory (seem to) want them to achieve more and more each year, at least as determined by reading and math test scores. While these two poles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they do present two starkly different conceptions of academic success, one accepting the mutability of human resource management, the other accepting nothing other than the culture of more, as defined solely by static test scores.

Said another way, by the eminent Ajahn Chah, “We are always dissatisfied. In a sweet fruit, we miss the sour; in a sour fruit, we miss the sweet.”<sup>2</sup> When students do not perform to our expectations, we can easily be dissatisfied, but we make it worse by our attachment to the ossified idea that they always should do better. Human resources are both sweet and sour, and each has a place in the beautiful mosaic of sentient beings.

Often, the term human capital is used to describe students. One complication with this analogy—that people are malleable and extractable like ore—lies in its simplicity. Unlike goods that are produced by machines, the precious human capital of our children and students needs continual caring attention, and whether provided by parent, teacher, mentor, professor, or monk, such care is the mortar of civil society, whether in the East or West.

Congratulations to all involved in HRD Journal, particularly the Senior Editorial Team, for this journal is a place where human resources are identified, analyzed, and nurtured. As I write this, Bangkok is again swarming with shirts, each one filled with a being trying to realize its dreams and fulfill the human right of happiness and well being. As I write this, I look forward to returning to Thailand and BUU, to meeting with students and faculty again, and to further understand the commonality of our human resources and experiences.

Here's to wisdom and compassion for all in our collective classrooms!

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2 No Ajahn Chah, *Reflections, Dhamma Garden*, Taiwan, 1994, p. 171