



**University of
Zurich** ^{UZH}

Institute of Secondary and Vocational Education

The Aspiration for Bildung in Vocational and Adult Learning - a Look Back and Forward

Prof. Dr. Philipp Gonon, University of Zurich, Institute of Education

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Overview

Personal remark

Bildung – a old and new term: Humboldt and the discourse of Bildung today

Bildung beyond the industrial state, Bildung and educational institutions

Traces of Kerschensteiner, Dewey & Progressive Educators

Can we refer to (Vocational) Bildung today?

Conclusion

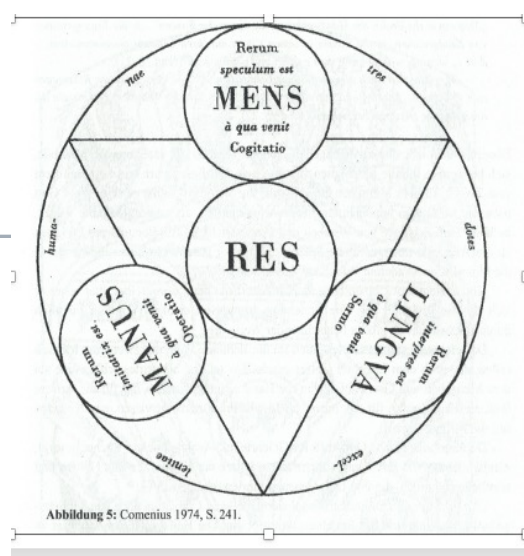
Bildung again or for ever?

- „German“ concept of Bildung?
- J.A. Comenius (1562-1670):

Education for wisdom as salvation -

„omnes omnia omnino“

- The idea of perfection of one-self in a (im-)perfect world; **human tendency to optimize** (Th. Aquin, protestant ethics, enlightenment thinkers) (see Gonon&Heite 2023)
- **Bildung** very much dependent on the (educational, national, cultural, economic) **context**





Bildung: Teaching, Learning, Knowledge

Bildung in
a specific
setting:
Self-Learner,
Elder and
younger
person
In Interaction





Bildung – Individual and/or Mass-Schooling

Father and Daughter in
Nature



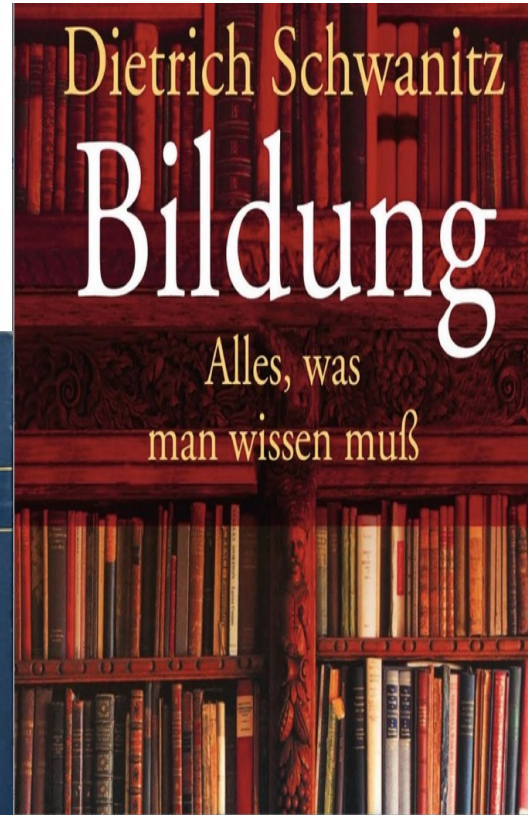
<https://www.freundeskreis-salzmansschule.de/presseartikel-2/440-ein-schulgr%C3%BCnder-und-philanthrop/file.html>



Bildung in the Making – Process and Result

Success Story

Self-help literature



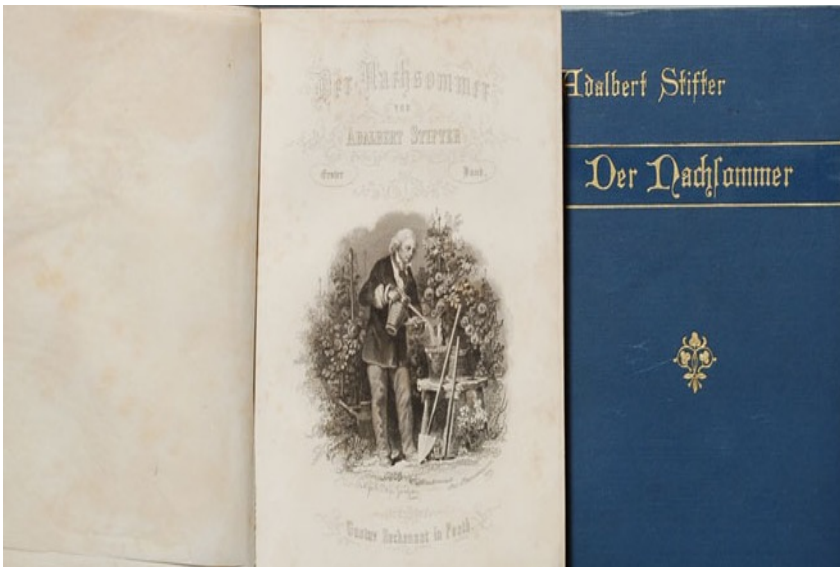
Frankfurt: Eichborn 1999



THE NORDIC SECRET
A European story of beauty and freedom



L. Andersen, T. Börkman: *The Nordic Secret*. Stockholm: Fri Tanke (2020)

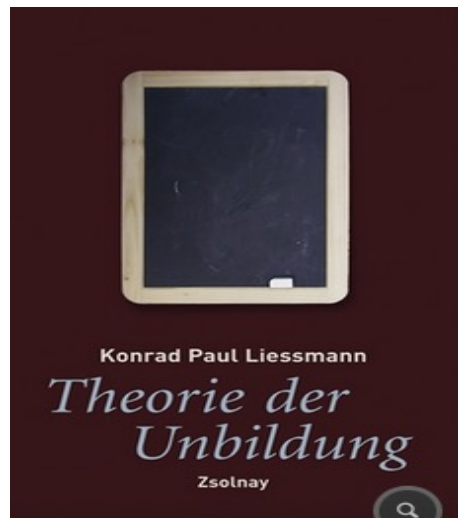


Bildungsroman (1857)
(„Heinrich wird erwachsen“.....)



Bildung as Critique

- Over-rationalisation, overbureaucratization of universities
- "Educational panic": the more needs, the more its value decreases - education as human capital and means of status improvement (Bude 2011, Lissmann 2006)





Bildung Today

- Bildung as a **prestigious**, even fashionable term
- **Aspiration towards a higher status** of individuals and societies: beyond utility, employability and qualification
- Bildung as a concept has been spread at the same time as the **rise of the educational systems**, although this also entailed a **critique of the institutionalization** and standardization of education.
- With the **rise of further education** like vocational and adult education also Bildung came into view



The Promise of Bildung, Bildungs-Gospel

- The promise of Bildung: Concept of a **culturally situated form of rationality**: does not really work and has not much **relevance** for most pupils
- **Self-confirming gospel**, promoting certain models and ways of life , sometimes a **business-case**
- Replaced in Adult Education more and more by **competences** due to the **Knowledge Society**
- Critique of Education Policy: **against neo-liberal politics**, market-driven provisions
- Encouraging new/old **forms of didactics** in order to understand global challenges

- So: what does this concept still today stands for?



Facets of Bildung

- Bildung is said to have a potential for **learnable & increased reflective capacity**.
- Bildung as **offer**, education as imposition
- "Making oneself the subject, **unfinishable "awakening"** through confrontation with culture (P.Bieri: How do we want to live? 2011)
Bildung is necessarily **self-education**
- Bildung as an **experimental form** of opening up the world (s. Ahrens: Experiment und Exploration. Bielefeld: transcript 2011)
- Bildung as semantic, national "**special way**» (Sonderweg)?
- Bildung as a "**container**“ concept»?



Varieties of Bildung

- The term 'Bildung' is used very heterogeneously **in public discourse** as well as in **educational science**, the meanings oscillate between various pathos formulas and purely functional terms
- Bildung as partial word, as **hyphen word**: as part of the 'educational system': Bildungs-certificate, Bildungs-system
- Bildung as semi-word: '**Half-Bildung**' (Adorno), Bildungs-expansion ('**educational expansion**')
- Bildung as a broad concept: **mathematical** and **technical**, but also **culinary and artistic, religious** and even **erotic** education (cf. Maaser & Walther 2011).



Theory of Bildung – W.v. Humboldt (1793)

- Theorie der Bildung des Menschen - Bruchstücke (in: A. Flitner & K. Giel (eds.): Wilhelm v. Humboldt. Schriften zur Anthropologie und Geschichte - Werke in 5 Volumes, Vol. 1. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, pp. 234-240).

"At the center of all special kinds of activity is **man**, who (...) wants to strengthen and increase the forces of his **nature**, to give value and duration to his being" (p. 235).

"The ultimate task of our existence: to provide the **concept of humanity** in our person (...) with as great a content as possible, this task is solved solely through **the linking of our ego with the world** to the most general, regesten and freest interaction" (p. 235f.).

"What man needs, then, is merely an object that makes possible the **interaction** of his receptivity with his **self-activity**."

Translated with DeepL



Focal Points of the Bildung Discourse (for higher education) Hamann, J. (2014)

- 1793-1821 Humboldt (**Studies on Antiquity**), Fichte, Kant, Schelling, Wolf, Schleiermacher, Hegel
- 1872-1925 Nietzsche (**Future of Educational Institutions**), Mommsen, Dilthey, Rickert, Spranger (Wilhelm v. Humboldt and the Idea of Humanity), Weber
- 1945-1968 Spranger (**Vocational Education and General Education**), Litt, Jaspers, Gadamer, Adorno (Theory of Half-Bildung), Habermas (**University and Democracy**)
- 1986-till today: Nida-Rümelin (Future of **Humanities**), Liessmann (Theory of Un-Bildung) Fuhrmann, Mittelstrass. Pedagogues like Arnold, Oelkers, Tenorth and others (**Pedagogy and Schools**)



The Historical Starting Point: Propedeutics for Science and Society

The (German) Gymnasium:

Propedeutic education for higher education

A broad range of subjects

Unspecific approach
related to professions

Humanistic polemic against
Vocational education:

E.A. Evers: «Schulbildung
zur Bestialität» (Aarau: Bek 1807)





Bildung as Education for Elites

A broad spectrum of knowledge also allows
students a greater choice
in order to pursue a **university degree**.

Professional career (in economically higher ranks)

Harvard graduates found privileged access to industry and commerce not because of their skills, but because of the social network they brought with them. It was the **reproduction of a social elite** that was in the foreground (D. Bell: The Post-Industrial Society 1975).



Photo: PhG



Bildungs-Tableau: Justification of Curricula (Today) (inspired by Boltanski/Thevenot: Sociology of Conventions: see Gonon 2023, 186)

Spheres	Justification	Curriculum	Actors
<i>Civic World</i>	Mature for society	„Humanities“ (Latin, History)	National Education Policy Actors Teacher associations
<i>World of Industry, Trade and Commerce</i>	„Employability“	„Real „subjects, STEM	Professional, Employer Associations, Trade Unions
<i>World of Inspiration and Personality</i>	Individual Development, Creativity & Innovation	„Humanities“ (Languages, Art)	Parents, Teacher associations



German Debate about Bildung, Education and Schools

- Germany: the philanthropists (in a way in opposition to the neo-humanists) plead for a “**realistic curriculum**”:
- against the scholastic school (“**Gelehrtschule**”) instead a Bildung for Bürger)
- against a narrow **religious teaching**
- against **social class divisions**





Bildung and Culture



- Friedrich Paulsen (Professor of Education, Berlin:

History of Higher Education «Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts» (1885)

- Through education and teaching: to **instill in young people all the forces and abilities that preserve and produce culture**, so that they can participate in the cultural life of the whole
- Cultural dimension of the professions**
- Criticism of "half-education", as conveyed above all by the Gymnasium; **distinction between higher general education and needs-oriented vocational training untenable**



The reform of 19th Century schools and the (mediaval) apprenticeship

- The expansion of the educational system in 19th Century raised the question **if primary school education is sufficient** in order to meet trade and industrial needs.
- A lot of measures were taken into account: **to include handwork in schools**, to enlarge the mandatory school for all, **to establish continuation schools with a specific focus on vocations** and to establish a vocational and training system, which overcame the traditional medieval apprenticeship.
- Here **the concept of Bildung gained ground**

Culture of the Workplace

Knowledge, skills,
Interactions;
Master and
Apprentices
Specific Culture

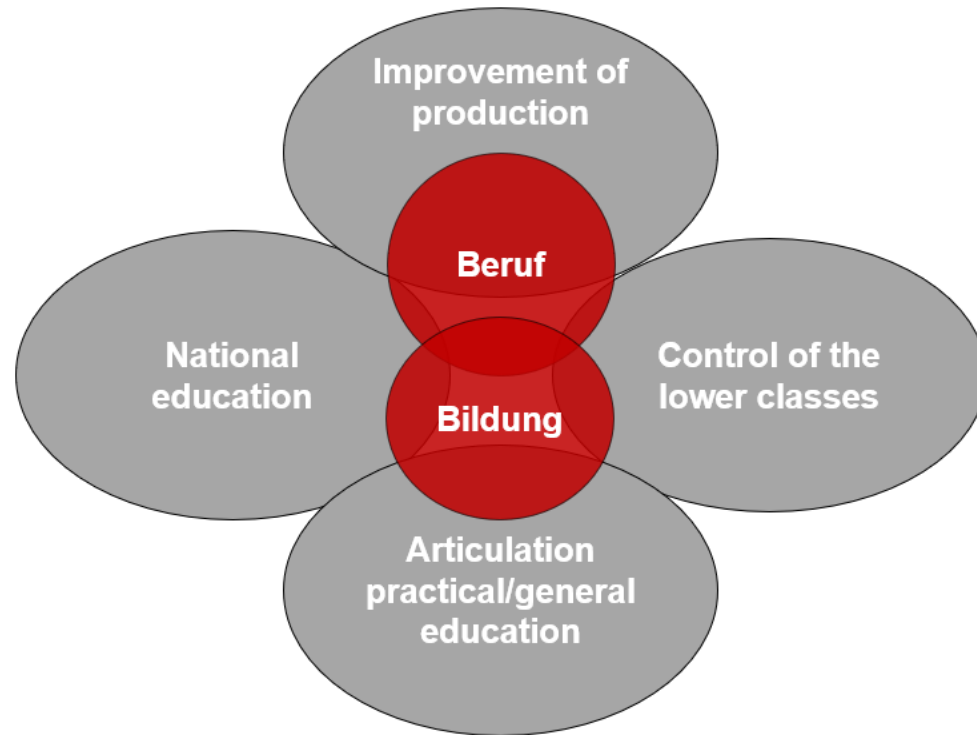


From: Wagner, M. Handwerk um 1700. Hürtgenwald:Pressler



An Enlarged Concept of Bildung at the Beginning of 20th Century

(Fig. Gonon & Bonoli, forthcoming)

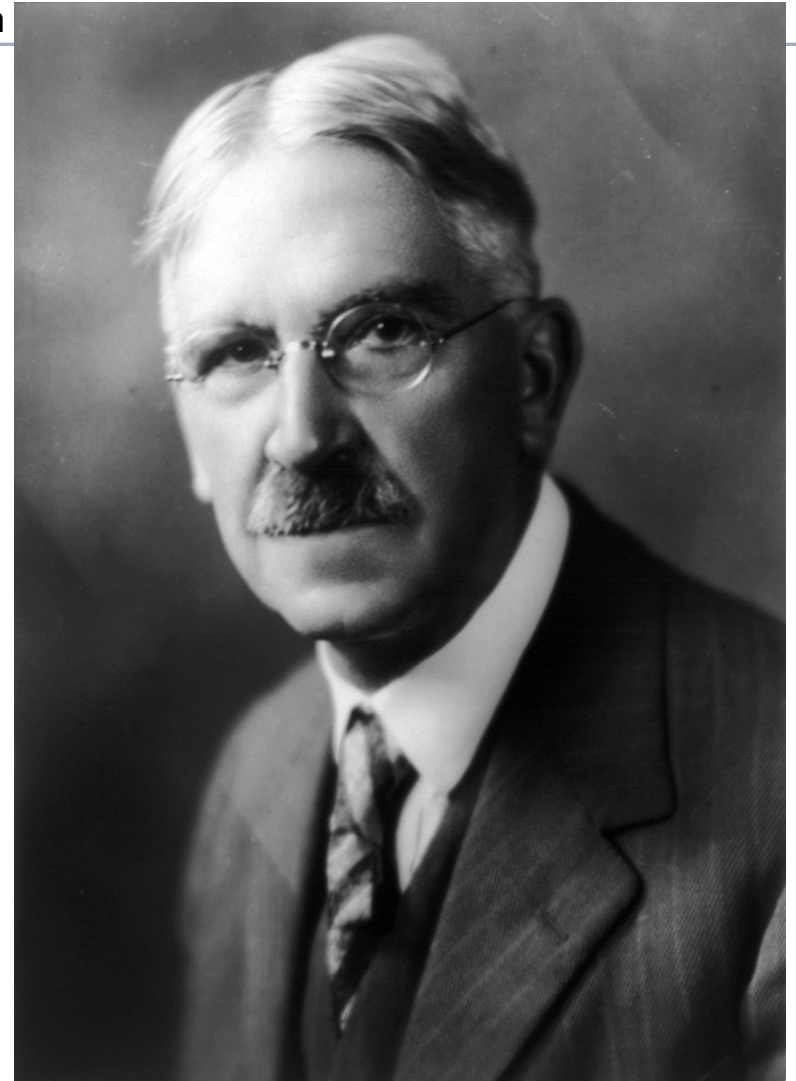




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**Georg Kerschensteiner (1854-1932),
Eduard Spranger (1882-1963)
John Dewey (1859-1952)**





„Industrial intelligence“

- John Dewey distinguished **informal education from formal education** in his 1899 Lectures on Philosophy of Education.
- Essentially characterized by informal learning, **non-institutionalized learning outside of school** is based on **experience** that accumulates over the years. Formal education, on the other hand, is **reconstructed, reflective learning** that often takes place in - but is not limited to - the school context.
- In **this interplay of informal and formal learning**, informal learning is, or is supposed to be, the central resource that helps to produce - according to Dewey with regard to vocational education - **industrial intelligence**.



Kerschensteiner

In all these debates
Georg Kerschensteiner
(1854-1932): active
school reformer in
Munich, Germany. He
gained international
reputation and was a
reference for reforming
educational systems.





Humanism and Bildung

The young **Spranger** himself published 2 **books on Humboldt**

The main purpose of both books was to introduce Humboldt, making him more widely recognised as a **founder of the idea of *Bildung* and of a modern education system** especially the new Berlin university (Spranger, 1908, 1910).





Humanisation of Vocational Education

- *Bildung* is not just introduced as a concept for universities or as an individual affair for a small elite, **but as a core element that defines education and an education system.**
- Like his academic teacher Friedrich Paulsen's he heads towards a 'realistic *Bildung*', in line with Humboldt's views, **at 'humanising' the existing education system** (Spranger, 1910, p. viii).
- The '**humanisation' of the vocational education and vocational schools** is the main merit that, at a later point, Spranger attributes to his elder colleague Kerschensteiner, who brought **the idea of full humanity, into the reality of the lives of German people** (Spranger, 1954).



Kerschensteiner as a School Reformer

- Kerschensteiner saw a **danger of overburdening the elementary school with knowledge**; instead, it was more important to promote the will and ability (Kerschensteiner 1899, 16).
- On the other hand, he demanded the **inclusion of natural science subjects** in the elementary school curriculum as well as a reaccentuation of the objective of instruction.
- Kerschensteiner's reforms: Response to the school's need for **modernization**; reorientation of the school's objectives.



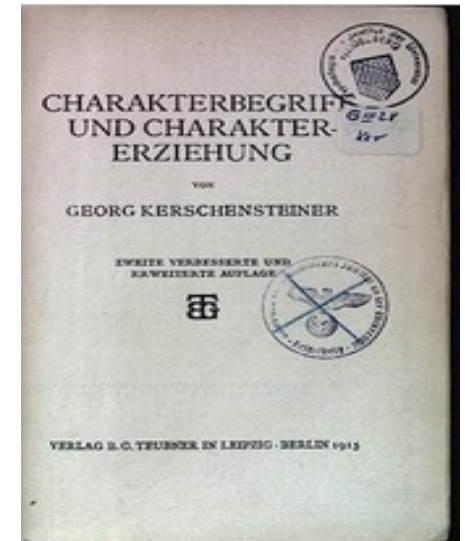
The Rise of Continuation Schools

Continuation schools (“*Fortbildungsschulen*”) as a **lever for the integration of German youth**: In order to make these schools attractive to young people, but also to legitimise further investment in education (for the public funding of such schools), Kerschensteiner **vocationalised** (“*verberuflichte*”) **this type of school**

The entire vocational education system, i.e. the arts and crafts and industrial schools as well as the trade associations, should develop a **“common spirit”** (Kerschensteiner 1914, 151) and thus be able to **educate citizens who, through their work, contribute to the well-being of the “politic body”** (ibid., 153).

Bildung of Character

- Young people should also receive “*Bildung*”, but not in the Humboldtian sense, based on a mainly humanistic culture, but on a **specific form of “character formation”** (“*Charakterbildung*”) oriented towards work.
- *Bildung* should begin with **manual activity**, which later leads to a broader knowledge and personality.
- Moreover, this kind of education is bound up in a national consensus and allows all members of society **to be part of a community** (“*Gemeinschaft*”).
- In several of his writings Kerschensteiner emphasises this expression “*Bildung* of character”, which includes psychological dimensions such as will, judgement and sensitivity.





Bildung through Vocations

Vocational education stands at the "gateway to human Bildung"

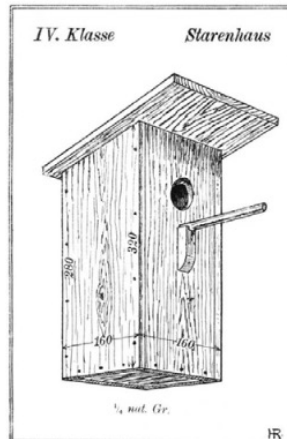
Kerschensteiner refers to **Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre** in his publication "Vocational or General Education?" (1904) (Kerschensteiner, 1966a, p. 94).

In his later works, such as his "**Theory of Bildung**" (Kerschensteiner 1926), published in 1926, Kerschensteiner further differentiated these ideas and focused on **the individual educational experience evoked by work** (Gonon 2009).



Character-Bildung and Welfare State

- “The Uniform German School System” (*Das einheitliche deutsche Schulsystem*):
- “...what civic awareness (“Geist der Staatsgesinnung”) is, is the will, strengthened by insight and habit, to **contribute to the welfare** of not only individual social classes, but of all classes without exception, to cooperate in the development of a *moral community* ... and to do so in the place where vocation, inclination and fate have placed the individual” (Kerschensteiner 1922, 119).



as Experience of Values

Starlings Nest Box

- Kerschensteiner's theory of education culminates in the **experience of values**:
- *“Bildung is an individually organized sense of value of individually possible breadth and depth awakened by cultural goods”* (ibid., 17)
- Vocational education forms a bridge: **awakening of the sense of value by experience of value**, building on psychological presupposition - sense of value **must be organized individually** according to different type.
- **Man works himself out** according to a more (Kerschensteiner) or less idealistically, or socially (Dewey) determinable objective.



Beruf and Bildung

- *Beruf* and *Bildung*, but also the organisation of learning and teaching in vocational education, are the **main pillars** of such a philosophically based approach.
- The two last books of Kerschensteiner's intensive publishing activity, which were not as influential as his earlier books, are a theory of *Bildung* (*Theorie der Bildung*) and a theory of the *Bildung* organisation (*Theorie der Bildungsorganisation*) (Kerschensteiner 1926, Kerschensteiner 1933).



All Schools should include Beruf and General Education

- Kerschensteiners' Process of Bildung needs an adequate Organisation of Bildung:(Theorie der Bildungsorganisation):

“All **educational institutions** are or should not be too specialistic schools but rather “**general vocational schools**” (“*allgemein bildende Berufsschule[n]*”) (Kerschensteiner 1933, 185).



Dewey: Vocational Education in Order to Transform Society

- For Dewey, the orientation towards vocations and industry should make **school life more directly meaningful**, and more connected to out-of-school experiences (Dewey 1997).
- In his seminal book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey, as in other publications, warns that **vocational-technical education**, as forwarded in Germany, is **too narrow** and amounts to **adapting to the industrial regime** (Dewey [1913] 1944, 102). Thus social differences are perpetuated. Vocational education and subjects should not be taught in separate schools, but should be integrated into mainstream **schools, aiming at transforming economy and society.**



Spranger: „Thinking Hand“ and „Higher Self“

- Eduard Spranger’s main contribution was the further development of Georg Kerschensteiner’s ideas on vocational schools and to transfer or enlarge his own concept of *Beruf* and *Bildung*.
- Spranger coined the expression “**thinking hand**” (“denkende Hand”) which should be the basis of VET (Spranger 1952). The vocational schools should be centered around vocations. The **peasant**, the **artisan** and the **trader** are in his view the three **basic figures**, not just as workers, but also as learners. VET therefore has to be based on such a kind of learning, which paves the way for *Bildung* and according to Spranger to a “higher self” (“*höheres Selbst*”) (Gonon 2022).



Too romantic notion of such a vocationally based *Bildung*?

- The theory of *Bildung*, including a vocational perspective, was already controversial before the Second World War.
- **Anna Siemsen** criticised the **romantic notion** of *Beruf*, which did not correspond to industrial reality (1926, 162 ff.).
- Another German philosopher and educationalist, Theodor Litt, also made a fundamental critique of such a foundation of VET theory. At the time of the reconstruction of West Germany, he also emphasised the importance of **ignoring the technological basis and the development of industry** and society, which endangered the theoretical foundations of the classics (Litt, T. *Das Bildungsideal der deutschen Klassik und die modern Arbeitswelt*: Bonn: Heimatschriften 1955).



The renewed vocationally oriented critical *Bildung*

- **Herwig Blankertz**. renewed the classical approach to *Bildung*, including vocational education. Around this discourse and the newly established schools at upper secondary level (“*Kollegschulen*”) with a programme of integration of general and vocational knowledge based on Blankertz's concept, the expression “*Bildung im Medium des Berufs*” (“**education through vocation**”) was coined.
- Blankertz combined the classical ideas of *Beruf* and *Bildung* (inspired mainly by Kerschensteiner and Spranger (Blankertz 1963) with a **critical approach** to society



Vocational „Bildung“: fading away?

- However the concept of *Bildung*, or vocationally based *Bildung* faded. Task-oriented qualifications and vocational competence (“***berufliche Handlungskompetenz***”) came to the fore. This development was linked to the opening and broadening of research perspectives in VET. Industrial sociology, economy of education, psychological approaches brought in new concepts that seemed **more applicable to empirical research**. Political science also discovered VET and developed an international comparative approach.





Hybrid Qualifications today: Vocational Learning and Academic Learning

Vocational education is nowadays more closely interwoven, both conceptually and institutionally, "vocational baccalaureate", "key competences".



**Ich will Architektin oder
Bauleiterin werden. Oder beides**



Aurélie, 17
lernt Zeichnerin.

Source: <https://www.berufsmaturbb.ch/home.html>



Key Qualifications, Key Competences

- In 1974 Dieter Mertens, the first director of the 1967 new founded and still today very influential IAB (“Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung”) launched a debate in proposing a new concept which he called “**key qualifications**” (“Schlüsselqualifikationen”) (Mertens 1974).
- He forwarded this concept as well as in his words a renewed or **actualized idea** of *Bildung* for the world of work. Key qualifications should adapt to the industrial development and technological change. The task for VET and the educational system was to guarantee the **transferability of the learned knowledge, skills and attitudes**.



Future Skills, 21st Century Skills

- In the sense of a **synthesis**, it can thus be stated that the representatives of classical and more recent vocational and business education **modernized the understanding of vocationally oriented learning**
- . Where and how this education is acquired, however, remained/remains rather diffuse. Since the 1970s, terms such as "key qualifications," "key competencies," "professional skills," and, more recently, "21st century skills" have become established, always with reference to the world of work in the **"knowledge economy"** and including multi-disciplinary knowledge, **transversal abilities, and skills such as general problem-solving and critical thinking.**



Conclusions

“Zurich Group”: **What is the idea of Bildung (general education) still good for?**

On the Historical-Conceptual Reconstruction of an Idea of Education and its Questioning on four Contemporary "**Test Cases**" (besides VET, **Sustainable, Economic and Inclusive Education**)

Bildung serves as a **goal and justification** for the further development and the expansion of education

In establishing VET (and VET schools) Bildung had a strong **legitimatory impact**

Fluid concept as **strength** (in education policy): **aspiration** of a higher, enlarged, more enlightened status, but **weaker** in educational research

Bildung emerged with the educational system although it was also at the same time a **critical instance** – this critical role will be maintained



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gonon@ife.uzh.ch