



VOCATIONAL BILDUNG

Philosophical perspectives and practical considerations

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Beginning with a story

Luke (from Schwartz & Sharpe 2010, pp. 13-17):

Luke works as a custodian/janitor at a large hospital. His list of actions to perform is quite clear, eg. using machines to shampoo and clean rugs. Wax floors. Use vacuum cleaner. Collect dirty laundry and take it to designated area. Exchange broken lightbulbs. Etc.

Nothing touches on interaction or communication with other people or on ethical considerations that might need to be taken. At face value it might even seem hard to imagine what these would be. But Luke also tells the following story in an interview.



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- Luke reports an incident where he cleans a comatose you patient's room twice because the father hadn't seen Luke do it the first time and had snapped at him to do it. So he did it again graciously. He explains:
 - I kind of knew the situation about his son. His son had been here for a long time and ... from what I hear, his son had got into a fight and he was paralyzed. That's why he got there, and he was in a coma and he wasn't coming out of the coma ... Well ... I went and cleaned his room. His father would stay here every day, all day, but he smoked cigarettes. So, he had went out to smoke a cigarette and after I cleaned the room, he came back ... I ran into him in the hall, and he just freaked out ... telling me I didn't do it. I didn't clean the room and all this stuff. And at first, I got on the defensive, and I was going to argue with him. But I don't know. Something caught me and I said, "I'm sorry, I'll go clean the room."
 - ...
 - And I cleaned it so that he could see me clean it ... I can understand how he could be. It was like six months that his son was here. He'd been a little frustrated, and so I cleaned it again. But I wasn't angry with him. I guess I could understand.
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 - Another custodian talked about stopping the mopping of floors because Mr. Jones, recovering from major surgery, was out of his bed getting exercise walking up and down the corridor. Charlayne talked about ignoring a supervisors direct order to vacuum the visitor's lounge when some family members who had been there all day were napping.

Premise

- (Almost) Anyone can do decent work if it is as simple as performing a specific set of tasks. But Luke!!
- (Almost) Anyone can do a decent job training someone in a specific skill or knowledge content.
- For example teaching geography by looking at an atlas, studying spanish-words or how to hold a hammer in order to strike a nail.
- The educational or pedagogical relationship is about that which is not apparent in a situation, ie. that which requires an act of imagination to see.
- In other words, a pedagogical situation arises when we work together in order to increase meaningfulness.
- ...but
- Meaningfulness that is not excluding or destructive to others (fundamentalism and fascism are intensely meaningful experiences to some). It is sometimes a weakness in VET that both work and training appear so self-evident and simple thus masking the potential that is implicit in many activities. (...but... this is also sometimes a strength)

Educational research as a way of expanding the imagination

Why imagination?

Mediator between general concept and concrete practice

Eg. it is relatively established in research on communication that "mirroring", "observational language" and "I- rather than You-statements" are conducive to less conflicts. But how is this enacted in practice?

Phronetic research (Flyvbjerg 2001)

Philosophy providing concepts that enable new perspectives

New concepts or old ones in new contexts have a tendency to widen our capacity for imagination for a period of time after which the new becomes everyday and we end up searching for other concepts or further contexts.

Vocational Bildung valuable as a concept for the perspectives it affords



A problem with Bildung as a concept



- Too many meanings lead to difficulties (cf. Sjöström & Tyson 2022, chapter 3)
- Classical Bildung categories: moral, aesthetic, practical Bildung, Bildung as understanding, autonomy, self-formation
- Modern or contemporary Bildung categories: critical-democratic Bildung, critical-reflexive Bildung, postmodern Bildung, cosmopolitan Bildung, post-colonial Bildung, posthuman Bildung, eco-social Bildung
- Vocational Bildung categories: existential Bildung (Claeson 2010)
- This multiplicity can be turned into a strength if Bildung can be "operationalized" in a more experiential direction.

Vocational Bildung

Operationalizing the concept:

Vocational education as a source of biographical richness and meaning

Modes of appearance/didactical practices:

Vocational Bildung – Bildung experiences and processes specifically afforded by a particular vocational practice

General vocational Bildung – cross-vocational Bildung experiences or processes

Vocational general Bildung – general or school-related Bildung experiences and processes potentially present in a vocational practice



Cases

- What types of cases and why?
- Extreme or marginal rather than "average" or "normal" cases (Flyvbjerg 2006, Harding 1992)
- Cases as expressions and documentation of wise practice (Jonsen & Toulmin 1988, MacIntyre 2011, Shulman 2004)
- Cases as repertoire of skilled practitioners (Schön 1983, 1987)
- ca. 50, 21 of them published in Tyson 2023



Vocational Bildung in practices (22)

- Grand Hotel (Tyson 2023)
- Hairdressing practice (Tyson 2023)
- The blood transfusion (Tyson 2023)
- The play-interruption (Tyson 2019, 2023)
- The apple tree (Tyson 2023)
- Luke the hospital cleaner (Tyson 2023, taken from Schwarz & Sharpe 2010)
- Maj, Rut, Greta, Sven, 2 unnamed (6 cases from dementia- and palliative care) (Tyson 2018, Tyson 2023b, Tyson 2019, Tyson 2019, unpublished)
- The child & The surgery prep (Tyson 2018)
- Surprise calligraphy (Tyson 2018)
- Making a mess (carpentry apprenticeship) (Tyson 2018, 2019)
- The teachers in hotel and conference training practicum (Tyson 2023)
- 4 Cases of communication and conflict resolution (unpublished)
- The pocket-mirror (Tyson 2019)

Vocational Bildung in vocational school-settings (16)

- "Punishments" at vocational school & Lange Otto (Tyson 2014, 2023)
- Learning to drive a truck with a wagon (Tyson 2023)
- The photography teacher (Tyson 2023)
- The wooden cubes (Tyson 2023)
- The coffee maker (Tyson 2023)
- The secret box (Tyson 2023)
- The facial-therapy (Tyson 2023)
- Mondange (Tyson 2015, 2023)
- Inclusive education (Tyson 2023)
- The boy, the duck and the lamb (Tyson 2023) + 2 further unpublished cases from animal care
- Edge-gilding (unpublished) & Calendar making (Tyson 2023)
- Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Illich* (Tyson 2019)

Vocational tasks in general education (8)

- Building a boat (Tyson 2023)
- Metal-turning (svarvning) (Tyson 2019)
- Diana & Ida (Tyson 2019, 2023b)
- Wilfried Kessler (Tyson 2016, 2019)
- European and east asian books (Tyson 2023c)
- Welding and gemstone cutting (Tyson 2023b)
- Working with geometry in bookbinding (Tyson 2023b)



Other cases (7)

Biographical cases

Johannes P., Martin M. & Beate P.
(Tyson 2019 and Sjöström & Tyson
2022 respectively, taken from
Gessler 1988)

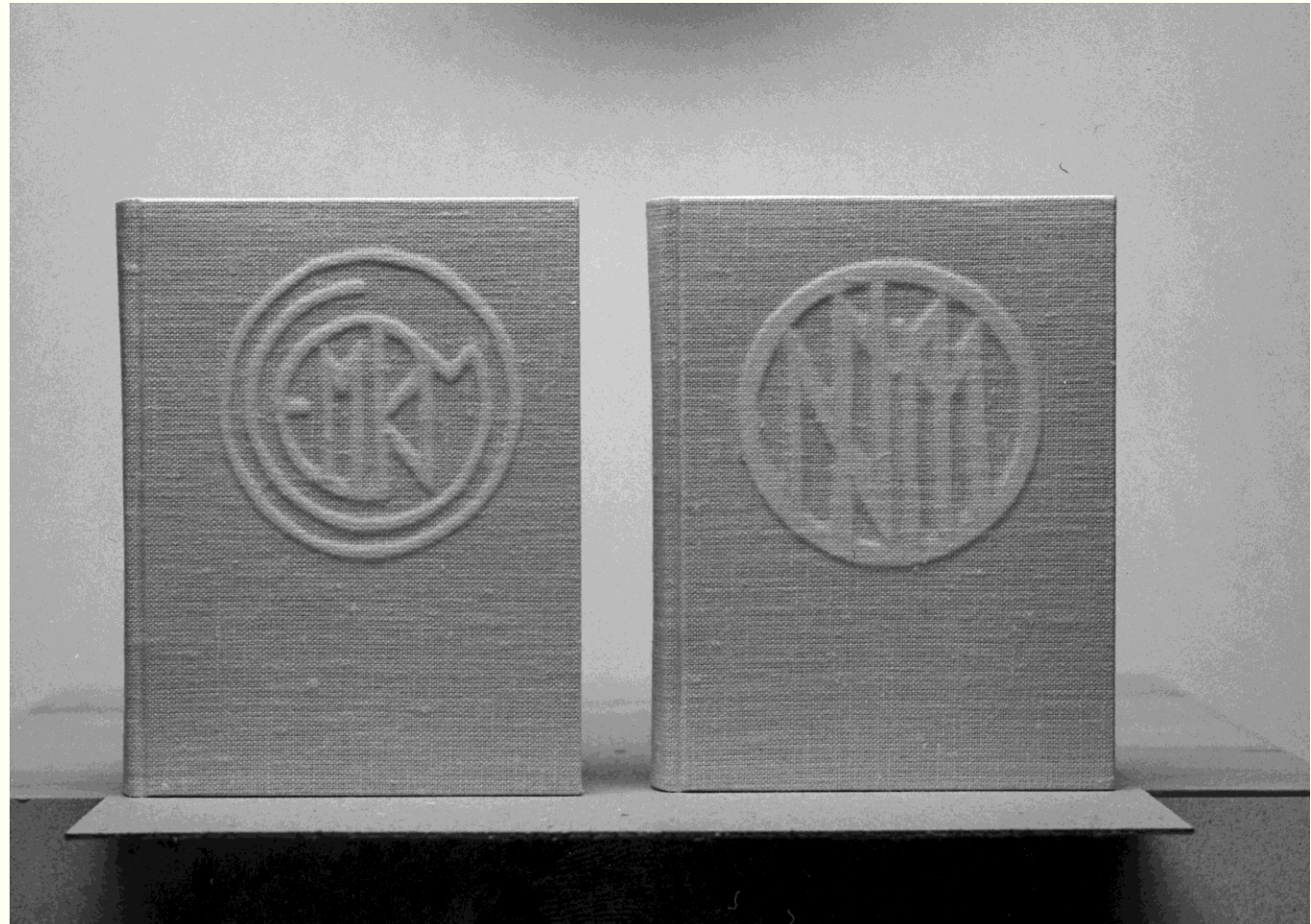
The vocational biography of
bookbinding, gilding and engraving
master Wolfgang B. (Tyson 2015)

Odd cases

The theatre project (Tyson 2019,
taken from Gessler 1988)

Begabtenförderung (Tyson 2016b)

The cube (Tyson 2016c)



Bildung and exclusion

- Meaningfulness can become deeply problematic if it is just meaningfulness "for me".
- Bildung has deep, elitist roots, not least in traditionally excluding vocational education "as mere training".
- **Some varieties of exclusion:**
- Cultural and social exclusion (racism, sexism, etc.) eg. the Bildung tradition represents mostly a male gaze and mostly the culture of the (central) European bourgeoisie
- Bio-psychological exclusion (eg. various neuropsychological diagnoses), the Bildung tradition has been mostly occupied with intellectuality (gebildet is someone who is well read) and discussing Bildung-processes in contexts of illness, disability, etc. is rare
- Existential exclusion (lack of meaning, hope, interest, warmth)
- **Standpoint epistemology (Harding 1992):**
- Using narratives of marginalized subjects to increase both the affordance/imagination of Bildung and the expansion of who is invited to participate and how.

Imagination and narrative, some concluding thoughts

The stories we tell inform the present and future we imagine

The stories we tell about education are often on an epic scale, OECD, PISA, systematic grade inflation (Sweden), etc.

The sheer epicness also tends to infuse the narratives with either unwarranted optimism (employability, entrepreneurship) or fatalistic pessimism (loss of agency, capitalistic deformation of identities etc.)

This habit of thinking in grand narratives seems closely related to the habit of seeking general theories, concepts that explain everything.

This is a vestige of the heroic (male) epic.





- Things rarely change on this scale but rather in the prosaic, in how everyday life takes on an epic quality.
- To be a teacher is from this perspective to be unusually capable in two ways:
 - First to invite others to become epic in their lives and to support this, ie. not to focus on one's own dreams primarily, but on the dreams of the other.
 - Second to create a prosaic existence that is enchanted.
- Vocational education is especially well-equipped for this kind of teaching-activity.
- Vocational Bildung didactics is an attempt to manifest this through cases of epic lives, not epic in the classical sense of a grand hero but epic in this prosaic sense where life is, for the lack of a less religiously burdened term, sacred.

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