Bildung Reloaded–Educational Challenges for a Globalized World

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Worldwide, education promises a better future for aspiring generations. However, our current educational landscape has been shaped by neoliberal thinking and is thus often oriented toward economic objectives. In Germany *Bildung* is a notion coined by philosophers representing a broad liberal and critical education, and the cultural and historical context of this ideal dictates how scholars and society defend educational values. However, in a so-called "knowledge society," education and language proficiency become parameters to assess the economic value of members of society vis-à-vis employment. In particular, immigrants are required to prove their merit in the labor market by learning German and acquiring educational qualifications. The influx of immigrants into German society thus requires a new approach to *Bildung*. This article explores the impact of economic reasoning and globalization on the discourse surrounding *Bildung*.

INTRODUCTION

"Bildung is the endless voyage of the individual towards him/herself as part of an ideal humanity."
(Masschelein & Ricken, 2003, p. 140)

In 2009, more than 100,000 university students at major universities in Germany and Austria united in the so-called *Bildungsstreik* (*Bildung* strike) and protested against underfunded educational systems (Ribolits, 2011, p. 115). The protesters announced, "*Wir sind hier, wir sind laut, weil man uns die Bildung klaut*" ("We are here, we are loud, because our *Bildung* is being stolen," own translation) and demanded "*Bildung* for all, education for free" (own translation), thus criticizing the government's decision to introduce tuition fees to compensate for cuts in the education budget. Furthermore, the *Bildungsstreik* called for an education independent from economic objectives and protested against the introduction of the EU-standardized bachelor's and master's degrees (Müller, 2011). While other neoliberal influences in the public sphere such as *Agenda 2010*, the "paradigmatic change" (Fleckenstein, 2011, p. 91) of the German labor market policy, were reluctantly accepted, the *Bildungsstreik* protests went on for five years until the German states abolished tuition fees at universities. During the preparation of this paper, the protests resumed once again in spring 2014. Unlike before, teaching staff joined students in protesting further financial cuts and an increasing commodification of higher education.

This brief insight into the current educational debate demonstrates the impact of *Bildung* in the public German discourse. *Bildung*, is, however, a concept that incorporates "a wide diversity of ideas and manners of thought" (Kivelä, Siljander, & Sutinen, 2012, p. 1) and this ideal has never been fully implemented in German education.

Paradoxically, the origins of education and capitalism are historically intertwined. Since the Renaissance, the concept of *Bildung* has been primarily understood as a constant effort toward intellectual self-improvement. This notion is very much influenced by Protestant culture, which believes in serving God through hard work and self-regulation (Precht, 2013, pp. 27–29; Tröhler, 2011). Protestantism did not only influence the concept of *Bildung* but is also responsible for the notion of self-regulation in current neoliberal ideology. In his groundbreaking theoretical exploration of the links between religious ideals and economic tendencies in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (2002), Max Weber analyzed the work ethics of Catholic and Protestant groups and concluded that the origins of capitalism are rooted in the Protestant mentality, which puts a strong emphasis on labor and an economical lifestyle. According to Weber, Western modern work ethic results from "the organization of the believer's life (*Lebensführung*)" in Protestant culture (Weber, 2002, p. 4).

A closer look at the Protestant denominations, Lutheranism and Calvinism, emphasizes the different effects on *Bildung* and capitalism. *Bildung* evolved out of Lutheranism, which focuses on inner strength (Tröhler, 2011, p. 206). Calvinism, in contrast, strives for one harmonious outer world and "reinforced capitalism in a certain sense unintentionally" (Tröhler, 2011, p. 43).

In line with the inward orientation of Lutheranism, new pedagogic ideas by the 18th and 19th century philosophers and educationalists such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Wilhelm von Humboldt , and Johann Gottlieb Fichte formed *Bildung* into an ideal that fosters personality, agency, intellectual freedom, and reflective self-understanding (Müller, 2011). In the 19th century, this classical *Bildung* philosophy of personal and individual intellectual reflection peaked during the struggles of the bourgeoisie for political participation and national unity (Elias, 2012; Francois & Schulze, 2001). The bourgeoisie devoted their lives to *Bildung*, arts, and German literature. In contrast to the French-speaking Prussian nobility, the bourgeoisie valued regional languages and argued for a federation based on the common German language. *Bildung* is therefore not only an important element of the German national identity, but inseparably connected to the German language. These historical idiosyncrasies underline the connections between language, education, and neoliberalism in contemporary Germany.

This article critically examines the different discursive trends in the ongoing struggle in education against economic interests and neoliberal influences to understand the impact of such discourses. The first section of this article briefly sketches a history of the German debate pertaining to *Bildung*, starting in the 19th century. The next section discusses current neoliberal influences on education, in the context of recent structural reforms at European Universities and of the examination practices of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Poor performance on the international PISA exams alarmed German educators and questioned their self-perception of Germany as a country of philosophers and poets (*Dichter und Denker*) (Tröhler, 2011, p. 194). The third section consequently explores limits and potentials of *Bildung* in a diverse society. The conclusion summarizes the arguments and outlines the future role of the *Bildung* discourse for education and democracy.

THE ROLE of *BILDUNG* IN CURRENT EDUCATIONAL DEBATES

Ever since the ideal of *Bildung* was developed in the 19th century, it has determined educational debates in Europe. In these debates, different perceptions of *Bildung* are in use:

the classical and the critical ideal of *Bildung*, but also as a term for cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

The Classical Ideal of *Bildung*

Nowadays, when authors discuss the neo-humanist or classical ideal of *Bildung*, they primarily refer to the works of Wilhelm von Humboldt. According to Humboldt (1797), *Bildung* is a process that strives to continuously perfect the intellectual self by acquiring new knowledge through engagement with the world (*Auseinandersetzung mit der Welt*). Hence, Humboldt considers language acquisition as crucial to engage with different ideas and gain new insights. For him, the connection between language and mind is inseparable and constitutes the basis of *Bildung*. The main objective in learning a new language is not the language itself, but gaining analytical competences and a new perspective on familiar concepts in order to widen one's understanding. He suggests that gaining linguistic knowledge (*Sprachgewinn*) leads to an extension of world (*Welterweiterung*) and thus to progress of knowledge (*Erkenntnisfortschritt*) (Michelsen, 1987, p. 246). His philosophical work describes *Bildung* as a liberating process that was not driven by a specific purpose, but rather aims to develop a strong sense of self, intellectual freedom, and inner harmony. By strengthening the inner self, *Bildung* is thought to prepare the individual for the challenges of the outer world (Tröhler, 2011, p. 206).

Already in 1872, however, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche criticized the loss of "true" *Bildung* due to economic instrumentalization, massification, and nationalization of the German school system. More precisely, he lamented how society perceived *Bildung* as a means for personal and economic enrichment (Konrad, 2012, p. 107). The claims raised by Nietzsche were widely supported by his contemporaries (Konrad, 2012, p. 107). Their critical stances towards the implementation of *Bildung* were representative of the reaction of many, who experienced a "rapid and dramatic modernization of the economy and society" (Konrad, 2012, p. 107). Ever since, educational, political and social problems have been often related to a lack of *Bildung*-ideal.

The Critical Ideal of *Bildung*

Half a century later, Theodor Adorno warned of the declining values of *Bildung* in his theory of half-*Bildung* (1959). Here, the German philosopher and sociologist lamented the corruption of Humboldt's ideal in a society heavily influenced by economic demands that tie education to a specific (economic) purpose. He described the downfall of *Bildung*, arguing that it cannot be saved by reforms or empirical studies. Adorno further warned that education could become an ideology itself, if the loss of *Bildung* steered away from the development of the individual to capitalistic development (Adorno, 1970, cf. Prisching, 2008). In 1970, Adorno however argued for *Bildung* as the sole element that could have prevented the Holocaust. Consequently, Adorno considers the duty of education not to form "well adjusted people" (Adorno, 1970), but to create a responsible consciousness. According to his critical theorization of *Bildung*, education should enable citizens to question power structures, to reflect on their role in reproducing those power relations, and finally to empower individuals to act according to their conscience. This formulation of critical *Bildung* is more politically oriented than the inward orientation of the classical *Bildung* ideal.

The Cultural Capital of *Bildung*

Most scholars argue against neoliberal developments of educational institutions in favor of Humboldt´s ideal of *Bildung* (Lederer, 2013; Precht, 2013). They take a stand for an education that fosters responsibility (*Mündigkeit*), self-reflection, and autonomy, which are believed to be essential qualities of citizens in a democracy. In line with Adorno, many authors reject *Bildung* as a means of gaining individual power and wealth, but rather emphasize the importance of *Bildung* to form a critical citizenry (Adorno, 1970; Bünger, 2013; Lederer, 2011). Both the classical and critical concepts stand in contrast with the perception of *Bildung* by the educated middle-class as knowledge of distinction and cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Fischer, 2002, Schwanitz, 1999). Since the 19th century, the educated middle class' (*Bildungsbürgertum*) self-perception has been shaped by their cultural capital via *Bildung*. As they legitimized their social positioning through higher education and creative practices of knowledge, the *Bildungsbürgertum* had an interest in limiting access to *Bildung*. In the postwar decades, however, changes to Germany's economic structure and increased social mobility called the limited access to *Bildung* into question.

Debating *Bildung*

In 1964, at the height of the educational debate about access to higher education, the philosopher and educator Georg Picht highlighted the need for a "*Bildungsrevolution*" (1964). He harshly attacked the selective three-tier schooling system, established in 1848 and unchanged until today in most parts of Germany, that reinforced social classes by assigning students to a hierarchy of three different secondary schools (Gymnasium, Realschule, Hauptschule) depending on their academic achievement. Picht proclaimed this educational system "a German educational catastrophe." He claimed that it denied students equal access to higher education and resulted in a low number of academic degrees. Consequently, Picht called for a modernization of the educational system, but with an economy-centered rhetoric (Picht, 1964, pp. 17, 26, 35, 43, 56, 66). Germany, he argued, would not be able to sustain a growing economy without educational reforms, necessary to generate increased numbers of qualified workers. The impact of Picht's criticism became visible a few years later when the social-liberal government dramatically increased funding for education. The *Gymnasien* (academic-track high schools) opened up to working-class children, a large number of universities were built, and a new kind of more practically oriented universities (*Fachhochschulen*) were founded. In contrast to existing universities, which focus on a broad and more theoretical education, *Fachhochschulen* provide a vocational and specialized academic training. During the 1970s and 1980s, the reform enabled access to higher education, especially for female students as well as for children from Catholic families, rural areas, and working class families. As a result, today more than 40 percent of pupils graduate from *Gymnasium*, whereas only 25 percent of pupils received education at a *Gymnasium* before 1960 (Edelstein & Grellmann, 2013). What the perennial debates incited by Picht demanded was thus broad access to higher education and a breakdown of social and institutional inequality within the educational system (Auernheimer, 2010).

Other European countries followed Germany's path and facilitated access to higher education for a vast majority of their citizens. Consequently, postwar working class societies such as Finland, as well as the predominantly farming populations of Spain, cultivated a large

number of university graduates. An adverse effect of this reform, however, was a mismatch between growing numbers of over-qualified graduates and relatively small numbers of relevant positions in the labor market, thus increasing competition among job seekers. The surplus of young academics, combined with the effects of the Eurozone crisis starting in early 2009, caused a migration of young professionals across and out of Europe in search of positions matching their qualifications. Germany profits from the free movement of persons in the EU, as the German economy is in need for skilled labor (Roth, 2011).

Today, educators concentrate less on access to education, and more on the resulting competition among students. Debates concerning the classical ideal of *Bildung* revolve around Humboldt's overemphasis on liberal arts, especially on classical languages and philosophy. As the main objective in education nowadays is inclusion and equality, scholars call for a balance of science, humanities, and physical activities because a sheer concentration on liberal arts reinforces inequality and functions selectively (Becker & Lauterbach, 2008, p. 37). Otherwise, *Bildung* becomes a phenomenon of the elite which reinforces social power structures through pedagogy *(Höhne, 2004)*.

Interestingly, this elitist and exclusive form of *Bildung* finds advocates among upper social classes. High competition and fear-lead upper and middle class parents to fight against reform efforts toward a less achievement-oriented and more egalitarian education system, as exemplified in the "school controversy" (*Schulstreit*) of Hamburg 2010 (Becker & Schuchart, 2010, pp. 431–432). Many educational scholars (Czerny, 2010; Huisken, 2011), however, criticize the idea of achievement-oriented, competition-based educational settings. They argue that achievement-oriented education systems judge academic results of individual students based on the collective performance achieved by all students in the class. Therefore, achievement is valued in comparison to other students and does not reflect individual development. Finally, competition is rewarded and becomes a dominant behavior in pursuing one's life. While people are competing for certain goals, the purpose of these goals and whether they are worth competing for remains unquestioned (Huisken, 2011). This mindset is believed to serve capitalist systems, where knowledge becomes 'human capital' and human beings become a competing "workforce," ultimately leading to self-interest and egoism, thus contradicting the communal aspect of the *Bildung*-ideal.

The Commodification of *Bildung*

Influenced by neoliberal language, *Bildung* has become *Bildung*-economy ("*Bildungsökonomie*" (Heinzlmaier, 2013, p. 10). Educational scientists (Girmes, 2012; Mecheril & Vorrink, 2013; Pasuchin, 2012), sociologists (Heinzlmaier, 2013; Münch, 2009), and philosophers (Negt, 2014; Precht, 2013) engage very passionately in the public educational discourse, arguing against neoliberal influences such as efficiency, competition, standardization, measurability, self-regulation, and utilitarianism in education (Bank, 2005; Münch, 2009). In some cases, scholars even base their arguments on economic reasoning (Girmes, 2012, p. 8; Precht, 2013, p. 83) in order to achieve social justice in educational institutions as was the case with Picht in 1964. This paradoxically reveals the dominance of neoliberal argumentation even in academic thinking and language.

Finally, while many German scholars fight for the survival of the classical concept of *Bildung*, others state that *Bildung* itself has ceased to exist, both as an ideal and as a normative reference (Liessmann, 2012). The major argument supporting this claim is that the so-called knowledge society, which considers knowledge as the most valuable resource (Liessmann,

2006; Stehr, 2006), does not aim at the development of the inner self and the interaction between the self and the world, but at profitable knowledge. In reference to Adorno's half-*Bildung* the Austrian philosopher Konrad Paul Liessmann speaks of un-*Bildung* (*Unbildung*) which, according to him, is the result of the commodification of our minds (Liessmann, 2012, p. 214). Despite the critical discussions and controversy, education is still considered to be the most important element for the future of society. Judging from the current discourse, Humboldt's ideal has become relevant again by contrasting the postmodern challenges of globalization and neoliberalism and by offering a process-oriented, reflective alternative.

THE THREAT OF NEOLIBERAL IDEAS ON EDUCATION

As outlined above, the ideology of neoliberalism undermines the values of the classical ideal of *Bildung* such as reflective and critical thinking, responsibility, and reason. Instead, the notion of neoliberalism is a "practical anti-humanism" as the sociologist Thomas Lemke (2002) puts it: its principles of free markets, rationalism, and individualization create competitive societies with self-centered and self-regulated individuals. Furthermore, neoliberal ideology promotes the freedom of capital over the freedom of humans (Harvey, 2005).

Besides educational institutions, neoliberal economic and utilitarian principles structure also other spheres of social life, such as health care systems, family life, etc. As a consequence, neoliberal thinking is cemented into society's self-image and transformed into common sense (Bank, 2005; Harvey, 2005).

At the turn of the 20th century, Max Weber characterized rationalism as the mindset of modernity, leading inexorably to subordination of other human values (2002). Rationalism is connected to progress and material freedom. This understanding of freedom is in contrast to the intellectual and political freedom of the classical *Bildung* ideal, which derives from the inward focus of Lutheranism. The classical *Bildung* philosophy understands freedom as an inner autonomy, detached from outer circumstances. Different scholars criticize the contemporary pursuit of material freedom, achieved through competition and economy-oriented learning. More and more societies are measuring their success according to neoliberal parameters such as efficiency and measurability (Münch, 2009). The "commodification of thinking" (Heinzlmaier, 2013, p. 10) normalizes economic reasoning to such an extent that it presents itself as something natural and given.

The Standardization of European Universities

Influenced by the demands of global players, European politicians enforced reforms to foster the competitiveness of Europe's educational systems. The so-called Bologna Reform is part of this process. In 1999, education ministers of 20 European countries signed the treaty in Bologna, Italy's oldest university town. It aimed to standardize the higher education system of European countries, modeled after the American Bachelor/Master system, as the U.S. became the leading scientific power of the 20th century. Different cultural and structural educational traditions were disregarded, and a more universal and competitive university structure was established. The educational scientist Tröhler ascribes the efforts to standardize and universalize to the Calvinist idea of one harmonious outer world (2011, p. 206), which is, according to Weber, also an element of capitalism (2002). Advantages, such

as increased international student mobility and employability in the EU, seemed to be more promising than the existing, diverse university structure. Meanwhile, scholars, universities, and students view the reforms skeptically and have consequently protested ever since its introduction for reasons that will be discussed below.

With the implementation of the new Bachelor/Master system, the predominant principles of *Bildung* in higher education such as "studies under one's own guidance," "solitariness and freedom," "external leisure or inner desire" (Humboldt, 1810) are replaced with coercion and external guidance through constant evaluation, time pressure, increased examinations, and compulsory attendance (Meueler, 2011, 2011; Müller, 2011, pp. 80–83). In this regard, the ideal of classical *Bildung*, cultivated over centuries, clashes with globalized, commodified standards (Münch, 2009, p. 9).

Fifteen years after Bologna, the labor market as well as the students still do not approve of the new Bachelor/Master system. "A recent study by the German Allensbach Institute shows: Students complain about time pressure and jam-packed schedules" (Himmelrath, 2014). Their complaints reflect their current longing for more time and a form of learning focused on freedom of thought; yet, nowadays, students' main concern is finding employment. Furthermore, the fellow student is viewed as a competitor and not as a partner (cf. Heinzlmaier, 2013, p. 16). The former politician of education Wolfgang Lieb pointedly summarizes this development: "The educational side of the process has been pushed aside in favor of economic aspects. That is why universities are now very much led by an economic way of thinking" (Himmelrath, 2014). As a consequence, this situation produces inner conflicts and discontent resulting in increasing health issues and psychological problems among students.

G8: A School Reform to Increase Competitiveness

The pressure to achieve is already discernable in secondary schools. In 1993, the German finance minister declared the then thirteen-year-long school education as being too extensive and too expensive. The so-called G8 reform (graduation from the German *Gymnasium* within eight instead of nine years) shortened the period of schooling. Since the curriculum remained unchanged, class time and homework were extended. The G8 reform is led by the neoliberal principle of efficiency and results in strict timetables at schools preventing the students from taking time for leisure. While pupils have no comparison with any other school system and accordingly conform to the educational pressure, their parents despair as they see their children suffer. An open letter by a father to his 10-year old daughter Sophie, published in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, received widespread attention (Sußebach, 2013). Here, the author explains to Sophie, in what way and why her childhood is taken away from her and what high expectations and competition await her. He outlines how globalization, deprivation of time, and population aging lead to higher pressure on young students. Thus, any activity is supposed to serve a purpose. Boredom is a phenomenon of former times, although the sociologist Hartmut Rosa strongly argues for the necessity of those moments, "in which I felt my soul. In which I learned to endure myself" (as cited in Sußebach, 2013, own translation). Sußebach concurs with the sociologist's view and describes how boredom helped him to find his inner self, to be creative, and to develop intellectual strength. Free time equals the freedom to understand what one has learned, to process, to reflect on the gathered knowledge, and finally to formulate one's own opinion. Instead, today's children learn how to manage their tight timetables and how to improve in the subsequent exams.

Being able to explore, to fail, and not to conform is what Sußebach considers important to develop one´s personality. He laments that pupils have become lonely fighters and competitors.

Following the introduction of the G8 reform, more and more students have failed to assimilate to the harsh conditions. As a consequence, the dropout rate in the Bavarian Gymnasien increased up to 31 percent for the first generation of G8 compared to 22 percent for G9 (Sußebach, 2013).

Even though most scholars (but few politicians) agree on the benefits of less competitive school systems, competitiveness paralyzes middle-class parents. Regarding the education and future of their children, they spare no expense. Parents increasingly spend on private tutoring, while the state saves with the G8 reform. Additionally, the number of German private schools has grown up to 40 percent in the past ten years (Precht, 2013, p. 75). Succeeding in education depends more and more on private financial investments and consequently, increases social inequality. The philosopher Richard David Precht takes a strong stance towards such a protectionism and safeguarding of privileges. He considers elite schooling as a threat to social peace. Accordingly, Precht addresses an important question: "Do I want the best for my child or do I want the best for the society my child is going to live in?" (Precht, 2013, p. 80).

The social, political, and educational developments described above demonstrate how current educational objectives rely not on the classical ideal of *Bildung,* which was meant to enable political and social emancipation, but on neoliberal constraints.

PISA: Testing Globalized Competencies?

What today's educational institutions deal with are competencies and soft skills valuable in the free market. Knowledge has become an economic commodity depending on its exchangeable value (Heinzlmaier, 2013, p. 24). This explains the interest of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in quantifying the knowledge of schoolchildren by implementing the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000. Accordingly, every three years, 15-year-olds from randomly selected schools of 65 different "economies" (OECD) are tested in reading, mathematics, and science. PISA testing is undoubtedly an extension of the neoliberal focus on educational metrics and evaluation.

When German pupils scored below the OECD average in the year 2000, a heated debate about the educational system resurfaced in Germany. The PISA experts stressed the high correlation between the test results and social status and ethnic background, demonstrating the selective and effectively discriminatory practices in schools. "The educational system had failed in its task to integrate the immigrants" (Tröhler, 2011, p. 207). However, these results did not lead to academic debates on education. Instead German scholars predominantly criticized the design and purpose of PISA and questioned the measurement and the perversion of the concept of *Bildung* (Czerny, 2010; Münch, 2009; Precht, 2013; Tröhler, 2011). The critique of PISA's methods derives from the divergent goals of two distinct, Protestant educational traditions. Daniel Tröhler ascribes PISA to the Calvinist mission of forming "a harmonious 'One World' of free, globally interacting, and economically secure citizens" (Tröhler, 2011, p. 206). Therefore, the goal of PISA, in line with neoliberal ideology, is for students "to take advantage of the globalized economy" (OECD, 2010, p. 5) by increasing the global effectiveness of their education. By contrast, German scholars

consider personality and inner harmony of the Lutheran tradition the aim of *Bildung*, which cannot be measured by global parameters. Nevertheless, politicians followed PISA´s approach and initiated more reforms to expand scientific subjects in school; thus, further pressuring and constraining the students.

Language - Education - Integration

Regarding the first and second generation immigrant children, language support programs were widely initiated, as the lack of linguistic skills was deemed responsible for the low performance (Roos, Polotzek, & Schöler, 2010). However, although language proficiency plays a critical role in access to higher education for immigrants, simply requiring a higher language proficiency neglects the discriminatory practices of the educational system (Fereidooni, 2011). Research has shown that the social and immigrant background of parents has a significant impact on the evaluation of their children's performance in (primary) schools (Ziegenspeck, 2009). As a result, children, whose first language is not German, are less likely to attend a Gymnasium and receive tertiary education (Ramirez-Rodriguez & Dohmen, 2010).

According to the public discourse, education and language acquisition determine the integration and thus the success of immigrants in society. Interestingly, the neoliberal mindset does not only connect integration with economic success, but it also attributes the failure to integrate to an immigrant's behavior and/or cultural factors. The discourse around integration ascribes social problems such as unemployment, poverty, and exclusion to a deficit in education, thus concealing institutionalized discrimination by blaming the immigrants for their lack of education and language proficiency (Lanz, 2008, p. 112). This argument leads to a treatment that ascribes poor educational attainment to all immigrants, irrespective of their actual qualifications. "Thus far, the lower classes are ethnicized and the belonging to a group of immigrants operates as a class positioning" (Karakayali, 2008, p. 98).

The neoliberal principle of measurability presents a seemingly neutral way to evaluate performance, aiming to demonstrate that the increased competition and efficiency improve education. However, the evaluation of education by neoliberal parameters is highly questionable, because education is not an economic, but societal matter (Bank, 2005).

THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF *BILDUNG* IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Today, the perception of education as an investment in the future, holding the promise of a better life, is often not fulfilled. Research of migration studies has revealed that neither education nor language proficiency necessarily imply upward mobility for immigrants (Binder, Hess, & Moser, 2008; Henkelmann, 2012). Moreover, the neoliberal principle of competition and economization has led to insecure work biographies for a majority of citizens, not only immigrants (Götz & Lemberger, 2009; Sennett, 1998). Education cannot compensate or stabilize this politically undesirable development. In fact, neoliberalism has infiltrated educational discourses to promote its ideology.

The different meanings of *Bildung* provide a concept that can "unite demands and visions, and that can be relatively easily adapted to changing historical, societal, and social conditions" (Horlacher, 2012, p. 143). In this ambiguity lies the strength, but also the

weakness of the ideal. The classical concept of *Bildung* was developed during the nation-building process and has become an important element of national identity. In later German history, the critical *Bildung* ideal evolved as a response to the incomprehensible historical disaster of the Holocaust. For today´s educators, the question arises how the concept of *Bildung* can be salvaged for a diverse society in a globalized and neoliberal world.

The Risk of Equal Opportunities

The neoliberal ideology adopts the postmodern expectations for *Bildung* to enable access and participation in society by promoting "equal opportunities" for all. It uses the principle of "equal opportunities," however, in order to increase competition, while neglecting the policies of distributive justice such as collective wage agreements or shared part-time jobs (Karakayali, 2008; Pasuchin, 2012, p. 154). This principle suggests that education allows anyone regardless of his or her origin to succeed in life depending on personal effort in education. Failure to succeed in the education system is ascribed to a lack of motivation or intelligence of the student and therefore justifies precarious employment and poverty (Pasuchin, 2012, p. 344). Furthermore, the deregulation of global markets "have shifted the balance of risk from capitalists to workers" (Block & Cameron, 2002, p. 12). The responsibility of hardship is thereby transferred to individuals, based on the argument of 'free' choice. However, the so-called freedom of choice could turn into a curse, if students have not developed a strength of judgment. Consequently, students choose their educational path not according to their interests or talents, but rather on future economic security.

Dangers for Democracy

During the preparation for this paper, the resignation of the victims of neoliberal reforms has shifted to anger and aggression. Among the victims of the reforms are not only the unemployed and poor, but also the middle class in insecure working conditions. In October 2014, these disgruntled citizens began expressing their discontent at so-called "Monday demonstrations" in Dresden, a revival of demonstrations in 2004 against the radical labor market reforms (implemented in 2003) known as *Agenda 2010*. Since politicians mainly ascribe the recent economic growth in Germany to these reforms, initiated by the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and Green Party, *Agenda 2010* has sparked the interest of the US government. The neoliberal reforms of *Agenda 2010* intended to make the labor market more flexible and reduce costs of the social system, yet they have reduced job security, caused precarious employment, and raised poverty levels to a historical high of 15.5% (Booth, 2012; Fleckenstein, 2011; Zeit, 2015). As such, scientists have harshly criticized the *Agenda 2010*, arguing that economic and social inequality have actually increased, as a result of pay restraint and *Harzt IV*, the fusion and cuts of unemployment and welfare benefits (Dörre, 2013). The political scientist Christoph Butterwegge warns of the erosion of the welfare state and its damage to democracy (2015). Indeed, research clearly indicates that insecure working conditions and unemployment are the primary source of the xenophobic fears (Bacher, 2001).

In 2004, the protesters lamented social injustice, but today's participants are driven by a diffuse fear and mainly accuse the media of ideological bias and political propaganda. The

middle class fears they will descend the social ladder if their children receive a less competitive education, reminiscent of the 2010 Hamburg school controversy. Their fear derives from the seemingly worldwide competition of skilled immigrants. The education scientist Iwan Pasuchin identifies the discourse about global competition as scaremongering, which he considers a political method to implement neoliberal ideology (Pasuchin, 2012, p. 343). Globalization seemingly evolved into a threat for national labor markets, and the demand for high-performance education appears to be the only answer to this problem. The losers of the educational system appear to have a grim future, and thus give in to neoliberal scaremongering, as the current development of the demonstrations suggest.

The demonstrations went mainly unnoticed until December, 2014, when the protests reached 10, 000 participants. The protestors identify themselves as Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA - *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*). This movement ascribes political problems to the growing Islamic influence on the West. The media promptly dubbed the protesters Nazis, but politicians reacted indecisively. Horst Seehofer, the leader of the ruling party in Bavaria (CSU - *Christlich Soziale Union*) intensified the integration discourse by demanding the sole use of German language in public and at home. Language acquisition symbolizes here a governing practice of the state and is obviously a political reaction to the current xenophobic sentiment expressed by the growing protests.

Counter-protests in several cities have attracted thousands of participants showing their solidarity with refugees and Muslims. PEGIDA continued to expand to different cities and received silent support by the middle class despite the fierce public criticism in the media and by a few politicians, most notably Chancellor Angela Merkel (Smale, 2015). However, the critique of PEGIDA does not solve the origin of hate and xenophobia.

Xenophobic reactions to socio-political issues are not limited to Germany, and are in fact occurring across Europe. But due to ever-present guilt about the historic crimes of the Third Reich, the protests and discussions in Germany are being closely observed. In recent elections, European governments have also experienced a strong shift to the right (Denmark, England, France, Greece, Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden). The national idea of a homogenous culture is revived again as a result of economic insecurities.

The interdisciplinary Council of Migration (*Rat für Migration*) understands the developments in Germany as a result of prejudices, and demands the development of a pluralist self-image (Beitzer, 2015). It is questionable though, whether this call for a multicultural self-image can effectively change the xenophobic atmosphere. The education researcher Frank-Olaf Radtke (Radtke, 2008) warns that simply attributing problems of cultural coexistence to a lack of tolerance, neglects unjust social structures. He points out the consequences of overemphasizing a perspective on 'culture', which evolved in the second half of the 20th century: conflicts, which arise out of social disadvantages, are often described as cultural issues. Explaining social problems based on cultural differences engenders racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. The various critics of PEGIDA, namely the media, the Council of Migration, and counter-protests, have inadvertently reinforced the argument of cultural differences, rather than emphasizing the social origin of the xenophobic movement (Schwan, 2014). It seems that the overall focus on cultural differences in media,

society, and in the humanities has unintentionally led to an ignorance towards economic and social injustice.

Bildung Reloaded

Immigration brings with it new social challenges for civil society and politics. The growing counter-protests indicate that a majority of German citizens are politically active and critical about right-wing national tendencies, and that they are willing to participate in the democratic process to show that PEGIDA does not represent Germany. The Muslim community, scapegoats of the PEGIDA movement, have also joined the counter protests. Middle-eastern music groups performed at the demonstrations in Munich and religious representatives spoke nationwide to the protestors. Nevertheless, many immigrants expressed fear and hesitated to take a strong stand (Jeong, 2015). Other young immigrants such as the rapper Matondo reacted to PEGIDA and the attack on Charlie Hebdo with a song that expressed solidarity with Muslims and accused the media of hate speech (Matondo, 2015). The engagement of immigrant rappers marks a turning point in German rap music, which have historically avoided political topics (cf. Afrob, Nazar, Samy Deluxe, Strom & Wasser feat. The Refugees). Their music addresses issues of racism and xenophobia, which have entered popular forms of art, film and music. Through creative forms of protest, these artists fulfill Humboldt's and especially Adorno's expectations in *Bildung* by evoking self-reflection, critical thinking, and appealing to civil society. However, cultural practices of poetry, music, literature or theatre need to be learned, before they can be used as a way of expression and agency (Greiner, 2015; Ordine, 2014).

The influx of immigrants demands flexible institutional forms of education as well as a culturally sensitive and multilingual approach to *Bildung* that includes all members of society and enables them to participate in education, the economy, and politics. One exemplary project in Munich, studied by the author of this work, illustrates how the classical and the critical ideal of *Bildung* can inspire today´s educational practices in a successful way. The NGO *Deutsches Erwachsenen Bildungswerk* (German Adult *Bildung* institution - DEB) implemented a program known as *Job Stage*, whereby two groups, immigrants and the (predominantly German) elderly unemployed persons, were integrated into a vocational training course to overcome language barriers and prejudices. *Job Stage* offered tuition-free education to strengthen the self and the community regardless of age or language requirements, legal residence permits, age restrictions, or standardized curricula of the national educational system. The course combined computer training and internships with language learning and theatre pedagogy, resulting in an extraordinary educational experience. Participants gained self-confidence by writing and presenting a multilingual play based on their personal experiences. In comparison to regular vocational training, up to 80% of participants of *Job Stage* not only found a job after years of unemployment (According to DEB, regular vocational training places less than 30% of participants into employment), but significantly improved their mental health and social life (Gostrer, 2014). The project viewed *Bildung* as a holistic and social process to develop one´s personality. Thus, it facilitated mutual support and self-empowerment by encouraging the participants to explore their creativity, play sports and learn German. Additionally, the project instructors informed the participants of their legal rights, supported their job search and advised the participants to

decline unjust job offers. Despite the ultimate goal to find work, the classical *Bildung* ideal dominated the course with its theater project, which included the biographies, religion, and creative talents of the individuals. While many participants questioned the usefulness of the theatre play, it created a strong community and fostered engagement with the participants' individual differences. In a diverse society, educational practices need to be sensitive to the background of both immigrant and non-immigrant learners. Liberal Arts, as espoused in classical *Bildung* provide a platform to experience, and negotiate differences. The acclaimed literature by authors who write in German as a second language can serve as a source of inspiration (Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Preis; Müller, 2001; Staniši, 2006; Zaimoglu, 1995). By taking the biographies of the learners into account, poetry and politics are no longer abstract, but connected to their life.

Such open forms of education give non-traditional students a second chance and could thereby prevent the further marginalization of immigrants, whereas a lack of acceptance leads many to search for alternative forms of identification in extremist groups. The sociologist Aladin El-Mafaalani ascribes the rise of the radical Muslim Salafists to youth unemployment, societal exclusion, and an intergenerational conflict (Brühl, 2015a). Interestingly, this provocative youth culture attracts second-generation immigrants, because Salafists are preaching in German. Young German Muslims often do not speak Turkish or Arabic well enough to understand the preaching of Turkish imams in Muslim communities. The linguistic assimilation is thus in conflict with social and economic integration. To combat the radical and antimodernist interpretation of Islam promulgated by extremists, as well as the prejudice against Muslims, *Bildung* needs to expand its umbrella to include the religion and culture of immigrants. Moreover, to foster a coherent teaching style, it might be beneficial to educate imams at German universities. Consequently, in 2011 centers dedicated to the study of Islam were founded at four universities, although Islam has yet to be introduced as a subject in the standard religious education curriculum in secondary schools nationwide, complementing Catholic and Protestant education in schools (Bayer-Gimm, 2015).

While radical Salafists have dominated media coverage in Europe due to the recent attacks by marginalized youth in Paris and Copenhagen, their impact in Germany is considerably smaller than right-wing nationalist extremism (Brühl, 2015b). Ironically, the worldview of the Salafists and PEGIDA, share many characteristics. Both refuse to accept a postmodern, globalized society, and instead embrace a singular ethnic or religious identity, pre-modern rituals, and violence against minorities and the media. The second-generation of immigrants are torn between different values, traditions and languages, and thus feel secure by the extremist's clear boundaries, historical orientation, and recognition. Equally, the PEGIDA-protesters from Eastern Germany experienced disorientation and loss of reputation after the dissolution of the GDR (German Democratic Republic). As the constant uncertainty of postmodernity damages the emotional stability and identity of people (Negt 2014, p. 19), people search for orientation.

The values of *Bildung* cannot solely prevent radicalization of youth, but they offer intellectual orientation and alternatives to violence through creative forms of expression. Classical *Bildung* values creativity as a means to gain self-reflection and self-empowerment (Mecheril & Vorrink, 2013), while the critical ideal encourages historical reappraisal and

political involvement. Critical *Bildung* can therefore channel the rage of stigmatized youth to political activism. In a diverse society, *Bildung* needs to recognize the cultural achievements of immigrants and integrate their multilingualism and religious practices into the curriculum. In this way, *Bildung* can provide recognition beyond a national identity. Moreover, this recognition must be reflected in politics and the economy.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the discourses on contemporary *Bildung* demonstrated the strong influence of neoliberal ideology on education. Yet, it also showed that the fight against economic and utilitarian principles in education is not a new issue. Scholars and society have turned to the classical *Bildung* ideal for over 100 years in the search of guidance. Today, the protesting students were able to use the ideas of classical *Bildung* to demonstrate their discontent of the current neoliberal influence. The strong presence of the *Bildung* ideal in discourse enabled the students to imagine an alternative to the existing educational system, although they have never experienced the full implementation of the *Bildung* ideal. Certain aspects such as free choice of a curriculum as well as unlimited study time, critical reflection on knowledge, and no tuition fees have exist(ed) and exemplify the meaning of *Bildung* in education. Hence, the discourse around *Bildung* prompted the students to fight for less pressure, more intellectual freedom, self-determination and independence. Furthermore, the support of society and thereby the professors and parents was responsible for the success of the students' fight for *Bildung*, since it still is an important element of national identity (Francois & Schulze, 2001). As a result, the universities abolished tuition and discussed changes regarding the implementation of the Bologna reform.

Expectations for *Bildung* remain high and ambivalent. According to a group-discussion by students of the social sciences, *Bildung* of the individual contributes to society (Müller, 2011). Students support the idea of egalitarian free *Bildung* for all. Nevertheless, students segregate the ideal of *Bildung* from qualifications for the labor market. This differentiation explains the ambivalent expectations for tertiary education. On the one hand, students value freedom, independence and critical reflection of the *Bildung* ideal; on the other hand, most students predominantly study to attain qualifications for a future career. The students' orientation towards exploitable knowledge despite their affirmation with the *Bildung* ideal demonstrates how widespread economic values and an entrepreneurial mentality have become (Müller, 2011, p. 101). Thereby the students adopt the neoliberal argumentation, believing that it reflects their actual needs. If education aims to prepare students for this world, it needs to strengthen the self against exploitation and manipulation (Pasuchin, 2012).

The ambiguity of the *Bildung* concept provides neoliberal ideology a platform to turn egalitarian and democratic ideas into competition for the free market. "Equal opportunities" might offer the chance for aspiring individuals to climb the social ladder, but it cannot guarantee financial security for the majority. Hierarchies continue to exist, currently in an ethnicizing way. The integration discourse considers the resulting problems to be cultural, not social. Instead of correcting the discriminatory practices in the educational system and labor market, education and language acquisition function as an assimilating procedure. Therefore, integrating immigrant populations starts by integrating immigrants' multilingualism and culture into the concept of *Bildung*, thus accepting the diversity of society as normal and desired. In this regard, discriminatory practices at the labor market need to be

addressed and reduced. As long as culture serves as a scapegoat for social problems, prejudices towards different cultures fall on fertile soil. The resulting xenophobic atmosphere is jeopardizing social stability all over Europe (Schwan, 2014). As research shows, democracies need a fair distribution of wealth in order to stay stable (Nützel, 2014; Sunde & Jung, forthcoming). The counter-protests against PEGIDA and the various creative projects indicate that *Bildung* can facilitate critical reflection and responsibility, but besides active citizens, democracies need politics to ensure social justice.

When competition in school separates the losers of the system from the winners, education is misused to divide society. In our day and age, the means of education needs to be resignified. The established ideals of *Bildung*, both classical and critical concepts, can hereby provide a valuable resource of guidance as the outcomes of the students´ protest show. A critical, collaborative concept of *Bildung* can unite students and educators in order to reveal the negative consequences of competition and fight for a more just, open and egalitarian society. Ultimately, education should unite and not segregate members of society. The leading question should be: How can education create a world in which we would like to live?

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