

Statements

Bildung from a lifelong learning perspective

Budapest, May 2011

The theme of 'Bildung'. Why ?

Recently, stakeholders in education and training have been witnessing an enhanced emphasis on the functional approach of education. Education and training seem to have as main objective to prepare young people for life in society, and to contribute to the development of a knowledge society and economy. According to the recent Europe 2020 Strategy, education plays a key role in achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

As a consequence, in European policy documents, the emphasis is put on tools, on competences, on measurable outcomes.

However, there is an anthropological tension between the two following questions:

- Do education and training have to provide young people (and adults in lifelong learning) with the competences, skills and knowledge that are useful for society?
- Or do education and training have to contribute to the development of the whole human being (cf. the meaning of 'humaniora')?

The need for a debate on the pedagogical mission of education and training is even more urgent in this period of economic crisis, where the economic returns of education and training are stressed, and in the context of rapidly changing societies, where young people, more than ever, need to make choices.

The EUNEC seminar: objective and context

We started from the 18th century definition of the concept of '*Bildung*', based on a humanistic ideal concept of the human being. '*Bildung*', according to Humboldt¹ aims at the harmonic development of the individual, of the human being as a whole. The

¹ 'Wilhelm von Humboldt: The theory and Practice of Self-Formation (Bildung), 1791-1810'. Author: David Sorkin; Source: Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1983), pp. 55-73; Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

question of *'Bildung'* is as old as human thinking. The concept is difficult to translate: there is no good equivalent for *'Bildung'* in many languages.

Several other concepts seem to be related to the general concept of *'Bildung'*. It sets forward the development of human qualities such as

- citizenship
- critical judgement
- creativity
- values
- general knowledge
- appreciation for arts and culture
- ability to deal with diversity and different cultural backgrounds
- tradition.

The main objective of the EUNEC seminar was to come to a common understanding of the concept of *'Bildung'*, and to reflect on how this concept can be implemented in the contemporary education and training systems.

This common understanding was built up progressively in small working groups, discussing elements for reflection advanced by experts.

The present statements are an element to be kept in mind when EUNEC will reflect on New skills for new jobs in Autumn 2011.

How to put 'Bildung' into practice? How to link 'Bildung' to existing policy lines?

EUNEC wants to initiate a debate at political level to think about a contemporary interpretation of *'Bildung'*. Given the fact that outcomes related to *'Bildung'* are not easily measurable, the concept of *'Bildung'* is hardly present in European benchmarks and progress reports. There is a risk that this particular aspect of education of the human being is neglected, as other outcomes of education and training are more measurable, are more linked to employability and have a larger impact on the ranking of a country in international education statistics.

The emphasis on *'Bildung'* can be enhanced linking up to already existing European policy lines, through the open method of coordination, including peer learning. We refer to the European framework of key competences². Four of them can be translated into *'Bildung'*.

- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Learning to learn

² The *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework* is an annex of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning that was published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* on 30 December 2006/L394.

(http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf)

- Social and civic competences
- Cultural awareness and expression

On the informal meeting of European education ministers of 28-29 March, under the Hungarian presidency, two objectives of the education and training 2020 strategic framework have been stressed:

- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.
- Enhancing creativity and innovation including entrepreneurship.

These objectives are translated explicitly into transversal competences

- Intercultural competences
- Respect for democratic values
- Respect for the environment
- Respect for fundamental rights
- Competence to interact positively with peers from different backgrounds
- A sense of initiative
- Cultural awareness

The fact that Europe stresses the competences above, reinforces schools and all those involved in education and training that work on '*Bildung*' is crucial.

EUNEC also refers to the title of the Europe 2020 Strategy: growth will have to be sustainable. One of the aspects of '*Bildung*' is indeed that young people should become aware of the fact that unlimited consumption will no longer be possible: sustainability is an important feature of '*Bildung*'.

Enhancing emphasis on '*Bildung*' in a broad sense can give trust to young people, give them something to hold on to and keep them on track and prevent them from dropping out of school. This way, working on '*Bildung*' can contribute to achieving one of the Europe 2020 headline targets.

Towards a contemporary definition of '*Bildung*'

EUNEC is convinced that attention for the personal development of youngsters and their capability to live in society is part of the mission of education and training; we would like to see policy makers confirm this.

EUNEC does not deny the importance of knowledge transfer. We are in fact convinced that the functional approach of education and training and the attention for the pedagogical mission of education and training can go hand in hand, are synergetic. Work on enhancing competences and '*Bildung*' can reinforce each other.

Education and training are now on a crossroad: is it all just about learning in order to compete? Or is it also about learning how to live happily? Choosing one of both directions is not an option. A strategic decision is necessary here. Europe has to be aware of the fact that, in order to be competitive, a society needs happy citizens.

During this working seminar, EUNEC started from a Humboldtian definition of the concept of '*Bildung*', putting emphasis on the development of the individual. After two days of

discussions with experts and members of education councils coming from 12 European countries, we came to a broader understanding of *'Bildung'*, as an interaction between an individual and a collective vision on education. *'Bildung'* can be defined in a broad sense: it is about personal development and about social development, brought together in a coherent and balanced way. The contemporary *'Bildung'* has two aspects: the content aspect (we want to give young people a broad view on the world, a kind of compass) and the process aspects: pupils will discover for themselves what they consider to be of value (or not) in finding their direction.

This brings us back to the words of Comenius: *'Omnes, omnia, omnitudo'*³

- *'Bildung'* concerns all human beings (omnes). Everyone has a fundamental right on education: the choice of learning contents should allow everyone to enjoy education and to learn.
- *'Bildung'* is all-encompassing (omnia). All dimensions of the human being should be addressed by education, including the relation with the world and the others.
- *'Bildung'* concerns the whole world (omnitudo). Through education everyone should become prepared to engage oneself to a better world.

'Bildung' is thus an all-encompassing concept, which starts at birth and never ends. It is not only an individual process, but a collective interactive process that brings together different generations and different cultures. Quality input in the early years cannot be underestimated. This concept, by its nature, will have to be constantly redefined in interaction with the changing challenges from society.

The crucial role of education and training

- In early years

Professor Edward Melhuish⁴ insists on the importance of quality input in early childhood. Research demonstrates that the life conditions and education and care during early childhood have a large impact on learning (language learning and literacy, a.o.), behaviour (communication and receptiveness, a.o.) and mental and physical health. Investment at this early stage guarantees the best returns, in terms of employability as well as in terms of the personal development of the child.

EUNEC insists on the importance of giving particular attention to early childhood education and care: the foundations of *'Bildung'* are laid here, as well as the foundations of all learning competences.

- In lifelong education and training pathways

³ *'Who's afraid of Bildung?'*, Hans Van Crombrugge, senior lecturer family pedagogy, Higher Institute of Family Sciences of the University College, Brussels (presentation at the EUNEC seminar, Budapest, 9 may 2011)

⁴ Edward Melhuish, professor of Human Development & Executive Director National Evaluation of Sure Start, Birkbeck, University of London (presentation at the EUNEC seminar, Budapest, 9 May 2011)

Richard Deiss, representing the European Commission, DG Education and Training, insists on the results of statistical studies demonstrating the difficulty of achieving equal opportunities. It is clear that the best jobs are for those with a master degree; it is clear that the ones struck hardest by the crisis are those with low levels of education. It is crucial that all have access to key competences; this was confirmed by EUNEC in 2006 in the statements on key competences.

EUNEC reaffirms the necessity of developing those key competence, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable target group: this is a question of equity, of dignity, of '*Bildung*'.

The crucial role of teachers and schools

If we consider '*Bildung*' to be a regulative principle, a challenging motive for education and training, it is clear that teachers play a crucial role. They are now so much pressured by the emphasis on knowledge transfer and competence building, that there seems little time left for work on '*Bildung*'. The focus in teacher training is very much on schooling and subject matters. EUNEC is convinced that learning to write, to read and to count is simply not good enough. Good teachers, crucial in a well functioning education and training system, are masters in '*Bildung*', through their personality they illustrate what '*Bildung*' means towards their pupils. For that reason, initial teacher training has to focus to skills that help teachers to give their pupils a broad view on the world: teachers have to have good knowledge of their subject, but also develop a good pedagogical attitude and be prepared to continue developing.

Education needs superb teachers. However, it is necessary that the attention that teachers pay to '*Bildung*' can be translated in terms of workload in order to make a constructive dialogue with teacher trade unions possible.

But teachers should not be left alone. Schools have to formulate a clear educational vision reflecting the values of the school. This way, the teacher can lean on the vision of the school. But the development of a vision is only a first step. Schools also have to create space for '*Bildung*' in the curriculum. Only this way, the educational vision of the school becomes a tool that allows to enhance attention for '*Bildung*'.

