



## **Evolve or perish: a theoretical proposition for development of the *Bildung* concept**

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### **Abstract**

The contemporary idea of *Bildung* is in danger of becoming a concept of mere historical significance as its content is poorly elaborated upon in terms of underlying processes. The main aims of the present paper are to (1) argue that this concept must evolve by specifying its content or perish from contemporary use in educational settings (2) present a model of *Bildung* which builds on a combination of current global educational movements and basic adaptive psychological processes common to all people regardless of their diverse backgrounds. The present conclusions point in the direction that *Bildung*, if sufficiently outlined, might be of significant importance for future educational contexts by providing an overarching perspective in terms of values and clear directions in terms of practice. The theoretical and practical implications are also discussed along with the possible limitations of the current analysis.

**Keywords:** Bildung, education, globalization, liberal education, human development

## Introduction

The concept of *Bildung* is one of the most prominent ideological concepts in both German and Scandinavian educational traditions. The interest in *Bildung* is also evident in the quantity of contemporary educational literature aiming to clarify the essence of this concept and includes books (e.g. Gustavsson, 2003), edited volumes (e.g. Slagstad, Korsgaard, & Løvlie, 2003; Gustavsson, 2007; Løvlie, Mortensen, & Nordenbo, 2003; Vettenranta, 2007), special issues in scientific journals (e.g. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 2002, 36, 3) and journal articles (e.g. Horlacher, 2004; Vinterbo-Hohr & Hohr, 2006; Masschelein and Ricken, 2003). However, the popularity and widespread use of *Bildung* in various educational contexts does not imply that this concept is defined in any satisfactory manner in terms of the underlying components or processes which in a clear and unambiguous manner outline its definitional boundaries. Indeed, a closer inspection of the relevant historical and contemporary literature reveals a noticeable tendency to a) avoid attempts to pinpoint the central elements or underlying mechanisms behind this concept (e.g. Nordenbo, 2003; Biesta, 2003), and b) excessively use the metaphorical/allegorical language as well as unclear and elusive parallels when describing *Bildung* (e.g. Gustavsson, 2003).

The main aim of the present paper is to argue that the concept of *Bildung* must conceptually evolve, i.e. adapt to contemporary educational perspectives and be specified in terms of underlying mechanisms or components in order to be useful to academics and educational practitioners, or perish, i.e. decline in popularity and become a concept of mere historical relevance. In order to make this argument more convincing, the current analysis will attempt to provide an alternative model of *Bildung* and outline the basic psychological/educational processes on which this concept rests. More specifically, it will be argued here that modern conceptualizations of *Bildung* should take into account (1) contemporary educational developments which are applicable to a majority of international educational contexts, and (2) fundamental psychological processes common to all people regardless of gender, cultural background, or level of development. The paper is structured in the following manner: Firstly, a historical background (including contemporary notions of *Bildung*) is presented. Secondly, the various definitions tending to portray *Bildung* in poetic and metaphorical manner are critically highlighted. Thirdly, a model of *Bildung* is presented along with a specification of its basic underlying components where the integration of relevant macro (i.e.

contemporary educational perspectives), and micro (i.e. basic developmental processes) approaches is central. Fourthly, an explanation of the rationale on which the present arguments rest is provided. Finally, the paper highlights the possible theoretical and practical implications of the current analysis, outlining its limitations and drawing conclusions.

### **Historical developments and contemporary dilemma**

Although relatively young as a theoretical concept, the idea of prescribed knowledge being necessary for adaptable human development has existed in various forms since the early days of recorded history (Nordenbo, 2003). In other words, the core reasoning behind *Bildung* is easily recognized and acknowledged as important for development in the majority of human societies regardless of the fact that many languages have no word or specific concept containing the main idea behind this process (e.g formation or liberal education). The origins of the concept as known from Scandinavian and German tradition stems from the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and is conceptually related to *paideia*, which denotes the process of planned development of skills and abilities (Foss, 1949). The seventeenth-century German philosophical tradition further developed this idea and coined the term *Bildung* as a combination of educational and religious elements (Korsgaard & Løvli, 2003). Thus, the term indicated development of human nature according to an ideal “picture” of God in addition to emphasizing a secular process of enlightenment and general personal growth. However, the concept tended to change in accordance with various historical, socio-cultural movements (Gustavsson, 2003). For instance, Eckhard Larsen (2004) identifies three distinct phases in the history of *Bildung*. The first one is originating in seventeenth-century Germany and commonly associated with the emerging *bourgeoisie* as a significant social class which was crammed between uneducated people and the aristocracy. This up-and-coming middle class tended to distance itself from both the lower and upper classes by forming a selective and elite social group which was guided by normative images of Ancient Greece, Rome, the Renaissance and Age of Enlightenment. The overall result of this process was a new emphasis placed on explicit general knowledge, which was only accessible through the means of formal education. The second phase of the *Bildung* development originated in eighteenth-century Scandinavia and contrasted with German tradition, being predominantly inclusive in terms of encouraging people to participate in the

construction a democratic society where everyone is required and allowed to contribute. Although it is certainly possible to identify elitist and exclusive tendencies emphasizing knowledge of Latin and classical texts, this idea in Scandinavia was nevertheless closely connected with the rise of educational systems where individuals from all social classes are supposed to participate, and consequently share, a common educational background. Thus, in many ways the major streams of Scandinavian *Bildung* traditions were echoing the ideas of Comenius and Pestalozzi, who advocated that everyone should learn everything and become enlightened as a means of both self-realization and power acquisition. Over time, this “*Bildung* for people” thinking also embraced functionalism as a means of making knowledge useful, and the process in itself represented movement which opposed the inactive, dormant, history-based book knowledge. The third phase in *Bildung*'s development is the modern era where this concept is politicized and as such closely embedded in educational systems which strategically aim to stimulate versatile aspects of human nature. In this sense, the idea of modern *Bildung* as a process of prescribed human development, in contemporary educational systems, predominantly focuses on two fairly ambitious tasks: a) knowledge acquisition and management, and b) interaction between individuals and wider social and cultural contexts.

### **Definitions and descriptions of *Bildung***

Throughout history many theorists attempted to clarify and/or define the concept. For instance, Key (1987) famously declares that *Bildung* it is everything that we are managed to forget, emphasizing the internalization process and the close relationship between *Bildung* and development of the whole or integrated personality. According to Gustavsson (2003), *Bildung* is a journey which symbolizes the movement in the unknown and establishes a consistency between the past, present and future. *Bildung* is further described as a free and never-ending process which is closely associated with personal growth. Hohn (2007) describes *Bildung* as an unfinished circling movement between the individual, who is known, and the general, which is unknown, as well as between the individual and society. Similarly to Gustavsson, Hohn also describes *Bildung* as a never-ending process, a moving target where the issue of personal growth is central (see also Rorty, 1979). According to von Humboldt (2000; Lüth, 2000), *Bildung* is embedded in the human ability for agency, where an individual's thoughts and actions exhibit their inner powers in order that they will gain knowledge of nature or external reality while avoiding becoming alienated from themselves in the process. Klafki (2001) writes that *Bildung* represents a two-sided opening where

individual and experienced reality becomes merged in a dialectical relationship. Synthesizing the historical heritage on the subject, Klafki describes how dialectic relations between a material *Bildung* (the importance of established norms and culture), and a formal one (the importance of personal growth in terms of development of critical thinking and moral values) can result in formation of categorical *Bildung*, which rests on interpretation and transference of knowledge in the direction of basic skills and insights in fundamental “truths”. Next, Sørensen (1974) perceive *Bildung* as a process in which the person’s inner characteristics are formed in interaction with external factors such as educational, cultural and social influences. Thavenius (1995) takes a macro perspective and discusses the concept’s changing historical essence emphasizing the needs of specific groups of people under specific socio-cultural circumstances. Løvlie (2003) perceives the emergence of techno-cultural *Bildung* as a new paradigm, in contrast to traditional book-*Bildung*, and suggests that technological concepts such as cyborg and interface are necessary for modernizing the content of *Bildung* and must be included as meaningful ideas in contemporary discussions on the subject. The additional list of educational theorists, philosophers and sociologists which were in various degrees of explicitness concerned with the issue of *Bildung* is impressively long, including among others Kant, Marx, Hegel, von Humboldt, Rousseau, Gadamer, and Dewey. The list of specific processes or concepts associated with *Bildung* is equally long and includes notions of humanism, religion, nationalism, bourgeois standards, pragmatism, nativism, liberal education, freedom, civilized behavior, self-formation, self-determination, independence, etc.

It is fairly clear from this brief presentation that movement between the known and unknown, integrated personality, nationalism and universalism, development of learning potential and relationships between people’s predispositions, external influences, and the manner in which this transformation is shaped, are central elements of many definitions. However, there are two immediate and interrelated problems with the majority of these approaches. The first one is the use of appealing and metaphorical descriptions which aim to outline the concrete process/concept of *Bildung*, but fail to do so sufficiently (e.g unfinished circle, never-ending process, relationship between the known and unknown, *Bildung* as journey, *Bildung* as circle, and so on). Such approaches often express the romanticized understandings of the concept in which *Bildung* is portrayed in an artistic and appealing manner to the reader without making any attempt to outline the underlying processes specific

to that particular phenomenon. This is related to a second conceptual problem where the majority of these general and symbolic descriptions approach *Bildung* in an extensively abstract manner, increasing its conceptual elusiveness as these descriptions might easily be applicable to other similar concepts such as knowledge, education, intelligence, identity/self, etc. Thus, the problematic status in terms of definition and the lack of effort to make this term functional in terms of practice is apparent. Hence, in dealing with the existing *Bildung* literature, it becomes evident that there exist theoretical challenges (1) to specify in an unambiguous manner the central processes defining *Bildung*, and (2) present this concept in a manner relevant to educational practice. Indeed, a number of theorists have explicitly expressed doubt as to the concept's usefulness. For example, Adorno (1962) implied discontent with the concept and expressed skepticism that it is possible in our modern age for us to meaningfully relate to an idea of education for humanity. Østerud (2007) expresses a similar doubt regarding the difficulty of achieving consensus on some specific, general, or practical knowledge which will provide a basis for the development of *Bildung*. Similarly, Masschelein and Ricken (2003) strongly argue for abandoning the whole idea of *Bildung* on the grounds that this concept might in fact represent a historical obstacle for the introduction of other categories and other ways in which educational perspectives might be advanced. In other words, these theorists suggest that there exists a problem with the broad definitional span of *Bildung* which ranges from specific competencies to general political discourses. Hence, the massive expansion of the conceptual meaning has necessarily contributed to decreased conceptual clarity and consequently decreased utility in practical educational settings.

### **The present model of Bildung**

Although it is easy to agree with the arguments of Masschelein and Ricken (2003) concerning the lack of utility regarding *Bildung*'s modern-day usage, the idea that *Bildung* nevertheless possesses practical and theoretical relevance for the organization of modern educational settings is tempting. Accordingly, the starting point for current analysis is the idea that the concept of *Bildung* must theoretically evolve in order to represent a meaningful and functional process, or, in accordance with the suggestions made by the aforementioned theorists, perish and make room for other concepts and categories which might advance educational theory and practice. Hence, the present model of *Bildung* represents an attempt

to advance the idea of prescribed and adaptive educational development by proposing a relatively simple model outlining the basic processes that should be embedded in the modern *Bildung* concept. The presentation of arguments is twofold: First, the description of *Bildung* as outlined in figure 1 is presented along with the specification of the processes included in the model. Secondly, it is argued that these developmental processes are compatible with contemporary historical developments, technological advances, and global changes, which unavoidably influence the majority of global educational settings.

Figure 1 about here

The present model starts with *Bildung* as a process of balancing the two opposing tendencies which tend to pull human nature in rather opposite directions. This tendency is presented by bipolar continuums or axes stretching between the implicit infinite endpoints. This is partially compatible with some historical and modern notions of *Bildung* where this process is viewed as a development requiring the integration of somewhat contradictory – or even confrontational - forces which influence the development of human nature (e.g. Gustavsson, 2003; Hohr, 2007; von Humboldt, 2000). In addition, the present model is also compatible with suggestions by Klafki (2000) that the contemporary process of *Bildung* must include (1) self-determination, participation, and solidarity, (2) concerns which are specific for the present epoch, and (3) all the dimensions of human capacity recognized today. In addition, the model advocates the understanding of *Bildung* as an educational movement going beyond the present and particular towards the general and enduring (Biesta, 2003; see also Uljen, 2003). Hence, all proposed axes and their end points in the model aim to represent the universal human processes which shape the development of human nature regardless of specific cultural, contextual, social or personal background and as such regard all people worldwide. The model also includes the explicit association between psychological processes which reside on an individual level and certain leading educational perspectives which are in international literature reliably identified as the processes which will shape future educational policies and practices. The model proposes that the ideal *Bildung* as an

idea of adaptive or desired educational development resides in the middle area as a mean of achieving the balance between the somewhat opposing processes.

### **Inclusion vs. distinctiveness**

The first continuum of the present *Bildung* model stretches between inclusion and distinctiveness (Figure 1). The general idea of inclusion is closely associated with the concept of belonging which is repeatedly identified in literature as a basic need important for healthy human development (e.g. Baumaister & Leary, 1995). In the context of education, this idea expresses the concern regarding the position of all individuals and groups of pupils who are excluded from learning and social arenas. Inclusive process as a means of regulating group belonging primarily regards the feelings of non-judgmental social acceptance of those who are in danger of being marginalized (Topping & Maloney, 2005). Based on the quantity of literature and political documents, it is quite evident that the notion of inclusive education has gradually become one of the most dominating educational perspectives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in western societies. This idea represents an important part of the growing global movement promoting basic human rights and equal opportunities for all people around the world (Alaimo & Klug, 2002). The speed of implementation of inclusive measures was facilitated by a number of UN documents which were specifically designed to secure, preserve, and legitimize the individual rights and learning possibilities for all children, regardless of cultural background or developmental level (United Nations, 1989; 1994). Although the concept of inclusion was rigorously scrutinized from several positions (e.g. Florian, 2005; Hornby, 1999, 2001), it is nevertheless fair to conclude that in a relatively short period of time, this idea has emerged as an overarching perspective which has shaped the content of national educational policies, particularly in the countries which base their education on democratic, progressive, liberal and pluralistic foundations. However, although the importance of inclusion for healthy development is evident, it nevertheless poses a dilemma when it comes to the issue of diversity. Thus, one of the recognized challenges in literature is that inclusive education might create a dilemma for practitioners in dealing with the acknowledgement of individuality. Whereas previous educational policies and school practices showed a clear tendency toward a bias inclined to accentuate differences between e.g. mainstream pupils and pupils with special needs, the effects of inclusive education went in the other direction in an attempt to make all pupils alike and thus under-communicate the fact that all human beings have a strong need to be recognized as distinctive persons (Dyson,



2001; Horst, 2006). This line of reasoning is related to Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991) which argues that there exists a fundamental tension between human needs for group validation (inclusion in groups in terms of similarity), and a complementary need for recognition in terms of uniqueness and individuality. The theory further proposes that social identification with groups will be facilitated to the extent in which specific (educational) contexts are able to stimulate the development of these two needs. Thus, inclusion, although important, is not sufficient for adapted development and needs to be complemented with the recognition of distinctiveness in order to fully satisfy the needs of participants in the educational process. Hence, it is proposed here that the first paramount goal of the educational *Bildung* is to provide an overarching atmosphere in classrooms and schools where these two fundamental needs are harmonized. Thus, teachers should be trained regarding how to practice inclusion/distinction aspect of *Bildung* and avoid/minimize dangers of the classical dilemma where their mandate is to simultaneously stimulate a sense of equality among pupils and simultaneously provide contexts which recognize and celebrate individual differences. In this sense, any educational system or individual educator which aims to create a healthy learning environment should attempt to foster sentiments in pupils (i.e. practice *Bildung*) which are in line with the ideas of inclusive/distinctive education.

### **Social competence vs. self-competence**

The second continuum in the present model of *Bildung* stretches between social competence and self-competence (Figure 1). Similar to the idea of inclusion, the notion of social competence represents a well-established concept in contemporary education and refers in general to the ability to manage the complexity of human relations across various contexts and situations. The various definitions of social competence converge on the idea that this concept includes a set of abilities and attitudes which promote adapted social behavior and healthy development of a variety of interpersonal relations over time (Schneider, 1993; Garbarino, 1985; Ogden, 2007). In this sense it is fair to say that there exists little doubt that the ability to manage many different human relationships in a satisfactory manner represents an important part of adaptive human development. Throughout their many years at school, pupils are frequently confronted with demanding situations in terms of social interaction. Children are automatically involved in many different human relations from an early age which might often be perceived as challenging in terms of determining who is stronger, higher, elder, smarter, and ultimately who controls specific situations and actions. These

relations, such as friendships, intimate relationships, family ties, relations to the elderly or teachers, are inherently characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of power. Parallel with other learning process such as mastering environmental cues and knowledge acquisition in terms of traditional learning, a child has to learn how to deal properly with potentially threatening stimuli in the form of other people. Social competence in this regard functions as an important supplement to the previously described process of educational inclusion/distinction. It is difficult to see how it is possible to create and maintain the inclusive contexts without making reference to the participants' general abilities to productively interact with peers, adults and younger children, thus being able to form and maintain relationships over time. In other words, the idea of educational inclusion is doomed to failure if pupils are not equipped with the necessary skills to balance their demanding relationships. However, (and similar to the inclusion/distinction continuum), social competence needs to be complemented with the ability to successfully balance inner developmental challenges, i.e. the process of self-competence. Thus, in addition to the issue of social competence, children are also forced to cope with constant developmental, physical and psychological changes which frequently result in unstable and even chaotic periods of time connected with the issues of personal development and adaptive identity. A relatively stable assembly of personality dispositions rapidly emerges during childhood and adolescence, and these changes require a great deal of effort and self-regulation in order to be properly managed. The number of psychological theories which underline the importance of achieving inner consistency is plentiful. Early propositions focus on the importance of inner balance in achieving harmonic relationships (Heider, 1958) and cognitive dissonance which is caused by performing an action that departs from one's customary and typically positive self-conception (Festinger, 1962). Later propositions are more specific in the scope and focus on the manner in which inner processes are successfully managed. For example, the need for self-affirmation holds that people tend to harmonize positive and negative aspects of their self-image by underlining and reinforcing positive aspects of it when there is a possibility that negative aspects could become salient and gain advantage (Steele & Liu, 1983). Such a threatening situation is at the center of Self-Evaluation Maintenance Theory (Tesser, 1988), which assumes that persons behave in a manner that will maintain or increase self-evaluation and that an individual's relationships with others have a substantial impact on their self-evaluation. The degree of this impact is influenced by (1) the level of our performance relative to another person, (2) the emotional closeness of another person, and

(3) how relevant the task is to our self-definition. Self-Verification Theory (Swan, 1990) is another line of reasoning which stresses the importance of balancing self-relations and suggests that people have a need to seek confirmation of their self-concept - whether this self-concept is positive or negative. Such confirmation may satisfy the need to maintain a consistent and stable sense of the self which parallels one's own perception of reality. The need to balance inner self-processes is also detectable in Symbolic Completion Theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) which holds that the valued aspects of a person's self-concept are involved in the active search for some sort of social recognition. Social recognition may be achieved by either symbolic means (money, car, clothing) or behavioral ones (engaging in a successful activity). In sum, there exist a great number of theoretical propositions which underline the importance of an individual maintaining inner consistency in terms of balancing emerging emotions, cognitions, and behaviors during the process of growing up.

Following this line of reasoning, it is possible to perceive increased skills in terms of social competence and self-competence as two complementary processes which help young people to cope with social and developmental demands. As such, these complementary processes jointly provide an individual with the necessary competencies essential to harmonic development in the complex web of relations embedded in at times insensitive educational environments. Similar to inclusion/distinction, it is argued here that the second principle goal of the *Bildung* process in the context of education is to provide an overarching atmosphere in classrooms and schools where the importance of social competencies and self-competencies are communicated, stimulated and ultimately taught.

### **Self-expression vs. self-suppression**

The third continuum in the present model of *Bildung* moves between self-expression and self-suppression (Figure 1). Self-expression refers to free disclosure of emotions and cognitions which are important to a person during their educational development. These self-expressive emotions and cognition might be visible in every activity in educational settings in which the self is disclosed and communicated to others. The positive aspects of self-expressive tendencies in education are widely emphasized in literature (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994; Fusani, 1994; Cayanus, 2004; Downs, Javidí, & Nussbaum, 1988; Sorenson, 1989). Furthermore, the free manifestation and disclosure of self-important sentiments is also

theoretically associated with the experience of flow where "*consciousness about self disappears and time experiences changes*" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). According to the theory, the experience of flow is dependent upon the optimal level of the following two factors: skills and challenges. When skills and challenges are too low, it is likely that the individual will give up any behavioral engagement because the activity is too difficult for them. Similarly, if the skills are too high and challenges too low, people will not pursue an activity because of their lack of stimulation (boredom). Thus, an optimal level between skills and challenges tends to promote self-expression, either represented in the display of school activities, disclosure of artistic ideas, or simply interest in sports or music. As such, self-expression is potent in stimulating educational settings where the inner experiences can be freely disclosed to friends and educators and provide recognition of existence and existential acceptance in terms of our individual uniqueness. At the other end of this continuum is the opposite process presently coined "self-suppression", where children tend to be extremely shy and cautious in a majority of situations. This tendency might ultimately result in social isolation and extreme loneliness. Shyness and behavioral withdrawal are consistently in research associated with difficulties such as social anxiety, depression, social phobia and avoidant personality disorder (Bruch & Belkin, 2001; Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001; for overview see Lund, 2010). These modes of behavioral functioning are easily visible in educational settings which are per definition social in the sense that traditional schooling automatically provides contexts which place a strong demand on pupils when it comes to being socially assertive and active (Paulsen & Bru, 2008). However, pupils described as being shy also represent a neglected group in schools, as this type of behavior does not pose an immediate challenge for teachers in comparison with behaviors which are noticeably disruptive and disorderly (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001; Pye, 1989).

In present work, these apparently opposed processes of self-expression and self-suppression are theoretically related, as they are perceived to represent the end points on the continuum between communicative self-assertiveness and under-communicative self-timidity. Thus, the processes are complementary in the sense that recommended functioning resides on optimal levels between extreme points which are modified by potent social circumstances and other features of external "reality". Similarly, as the relationship between inclusion and distinctiveness, and social- and self-competence, the present proposition is that the third paramount goal of the educational *Bildung* is to stimulate development in pupils which

provides a balance between the constant need for expressing their inner sentiments and paying attention to social and other circumstances calling for suppression of these impulses. In other words, although the suppression of the self is certainly counterproductive in terms of healthy development and in promoting other aspects of *Bildung* (inclusive measures and competence development), it nevertheless functions as a process which brings equilibrium or symmetry between urges for “being heard” and “hearing only my own voice”. This is not to downplay the importance of self-expression, as the value of the educational performance might often be based solely on sincerity and truthfulness to one’s inner self, and this quality should be actively recognized by educators. It follows that educators should attempt to stimulate self-expressive activities in either written or oral format as a part of general *Bildung* development. Allowing nonjudgmental communication provides an establishment of a base line which conveys indicators for further development in terms of mandatory learning levels. This approach is also an important aspect of adapted instruction in which inhibition of pupil’s initiatives might negatively influence motivation, personal development and, ultimately, the results of the learning process.

### **External pressures vs. autonomy**

Finally, the fourth continuum in the present model of *Bildung* moves between autonomy and external pressures (Figure 1). The concept of autonomy refers to intrinsically motivated behavior where pupil’s activities and efforts are based on personal interests in the activity itself (Deci, 1975). The postulation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as end points on the imaginary continuum between autonomous behavior and external pressures is fairly unproblematic in terms of theory, as these processes have been widely researched across diverse behavioral domains, including educational settings (for an overview see Deci & Ryan, 2008). The concept of autonomy is a central concept in self-determination theory, which postulates that autonomously based and externally controlled behaviors fundamentally differ in terms of underlying regulatory processes and accompanying experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, when pupils work on assignments because they find them interesting, they are basically doing the activity on a completely voluntary and enjoyable basis. In contrast, assignments which are perceived, controlled and initiated by teachers frequently involve perception of external pressure, ultimately resulting in the sense of enforced actions and general displeasure in pupils. It is important to note at this point that, similarly to the idea of inclusion or self-expression, we do not wish to romanticize theoretical

concepts by portraying idealized or unrealistic learning settings. It is clear that many school activities, similar to premises of paid or professional jobs, necessarily and unavoidably contain a great deal of externally based incentives which provide a useful timeframe and sense of direction, making sure that assignments are done in time. However, it is fair to say that many school environments combined with specific teacher types are not sufficiently sensitive to the importance of designing autonomous supportive learning settings which stimulate and promote intrinsic motivation. This is partly understandable taking into consideration that the relationship between external cues and intrinsic motivation is extremely complex and, ultimately, is also subject to individual differences. Nevertheless, as autonomy is unquestionably important to human functioning and general development, it is argued here that this process should be included in the modern conceptualization of educational *Bildung*. Hence, educators should attempt to cultivate and promote in their daily work the balance between external pressures and autonomous activities in a more organized and systematic manner.

### **Why these processes and not some others?**

It is reasonable that the critical reader at this point is wondering why exactly these processes were chosen to fill the content of the revised *Bildung* concept. As noted earlier, the starting point for development of the present model is the observation that the concept of *Bildung* must evolve in order to represent a meaningful idea in modern education and play an active role in influencing the development of young people world-wide, or perish from contemporary discussions and be sporadically mentioned as a concept of merely historical importance due to its conceptual elusiveness. The present arguments support the idea that *Bildung* has a potential to maintain its position as a guiding principle of pupil's general development in a variety of educational settings under the condition that its content is in line with modern developments collectively shaping the future direction of current international educational systems. In other words, the content of *Bildung* must reflect relevant contemporary processes which have gained their validity over the years in the international educational community. For example, the evolution of the *Bildung* concept should in one way or another follow the globalization process which in general terms involves a complex web of growing economic exchanges, an explosion of human (e)migration, and establishment of international value standards (e.g. the number of UN documents on human rights). This unstoppable tendency links countries together through a variety of trade-based

processes, inevitably influencing and shaping national educational policies by pushing them toward an establishment of the common ground embedded and further legitimized in general humanistic values. Thus, the national educational systems which historically had an autonomy and monopoly over the transmission of traditional and context-bound values through the power embedded in educational institutions are now forced to adapt to values and standards originating from the wider international community. Consequently, any model which aims to revise or modernize the content of *Bildung* should assume a starting point in ideas and processes which are identified in contemporary literature as being important for the further development of international educational policies in line with general humanistic values. More specifically, the reason for why it was suggested here that inclusion/distinctiveness, social/self-competence, self-expression/suppression, and autonomy/external pressures are the processes which should be an integrated part of the revised understanding of *Bildung* is based on the arguments that these processes reflect general humanistic ideas and represent fundamental and adaptive developmental processes which are either empirically validated in educational/psychological literature or widely accepted as ideas which should guide future developments of international educational societies. Consequently, it logically follows that present arguments do not support the idea of *Bildung* as narrowed down to context-limited definitions and meanings which are in contrast to modern global developments in the context of education. For example, *Bildung* is perceived here as neither general nor specific explicit knowledge. Rather, traditional knowledge acquisition is associated with specific competencies and follows the path of knowledge quantity. As such, knowledgeable individuals who are good in particular areas of expertise do not necessarily or automatically develop values which are in line with inclusion or social competence. Knowledge acquisition often gallops ahead of other important aspects defining human nature in terms of fundamental processes. Although *Bildung* is in essence certainly related to basic epistemological questions, we nevertheless posit that it is possible to be emerged in *Bildung* thinking and practice it regardless of educational or developmental level. Similarly, *Bildung* does not stand for educational level. The connotative meaning of the word “education” implies recognized credentials which testify that knowledge is acquired through formal channels, e.g. traditional schooling. However, recorded history testifies to the existence of highly educated people whose behavior was directly contradictory to the basic premises on which the present *Bildung* concept is based, e.g. humanistic ideas. Furthermore, the notions of knowledge and education (which are

frequently and empirically related to high levels of intelligence as expressed in high IQ scores) were often erroneously confused with *Bildung*. However, and similar to knowledge and education, we posit that the notion of high IQ is not necessary dependent on the processes embedded in *Bildung* thinking and behavior (and vice versa). While people with a high IQ are competent in many areas associated with general knowledge and problem solving, their talents say little about their ability to, for example, relate meaningfully to other persons, manage their inner personal processes or be inclusive or autonomous in terms of motivation. It logically follows that *Bildung* should not be confused with specific or contextual behavior in terms of good manners, etiquette or protocols specific to distinct time periods or situations. In other words, it is quite possible to be embraced and actively practice *Bildung* and yet not respond in a satisfactory manner to situations requiring contextual or socially conditioned knowledge. Finally, *Bildung* is not the same as identity or self, although these two concepts come very close, as both are centered on the issue of human development. The main difference is that identity or self is more closely associated with the notion of continuity over time as being a distinct person from other people. In contrast, the main emphasis in the present development of *Bildung* precisely concerns the development of the universally shared processes with clear humanistic principles - regardless of individual differences. This list could be expended with notions that *Bildung* should also be associated with national, cultural and social norms, ethics attached to specific religious systems and historical national ideals. The tendency to conceptualize *Bildung* in terms of contextual or national values was understandable before the era of globalization when taking into consideration that the ideological ideas of the past were not transmitted as fast and effectively as they were at the end of twentieth century. However, the tendency to describe *Bildung* by association with a number of “locally” shaped ideas with a clear normative directive has also contributed to imprecision concerning the definitional boundaries of the concept. In sum, although it is expected that abovementioned processes could function as a support for the development of *Bildung* and are probably empirically related to it in the sense that all of them embrace the idea of desired human development, they nevertheless are not considered here to be either necessary or sufficient conditions for the development of *Bildung*.



### **The Potential Shortcomings of the Current Analysis**

The current analysis suffers from several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, and most obviously, there is a possibility that the present model actually contributes to further elusiveness of the concept by being merely one of the many attempts to say something sensible about such a complex concept as *Bildung*. However, the strength of the model rests on integration of existing social psychological processes which have already been identified in the context of education as being vital for pupil's adaptive development in terms of future productive citizenship. It follows that the processes outlined in the present model could be further specified and implemented in teacher education as overarching principles which might influence the learning atmosphere in classrooms and educational institutions. Secondly, the present model is somewhat normative and value charged, and such an approach might run an obvious danger of claiming a monopoly over a recommended pupil's development. However, it is difficult to be detailed about the content of this concept and yet avoid being normative at some level, as the whole idea of educational *Bildung* rests on the recommended path for "healthy" development. In addition, the present propositions do not claim a monopoly over the only "true" model of *Bildung*. On the contrary, the model's conceptualization is flexible in the sense that other theorists might have strong arguments against the inclusion of the proposed processes, and might make an attempt to rename, replace or reject the parts of the model. However, the rationale for development of the present arguments strongly advocates that (1) *Bildung* should be revised in order that it will evolve and make sense for educational practice, and (2) this revision and consequent specification of the revised concept should be influenced by global educational processes reliably identified as being common to all people, regardless of national origin, gender, or race. This notion, which underlines the explicit universality of the present *Bildung* concept, represents a third possible limitation of the current analysis. Although the strong position is taken on the issue that future conceptualizations of *Bildung* should be based on universal ideas common to all people, it is easy to recognize that the general notion of universality is obviously problematic in the sense that such an approach tends to neglect the importance of cultural and national influences, individual differences in terms of development and the general issue of freedom in determining which processes should be included as parts of the recommended development (for reflections on this subject see Uljens, 2003). For instance, in relation to an individual's development of social and self-competence, it is now commonly accepted that the development, function and "construal" of the self is quite different in

cultures which differ across the independent vs. interdependent dimension (Cross & Gore, 2003). Thus, the cultural specifics might ultimately change the manner in which the parts of *Bildung* are fostered. Taking into consideration the importance of culture in shaping reality, it is reasonable to agree in principle with this potential objection and support the role of specific national influences in constructing the “local” meaning of *Bildung*. This is also partly unavoidable and the part of the same process where overall national educational instructions relevant for the “central” areas of the country, are frequently perceived as irrelevant for some local contexts and, accordingly, are changed or adapted in order to fit the contextual reality of the geographically smaller or more remote places. Nevertheless, it is possible that cultural adaptations do not necessarily influence the content of the concept but they might merely play a part in the manner in which these processes are expressed and practiced in particular contexts. Finally, there is a vague conceptual connection in the present work between *Bildung*, which is the main concept of the present analysis, and the same underlying processes we frequently associate with *Bildung*, such as the notions of humanism and human development. In other words, in the present analysis it has been taken for granted that *Bildung* reflects humanistic ideas and stands for human development without presenting arguments for such an association. Similarly, the relationship between *Bildung* in the context of education and *Bildung* as a concept regarding human development in general is not sufficiently provided. Presently, these issues, although important in terms of achieving conceptual clarity, are nevertheless perceived as a possible theoretical detour which may distract the reader from the main arguments presented in the present analysis.

### **Theoretical and practical implications of the present work**

Notwithstanding these limitations, there are several theoretical and practical implications of the current analysis. In terms of theory, this is to our knowledge the first attempt to propose a structural model of *Bildung* and specifically delineate its content which combines contemporary global processes in the context of education with basic psychological mechanisms central to adaptive development. The present approach might be beneficial in terms of further development of *Bildung* as an important integrative energy in shaping the variety of educational settings. The model also provides a starting point for initiating a discussion considering the viability of *Bildung* as a meaningful concept. In addition to implied theoretical advances, there are clear practical implications of the current analysis in terms of designing the specific measures which would promote the implementation of

*Bildung* ideas in educational institutions. The critical development of the present propositions might provide educational institutions with a clearer and stronger value basis for meeting the growing diversity of pupils, parents, and educators in terms of background. Hence, the present model might represent a starting point for developing ideas which might be applied in the process of training educational practitioners and, consequently, implementation in didactic approaches to various types of instruction.

### Conclusion

The main idea of the present paper is to argue that more rigorous theoretical efforts are required in order to further develop *Bildung* as a meaningful concept that can enrich the variety of educational contexts in terms of theory, practice, and values. The model presented here represents a combination of global educational movements which are now characteristic for many national contexts and basic adaptive psychological processes common to all people regardless of their background. Although the present proposition could and should be a subject of modification and improvement, it is nevertheless reasonable to make a conclusion based on present arguments that the call for renewing the concept of *Bildung* by specifying its underlying processes is valuable, as it provides a starting point for further development and, consequently, implementation of this concept in practice.

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Figure 1. The present model of *Bildung*.

