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Going Deeper into Profound Learning through Intellectual Humility, Deep-Surface Learning, and Bildung

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Abstract: Profound learning (PL), recently introduced, is considered here through the lenses of intellectual humility, deep-surface learning, and *Bildung*.

The purpose of this conceptual review is to develop a richer understanding of profound learning (PL) by considering key tenets of intellectual humility, deep and surface learning, and *Bildung* to see how they might elaborate PL, which has only recently been suggested. Kroth (2016) originally introduced the idea of the profound learner. He defined a *profound learner* as "someone who pursues deeper knowledge regularly over time" (p. 29). This, he said, was to distinguish longitudinal, persistent deepening over a lifetime from episodic learning *experiences*. This has been further conceptually and empirically developed to include the relationship of profound learning to spiritual disciplines (Carr-Chellman & Kroth, 2017), preparing profound learners (Kroth & Carr-Chellman, 2018), qualities of profound learners and learning as identified by adult learning experts (Kroth & Carr-Chellman, 2018), and the use of metaphor to conceptualize profundity (Kroth & Carr-Chellman, 2017).

Intellectual humility is a character trait "related to open-mindedness, a sense of one's own fallibility, and a healthy recognition of one's intellectual debts to others" (From the John Templeton Foundation website, downloaded 10-2-18). The *deep-surface approach to learning* contrasts a surface approach to learning, which is characterized by the desire to meet course requirements with minimum efforts, with a deep approach, which is characterized by meaningful learning, application, appropriate methods, built upon a solid foundation of earlier knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2007). *Bildung* is "…a philosophical concept that refers to processes of cultivation of human capacities as well as to the end state of this process, the state of being educated, cultivated, or erudite" (Fuhr, 2017, p. 3).

Profound Learning

Profound learning is a way to think about lifelong learning (Kroth, 2016). A profound learner, Kroth (2016) says "pursues ever-deepening as a way of life" (p. 68). Conceived in this way, profound learning is a proactive and ongoing approach rather than one held captive by an unpredictable event that transforms perspective (Mezirow, 1991). As well, profound learning is not an "adult" learning theory but is rather a lifelong learning perspective. This deep learning can occur at any point in one's life. Indeed, "a centerpiece of profound learning is penetrating mystery" (Kroth, 2016, p. 68), in whichever domains – rational or super-rational, natural or preternatural – they may occur. This abyssal exploration into the unknown and opaque includes spiritual and scientific investigation and may be a dispositional search into this mystery or perhaps a habitual, quotidian quest undertaken via a set of practices which come about as a result of an intellectually, physically, emotionally, or a spiritually moving experience.

Intellectual Humility

Intellectual humility is a concept in the making with no clearly defined agreed-upon theory (Johnson et al., 2017). After review of contemporary literature, there is disagreement on which model best describes the concept and whether intellectual humility should be considered one unique trait or a cluster of traits. Johnson et al. (2017) describe this divide in agreement as monism, referring to one unique trait, versus pluralism as being a collection of related traits. They go on to say that better understanding or "being aware of this central difference between the kinds of views is helpful in understanding the current debates in the philosophical literature." (From the Oxford Bibliographies website, downloaded 12-28-18)

Tanesini (2018) adds to the discussion by stating that contemporary philosophical literature views intellectual humility as falling into one of two "families": 1) as a virtue of ignorance (Driver, 1989, 1999, 2001), or 2) as a virtue of accuracy (Snow, 1995). Whitcomb et al. (2015) view it as a realistic assessment of one's intellectual shortcomings while at the same time regretting one's shortcomings and limitations and thus admitting their existence such that one may deal with them (Whitcomb, p. 11). The John Templeton Foundation describes intellectual humility as a moral virtue "related to open-mindedness, a sense of one's own fallibility, and a healthy recognition of one's intellectual debts to others" (From the John Templeton Foundation website, downloaded 10-2-18), as well as an approach to learning.

Tanesini (2018) argues that intellectual humility is a cluster of attitudes - "directed toward aspects of one's cognitive agency that serve the knowledge and value-expressive functions" (p. 400) that make up someone's "cognitive make-up" (p. 399). She argues that intellectual humility is a virtue that is based on stable attitudes that serve knowledge and value-expression functions. This includes modesty and self-acceptance. Modesty from proper pride about one's intellectual achievements and self-acceptance as an evaluation of one's own intellectual limitations is not to be confused with self-esteem or social standing. Tanesini argues that modesty and self-acceptance are often found together.

To summarize, as a profound learner, this need for a deeper and more meaningful understanding "of one's encounter with the world" (Kroth & Carr-Chellman, 2018, p. 67) and the knowledge one pursues through continued deep learning, we argue, include the character traits of intellectual humility. Intellectual humility represents a person who is intellectually modest, is formed to express a commitment to epistemic goods - doing what we know is the right thing, and is based on past experiences one has through the need for deeper knowledge and understanding.

Deep and Surface Learning

Deep learning results in depth of understanding, while the purpose of surface learning is more pragmatic. Research shows that some students have a deep approach to learning and others have a more surface approach (Fink, 2013). In general, students pursuing deep learning are interested in developing a "personal, meaningful understanding of the material" (p. 21), while other students just want to be able to reproduce course content. Surface and deep learning has been described as the difference between learning facts to pass a test versus recognizing the connections between the facts and why they are interrelated (Säljö, 1979). As Coombs (2002) pointed out, not every question is a problem that needs to be resolved as quickly as possible. Those who excel in surface learning often seek immediate solutions to questions that are not easily resolved and may in fact, be mysteries. Here we are most interested in the qualities and processes found in deep learning.

The origins of deep and surface approaches to learning began as early as Biggs' work in 1970 (Entwhistle, 2015). Entwistle (as described in Moon, 1999) summarized deep and surface approaches to learning. The intent of surface learning approaches is "to cope with course requirements" (p. 122), which include "studying without reflecting on either purpose or strategy; treating the course as unrelated bits of knowledge; memorizing facts or knowledge routinely; finding difficulty in making sense of new ideas presented; feeling undue pressure and worry about work" (p. 122). In contrast, the intent of deep learning approaches is to understand the ideas for themselves, which is accomplished by "relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience; looking for patterns and underlying principles; checking evidence and relating it to conclusions; examining logic and argument cautiously and critically; becoming actively interested in course content" (p. 122). Moon (1999) further suggests that deep learning is "actively integrated into the cognitive structure" (p. 134), which accommodates and possibly changes as a result.

Educators may be able to push students toward deeper approaches to learning. Gibbs (in Fink, 2013), after working with teachers who tried to move students toward deeper learning experiences, shared ideas for doing so. These ideas included: 1) developing an underlying concept of learning or knowledge; 2) developing metacognitive awareness and control; 3) providing space and freedom to investigate their own interests; 4) making students aware that only full understanding will be considered a satisfactory learning outcome; and 5) making learning strategies more active and interactive.

Blaich and Nelson's study (Mayhem et al., 2012) found that those students who carried out moral reasoning in groups and provided explanations for their moral choices to their fellow classmates had integrated what they had learned and explored in the course far more deeply than those who did not. This personalization of what one has learned is the fundamental component of deep learning as it allows the student to change their character in terms of what they come to deeply appreciate. The need to explain why one deeply holds an ethical view led students to explore and discover their own ethical views more closely.

Green et al. (2013) examined the results of their attempts to inculcate deep learning into their students and found that: 1) students had to have sufficient understanding of the theory involved, and 2) students deepened their understanding to the degree they could explain how to solve an economics problem and present their solution via a variety of methods. The deep learning approach was then evaluated in measuring how well students integrate what they have learned in the later courses in economics. To make this approach successful, the course was structured in such a way as to encourage the students to deepen their understanding and make the connections among the various theories they learned in class and how to apply them to realistic problems in economics. This required a change in assessing the students, which leads to more investment by the students and the professors (Green et al., 2013).

To summarize, deep learning has implications for profound learning. Deep learning results in meaningful understanding for learners, which is integrated into and adapts their existing stock of knowledge such that it makes a lasting difference in the way they interpret new information, as well as how choices are made over their lifetime including future learning endeavors. Deeper learning involves more than facts, but also includes the inter-relationship of ideas and concepts, patterns, and their relationship to prior knowledge. A deep approach to learning emerges from the interest and curiosity of the learner, more than or in addition to external learning expectations, which may or may not be immediately, or ever, practically useful. Finally, though most of the work on deep and surface learning has been conducted in educational

settings, we propose that these ideas are applicable to lifelong learning and should be considered within the context of profound learning theory development.

Bildung

Bildung is a concept that has been around for 200 years. With no literal English definition, it is concerned with developing individual capacities to their highest potential and the search for truth, beauty, aesthetics, and morality (Fuhr, 2017; Fuhr, Laros, & Taylor, 2017). *Bildung* is the ongoing search for how to lead a meaningful and good life. It values liberty and human dignity. It means having a broad understanding of many topics, a wide range of virtues and capabilities. *Bildung* is related to self-direction and life-long learning. *Bildung* is a "never-ending process of critically assessing knowledge" (Fuhr, 2017, p. 10), and in order to be "educated," a person should know a broad variety of subjects; should have an understanding of the underlying principles of the subjects; and the 'whole person' should be touched by this understanding" (Fuhr, 2017, p. 13). As such, while *Bildung* seeks the highest development of human potential, it values complexity, depth, universal meanings, and the "open and uncertain interplay of components" (Rucker, 2017). *Bildung* is not a neutral quality but is "something noble and undeniably good" (Prange, 2004). Indeed, *Paideia*, the classic notion of Greek humanism that the real goal of humanity is "striving for truth, beauty and virtue" (Fuhr, 2017, p. 3), has influenced the notion of *Bildung*.

Bildung, from its inception, was concerned with self-cultivation (Bohlin, 2013). Bohlin equates Nussbaum's assertion that liberal education's goal to liberate the mind, to critically examine society's norms and traditions, and to "take charge of their own thought" (Nussbaum, 1997, in Bohlin, 2013, p. 391). Critical theorists from the Frankfurt School felt *Bildung* was a key part of their work (Gur-Ze'Ev, 2002), because autonomy, the full development of individual potential, a commitment to free will, and their ability to "escape from the dominant normalization processes and the manipulations of hegemonic hierarchies" (p. 392).

Although *Bildung* has been considered in a wide variety of contexts, "*Bildung*-Psychology" provides a focused lens to help inform profound learning. The concept of *Bildung*-Psychology, which was initially conceptualized and moved forward by Christiane Spiel, has a focus on lifelong learning, looks structurally at developmental and educational psychology to lay out processes applicable to an educational career (Wagner, Strohmeier, & Schober, 2016). *Bildung* is both a product and a process (Spiel et al., 2008). The product is a person who has developed certain characteristics, and the process is how those are developed in that person. Those characteristics are subject to change and debate, especially since the term *Bildung* has changed in meaning, and is interpreted in terms of the context within which it is used. *Bildung*, Spiel et al. (2008) say, includes both occupational-technical qualifications and social-cultural competencies such as social skills.

Spiel et al. (2008) propose a structural model of *Bildung*-psychology, which contributes to the development of these two sets of competencies. They are influenced by three dimensions: 1) that every person goes through a chronological "*Bildung*-career" (p. 155); 2) that functional areas of educational psychology, such as research, counseling, intervention, and evaluation, support and are also included in *Bildung*-psychology; and 3) this learning is accomplished on three levels, which are microlevel, mesolevel, and a macrolevel which represent the individual's direct environment; the institutions the person attends over the course of a career; and the entire system, including political guidelines and conditions. *Bildung*-Psychology, "is concerned with all

educational processes contributing to the development of individuals, as well as all conditions and measures potentially influencing these processes…" (Wagner et al., 2016, p. 626).

To summarize, several qualities of *Bildung* have applicability for reinforcing, extending, and deepening the conceptualization of profound learning. First, *Bildung* is lifelong, ongoing learning, and self-cultivated learning. It is not dependent upon events, but is a self-directed activity, even a disposition, reinforced culturally. Second, an important component of *Bildung* is an emphasis upon developing virtues and seeking aesthetical qualities, such as beauty, truth, and morality. This is intentional movement by the learner toward lasting, higher-level qualities. Third, *Bildung* is concerned with developing a wide range of knowledge, not only depth in one area, and being educated is concerned with underlying principles, complexity, and interrelationships over an array of topics. Fourth, *Bildung* is intended to help individuals reach their highest potential, which involves striving for the good in humanity, and moving toward self-perfection. Fifth, *Bildung* is concerned with questioning societal assumptions and liberation, in particular liberating the mind from hegemonic assumptions. Finally, while *Bildung* is interpreted a variety of ways, it can be structured into educational processes that reinforce the qualities which develop people to their highest potential.

Going Deeper into Profound Learning

Profound learning is a continuous and lifelong process of seeking truth in all areas of the human experience. The three theoretical frames here add to our understanding of profundity by considering issues of character, virtue, morals, openness, and complexity, along with a process that is voluntary, self-initiated, and continuous over a lifetime. Profound learning, grounded in these constructs, becomes a richer picture of a learner who is open to investigating more complete "truths", who takes the lead in the lifelong pursuit of a wide-ranging depth of ideas and knowledge, and who learns not only for utilitarian reasons, but also more virtuous pursuits of truth, beauty, and contribution.

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