

University of Groningen

## Critical Thinking, Citizenship, and Vocational Training

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*Published in:*

Opening up spaces for meaningful engagement in educational praxis

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2020

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Zuurmond, A. (2020). Critical Thinking, Citizenship, and Vocational Training: Creating a Space for Bildung. In N. Montesano Monteressori, & G. Lengkeek (Eds.), *Opening up spaces for meaningful engagement in educational praxis* (pp. 19-42). Eburon.

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## Chapter 2

# Critical Thinking, Citizenship, and Vocational Training: Creating a Space for *Bildung*

*Anouk Zuurmond*

## 1. Introduction

The importance of *Bildung* in education has been emphasised in recent years in many ways, and for many reasons. Generally understood as a concept that refers to educational attempts to provide students with an opportunity to develop moral awareness, encounter arts, cultivate a personal identity or to progress in social skills, it is currently hailed by critics of the neoliberal paradigm in education - who argue that *Bildung* provides the perfect answer to an excellence-driven, competition-based, economic frame of thinking about schooling (e.g. Nussbaum, 2016). At the same time, it is presented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as an important means to enhance human and social capital as contributors to economic growth, whereby this organisation stresses the importance of "non-cognitive competences, values, norms and attitudes with regard to health, civic and social participation" (OECD, 2010). These different interpretations illustrate the observation by some educational philosophers that "*Bildung* has become a large field covering nearly everything in pedagogical discourse" (Masschelein & Ricken, 2003, p. 141). However, the fact that *Bildung* is conceptualised in many different ways in recent thinking about education, not only makes it theoretically complex: it is moreover challenging at the practical level to implement *Bildung* in schools.

In the first part of this chapter, an overview is given of recent research texts and policy documents published in the Netherlands on the notion of *Bildung*, which range from utilising this idea to emphasise the cultivation of the individual personality, to understanding *Bildung* as a necessary means to become socialised or acquainted with societal and professional norms. In section 2.1, I will describe how - mainly - philosophers have attempted to negotiate between both ends of the spectrum in their conceptualisations of *Bildung*. Section 2.2 will then analyse three recent policy documents on *Bildung* in education, bringing to light that these texts strongly emphasise the more social interpretations of *Bildung* - which is a similar finding to that of Blaauwendraad in her study of policy documents on citizenship education

in our previous publication *Complexity in Education. From Horror to Passion*. (Bakker & Montesano Montessori, 2016). In turn, section 3 will explore how one can steer away from the pitfall of interpreting *Bildung* merely as a socialising strategy – or as a means of mainly creating well-behaved citizens – by exploring the interrelatedness of *Bildung*, democracy, and critical thinking.

The second part of this chapter (section 4) reports on a NRO-funded<sup>1</sup> research project that includes two research-oriented universities (the University of Groningen and the University of Twente), the HU University of Applied Sciences, and two secondary vocational institutes (the ROC Midden Nederland and the ROC van Twente), entitled '*Democratising Critical Thinking*' – a project led by Laurence Guérin. This research project aims to find a space for *Bildung* in secondary vocational institutes in the Netherlands, whilst at the same time providing theoretical clarity and practical support for the educational practice. This consortium perceives a promising link between *Bildung*, citizenship education and critical thinking, and aims to tie *Bildung* explicitly to secondary vocational training (mbo). In their effort to conceptualise *Bildung* and create teaching materials for students as part of their vocational preparation, the research project members seek to steer away from the pitfalls of, on the one hand, individual elitism and, on the other, socialising conceptions of *Bildung* in order to unite these two opposing tendencies: *Bildung* is about the art of one's individual life and, at the same time, about the practice of conforming to societal norms.

## 2. *Bildung* as the Individual Art of Living and as a Process of Socialisation

When the Education Council of the Netherlands published a report in 2011, in which it emphasised the importance of social skills, moral training and cultural heritage (Onderwijsraad, 2011b), it tapped into an important revival of *Bildung* in the Netherlands, instigated by, among other institutes, the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and the International School for Philosophy (ISVW). Almost ten years later, several initiatives have been deployed to translate the ideals of *Bildung* into practice, implemented in vocational training and in universities. Below, I will highlight some important contributions of (educational) philosophers to recent debates on *Bildung* in the Netherlands.

1 NRO refers to 'The Netherlands Initiative for Education Research;' an organisation that coordinates and funds educational research in the Netherlands. The aims of this particular funded research project were to conduct research in vocational education on the topic of citizenship, and to establish a network of vocational educational institutes and universities.

### 2.1. Conceptualisations of *Bildung* in Recent (Philosophical) Educational Debates

Recent publications in the Netherlands show how a debate on the importance of *Bildung* was initiated by philosophers and educational professionals (see for example Landelijke Regiegroep *Bildung*, 2017; van Stralen & Gude, 2012). In some publications, one can observe an attempt to address the issue of the individual perspective and the social perspective explicitly and to negotiate between the two. With the publication ... *En denken! Bildung voor leraren* ('... And Thinking! *Bildung* for Teachers,' van Stralen & Gude, 2012), the International School for Philosophy (based in the Netherlands) and the Faculty of Education of the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, launched a reappraisal of the idea of *Bildung* in education. In this volume, in which prominent Dutch personalities give their views on the meaning of *Bildung* for teachers, a philosophical approach was chosen. Important are the contributions of the philosopher René Gude and the internationally renowned philosopher Peter Sloterdijk who together provide a theoretical introduction to the notion of *Bildung*, by means of which they immediately clarify the tension between the individual and the social perspective, or, in Gude's terms: the tension between the authoritarian form of *Bildung*, with a focus on society, and the anti-authoritarian form of *Bildung*, with a focus on the individual (van Stralen & Gude, 2012, p. 35). In the book, Gude and Sloterdijk trace the dilemma of how to compromise between a disciplinary and a liberal approach throughout history (van Stralen & Gude, 2012, p. 65). In response to this dilemma, Gude et al. suggest the 'agora model' as a framework for translating *Bildung* into practice, in which the key term is not meant as a metaphor, but in the sense of a genuine image of the Greek 'polis.' This framework effectively constitutes a compromise between the liberal and the disciplinary approach to *Bildung*.

In other publications it can be seen how conceptualisations of *Bildung* are not so much aimed at achieving a compromise between both perspectives. In contemporary debates on education, these texts position themselves more on a continuum, with the perspective of the individual on one end and the perspective of society on the other. At one end of the spectrum, *Bildung* is understood as the art of living. The Swiss writer and philosopher Peter Bieri (2008), with his often quoted article on what it would be like to be shaped by *Bildung*, can be seen as an important proponent of the more individual interpretation of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is a process that we have to undertake ourselves that consists in the developing of self-knowledge, empathy, poetical sensibility, and autonomy (Bieri, 2008). The Dutch philosopher Joep Dohmen provided an important translation of *Bildung*-as-the-art-of-living to educational practice,

by frequently publishing on moral education and through his critique on the instrumental approach in the current education system:

Why is *Bildung* so important for education and upbringing nowadays? In my opinion, the well-being of young people in our neo-liberal culture is seriously threatened. In our present age, they are supposed to be agents who decide their own fate and who take responsibility for their own choices. The tragedy of liberalism, however, is that it does not teach how to distinguish between good and bad interference. What is quite worse: we lack the courage to guide young people in the shaping of their positive freedom. (Dohmen, 2015, section 4 Conclusion).

*Bildung*, in Dohmen's view, is "guided formation of the individual, by the individual" (Dohmen, 2015, p. xx) – which means that individuals, with some help of others, can develop their personal character in order to find an answer to the question: how should I live? Drawing on Foucault's later works that deal with the art of living, he argues that self-knowledge, self-discipline, authenticity and moral orientation are crucial traits to find one's path in life – qualities that are incompatible with "authoritarian forms of disciplining. *Bildung* is a modern anti-disciplinary movement and seeks to promote independent thinking and autonomous action" (Dohmen, 2015, p. xx).

At the other end of the spectrum, the prominent educational philosopher Gert Biesta argues that *Bildung* presupposes a form of socialisation. 'Personification,' he asserts, has two modalities: subjectification and socialisation, and in order to understand *Bildung* correctly, we need to differentiate between the two. In a publication on *Bildung* for teacher trainers, he articulates this as follows:

Nevertheless, use of the terminology 'personification' is not ideal, when we consider that the distinction between socialisation and subjectification is precisely intended to indicate that the formation of an individual can happen in two different ways. It is therefore more accurate (...) to understand subjectification and socialisation as two different modalities of personification, or, as I have indicated elsewhere (...) as two paradigms of personification in education (Biesta, 2018, p. 23).

*Bildung* is personification-as-socialisation ('*persoonsvorming-als-socialisatie*'), since this process always ties up the individual with the societal context and its exemplars. *Bildung*, in other words, corresponds to the process of becoming a person in a society. How we shape ourselves in the sense of *Bildung*, Biesta

argues, depends then on the way we interact with our culture and society, in which he makes a reference to the Greek ideal of *'paideia,'* an ideal that refers to the introduction of young people into the culture and society as a whole:

*'Bildung'...* is about the process where, through engagement with existing meanings - or with a wider term: culture - individuals 'invest' themselves into those meaning(s) and thus become someone. *'Bildung,'* understood as the formation of self (or in more modern terms: identity) through engagement with culture, in this regard goes back to the Greek idea of *'paideia'* (Biesta, 2016, pp. 834-835).

Such a process, then, presupposes that an individual gets to know a culture, for example by reading canonical writers, and learns to interact with others in accordance with social norms of self-discipline. However, as Biesta points out, "the logic of *'Bildung,'* of becoming someone through engagement with culture - and I apologise for the crude example - provides an accurate account of both the becoming of Adolf Hitler and the becoming of Nelson Mandela" (Biesta, 2016, pp. 835-836). It is therefore necessary to understand personification also from the perspective of subjectification - a process that, according to Biesta, enables an individual to actually do something *with* the cultural traditions and societal norms s/he was introduced to as part of *Bildung.*

Crucial to 'subjectification', then, is a process in which personification is not determined by some exemplar, but occurs through the creation of possibilities for pupils to 'want to become a person' (personification-as-subjectification). This entails that an individual enters the world with its full range of different personalities and various opinions and gets to keep her/his own, particular voice - which is fundamentally a political process, according to Biesta. In articulating this phenomenon, he relates this process to the more suitable German term *'Erziehung,'* as opposed to *'Bildung':*

There are, however, other ways in which we are being addressed, in which we are being spoken to, in which we are being put into question, ways that come from a different intention - the intention not to determine us, but to call us into life, to call us into our own existence or, with a difficult but nonetheless appropriate word: to call forth our freedom and call us into our freedom (which does not mean to produce our freedom or make us free, but to appeal to our subject-ness, to put it quickly and briefly). In English, we could name them as educational gestures. In German, however, such acts, such ways of addressing, would be in the domain of *'Erziehung,'* not that of *'Bildung'* (Biesta, 2016, p. 842).

Consequently, according to Biesta, it is only through '*Erziehung*' (the modality of personification that centres on 'subjectification') that young people are able to critically reflect on what *Bildung* (the modality of personification that centres on 'socialisation') has to offer, since in *Erziehung* young people do not only perceive themselves as part of a tradition, but also as part of a new generation that can 'renew' the world, to put it in terms of Arendt's concept of 'natality'.<sup>2</sup> Even though the differences between Biesta's two modalities of personification can be subtle and complex at times, what is important for now is to note that Biesta reserves the term '*Bildung*' for the social process of personification and the interaction with a particular culture, something which he links explicitly to the more individual perspective on 'subjectification' (captured under the term '*Erziehung*').

## 2.2. Conceptualisations of *Bildung* in Policy Documents

The previous subsection argued that philosophers have played a crucial role in instigating the recent debate on the importance of *Bildung* in education; their conceptualisations of *Bildung* range from an individual approach to a more social interpretation, and involve notable attempts to negotiate between both perspectives.

However, in studying educational policies that are in effect in the Netherlands, it becomes clear how often one of the interpretations prevails over the other in issues of moral education and citizenship. Ten Dam and Volman (2003), for example, concluded from case studies in secondary education that schools opt either for the individual approach or the social approach when it comes to furthering the "moral task" of education - and more importantly, this choice seemed to correlate with the type of education:

The results show that in the general secondary education projects the emphasis was on the meaning of changes in society for students and the contribution they can make to such changes (social competence in education as an "art of living"). The prevocational education projects focused on improving the chances of students at school and in society by developing aspects of social competence that they have not acquired at home or earlier in their school careers, such as self-confidence and social and communicative skills (social competence as a "life jacket") (Ten Dam & Volman, 2003, p. 117).

2 Arendt's philosophy of education and Biesta's oeuvre were explored in our previous publication *Complexity in Education. From Horror to Passion*. (Bakker & Montesano Montessori, 2016).

The fact that students in general secondary education are mainly trained in 'the art of living,' while students in vocational secondary education are mostly trained in social skills, obviously raises questions regarding the equality issue in education. A one-sided approach can also be observed in government-issued documents on citizenship education. Recent research on citizenship education in primary education (Blaauwendraad, 2016) leads to the conclusion that contemporary Dutch policy documents only strongly emphasise one perspective, namely socialising interpretations of the concept of 'citizenship.' Based on her critical review of government-issued texts on citizenship education in the Netherlands - presented in our previous publication *Complexity in Education. From Horror to Passion*. (Bakker & Montesano Montessori, 2016) - Blaauwendraad concludes:

The advisory reports issued by the government [are] characterized by their strong focus on social integration (...) This outlook is building on an assumption that in earlier days, well before the individualisation process and the increase in migration took place, society had a common framework (...) Proceeding in this manner, students will not be taught how to cope with the complexity of reality, instead they will have to contribute actively to the existing order as it is envisioned by the government (...) This interpretation of citizenship is the reason why particular attention is given to the education target domain of socialisation, whereas the target domain of subjectification receives little to no attention (Blaauwendraad, 2016, p. 86).

According to Blaauwendraad, recently released Dutch policy documents on citizenship education leave little room for students to be treated as free individuals with the liberty to position themselves as individuals in society and the liberty to understand and criticize the social frameworks of the society in which they live from their personal perspective. The prevalence that is given to socialising strategies in legal texts and policy documents in which the goals of citizenship education in vocational education are laid down, has also been stressed by Piet van der Ploeg and Laurence Guérin. Guérin argues that a 'hidden curriculum' in the Netherlands strongly emphasises a "participatory approach to CE [Citizenship education] [that] favours an obedient citizen while ruling out stronger nonconformist forms of participation, such as insubordination" (Guérin, 2017, p. 9). Van der Ploeg, in his turn, observes these tendencies towards social cohesion and harmony in European policy documents



(van der Ploeg, 2015 and see Montesano Montessori, 2016, for a detailed analysis of EU policy documents).<sup>3</sup>

These critical studies of policy documents dealing with citizenship and moral education thus reveal a rather one-sided approach. In addition, they prompt the question whether the same one-sidedness might turn up in policy documents on *Bildung* - and if so, to what extent. In this paragraph, I will pursue this question, i.e. explore in what way recently released policy documents conceptualise the idea of *Bildung*, whereby I will focus specifically on the question whether these conceptualisations tend to overemphasise the individual or the social aspect of *Bildung* in education. My analysis shows that, in these documents, the importance attached to *Bildung* moves between the autonomous and the social interpretation of the concept, but as I will argue below, the social perspective nevertheless often prevails in these texts - which is in line with the findings published by Blaauwendraad (2016), Guérin (2017) and Van der Ploeg (2015).

An important impetus for the revival of the idea of *Bildung* in the Netherlands was a publication of the Dutch Education Council, entitled *Bildung* in English (2011a). This work explicitly refers to the fact that *Bildung* as a concept unites two opposing perspectives: the individual and the communal, traditional perspective. Despite the fact that "both perspectives need to be taken into account" (Onderwijsraad, 2011b, p. 12), the report and recommendations seem to bypass the individual in favour of the societal perspective. A quote from the English summary illustrates my point:

A focus on *Bildung* means broadening the world of pupils or students through a broad-based cultural transfer that provides them with a compass. *Bildung* also means giving pupils and students ideas that will help give them direction or point out things of value. Attention for *Bildung* is important and desirable, not only because schools in all sectors have a legal duty to provide it, but also because the current socio-cultural context demands it. Society is complex, pluralistic and dynamic, and places high demands on young people in terms of their personality, but also in terms of the way they function socially and professionally. *Bildung* prepares them for this (Onderwijsraad, 2011a).

In short, the point is made that *Bildung* is important because we want students to function in society. This is why educators have to shape the personalities

3 For a series of publications on citizenship education that take this perspective, see: <https://xs4all.academia.edu/PietvanderPloeg>.

of the students, and need to address their behaviour from a social and professional perspective. This can be achieved, according to the Dutch Education Council, through a 'broad cultural transfer' that provides young people with a compass. This metaphor seems to suggest that as long as teachers pay proper attention to traditions, societal norms and cultural heritage, students will eventually be able to find their way as individuals in this domain. Leaving aside the question *whose* cultural traditions need to be transmitted, the question arises *how* individual students will critically engage with these traditions. The report remains unclear on this point; only a general reference to the possibility of 'discussions' is included in the recommendations for teachers:

The Education Council believes it is important that teachers and tutors are aware of their role in the formation of students. Awareness of this role presents opportunities. A good time for formation is during subjects such as religion and beliefs, science, literature, history and philosophy. Teachers can act formatively by teaching their subject with passion, by bringing the outside world into their classes to show the relevance of their subject, by engaging their pupils in a discussion of more underlying questions, or by showing what a subject means for teachers in their professional capacities. To a large extent, formation also takes place through the behaviour of teachers or tutors towards pupils or students, the way they make contact and the way they respond. *Bildung* will therefore also be visible in everyday educational practice (Onderwijsraad, 2011a).

This recommendation for teachers relies heavily on the idea of *Bildung* as a form of socialisation: the teacher provides an example of how to interact, respond and value, and students are expected to use this example as a guideline for their own behaviour.

A second impetus for *Bildung* in the Netherlands was provided by a highly contested report published in 2016. This report, entitled *Ons onderwijs2032* (Platform Onderwijs2032, 2016), was the result of a large consultation with educational professionals, initiated by the Minister of Education in 2015. In its approach, the report leaned on three educational goals discerned by Gert Biesta - qualification, socialisation, and personification - in order to propose a large-scale curriculum change for primary and secondary education in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> Personification is rendered as '*persoonsvorming*' in Dutch. As a concept, it entails both the individual process of personal development and

4 Despite the fact that this report was aimed at primary and secondary education, the impact of this perspective was also important for vocational education.

the social process of cultural education and professionalization. The report outlined that personification, on the one hand, refers to the role of “education to help students discover who they are and who they want to become, what they find important, and how they relate to others and the world around them” (Platform Onderwijs2032, 2016, p. 22). Further unpacking the concept, it stated:

Personification also entails that students learn to shape their emotions in appropriate ways, and learn to take the opinions, interests and feelings of others into account. Respect, willingness to help others, and empathy help them to co-exist with others (...)

The school contributes to the formation of independent adults who can - and want - to act in socially responsible ways, both on the labour market and in society. (Platform Onderwijs2032, 2016, p. 22).

In brief, this report confronts education professionals with a concept of *Bildung* that combines the individual and the social perspective. Nevertheless, in this text too the social perspective seems to prevail when we see that at some point it is stated that personification is just as important as citizenship education, because both are aimed at realising social cohesion: “As important tasks of education, personification and citizenship education must contribute to the creation of social and cultural cohesion in an increasingly pluralistic society” (Platform Onderwijs2032, 2016, p. 15).<sup>5</sup> In critical commentary on this, it can be said that if, on the contrary, one understands personification from an individual perspective, one can just as easily argue that as a process it only adds to plurality, and could even make social cohesion more difficult.

A final example of how *Bildung* is deployed one-sidedly for the purpose of socialisation, is a text by the former Dutch Minister of Education, Jet Bussemaker. The report *2 werelden, 2 werkelijkheden* ('2 Worlds, 2 Realities'), published by the Ministry of Education in 2016, addressed the same issues as *Ons onderwijs2032*: the polarisation and diminishing cohesion in Dutch society, advanced by, for example, the influx of immigrants into Europe and the Paris terrorist attacks (Bussemaker, 2016, p. 5). At one point in this report, the minister advocates the importance of *Bildung* as a means for students to develop themselves into individuals, so that they acquire the capacity to critically question the society in which they live (a position that culminates in the individual perspective):

5 With Biesta, we can therefore draw the conclusion that this report understands 'personification' mainly from the modality of socialisation, and not nearly as much from the modality of subjectification (see previous paragraph).

As important tasks of education, personification and citizenship education must contribute to the creation of social and cultural cohesion in an increasingly pluralistic society (Bussemaker, 2016, p. 7).

However, it turns out that the minister understands *Bildung* predominantly as a process of socialisation, and, as such, mainly regards it as an answer to the polarising tendencies that she discerns not only in society, but also in the classroom:

The temptations that act on young people can be so strong that they can hardly be resisted on the individual level. If we want to counterbalance the temptation to give in to various kinds of extremism through the education we provide, then we have to put serious effort in the formative task of education. And then we need a robust social fabric (Bussemaker, 2016, p. 7).

If we translate these insights on *Bildung* into practice, this would mean that teachers would be constantly torn between allowing their students to conduct an individual 'critical examination of society' and working to shape their students into links in a strong social cohesion that prevents extremism - which begs the question where the fine line between societal critique and extremism should be sought.

In this paragraph, the argumentation has been developed that recent Dutch education policy documents present both the social and the individual perspective on *Bildung*, but that in the current societal context of diminishing cohesion - a societal development that is outlined in these texts - the first interpretation is emphasised more than the latter. In my chapter in our previous publication, *Complexity in Education. From Horror to Passion* (Bakker & Montesano Montessori, 2016), I explored the risks involved in overemphasising the socialising aspects of education by referring to Hannah Arendt's perspective: within such a one-sided approach, teachers run the risk of getting stuck in 'teaching for life' (Arendt, 1961) rather than focusing on 'teaching for the world.' The problem here is that focusing too exclusively on the social aspects of education has the effect that students are only prepared to be part of an efficient and docile workforce, and that their education to become political citizens is neglected (Zuurmond, 2016). On the other hand, one should be equally wary of focusing too much on the individual approach of *Bildung* in the educational practice, as, for example, Walter Bauer has argued in his publication on the relevance of *Bildung* for democracy (Bauer, 2003). He perceives how a theory "on neo-liberal models of privatisation and commodification of education" results in the phenomenon that "*Bildung* is again

in the process of turning into an individual asset. Defined economically, this individual asset is designed to provide lifelong fitness for globalised labour markets and global competition" (Bauer, 2003, p. 222).

In summary, focusing too exclusively on one end of the spectrum might result in 'teaching for life' instead of 'teaching for citizens' as an integral part of education in a democracy. In the next section, we will therefore explore the interrelatedness of *Bildung*, critical thinking and democracy, in order to take both perspectives into account in educational practice.

### 3. *Bildung*: A 'Toothless Tiger'? *Bildung*, Democracy and Critical Thinking

One of the most vocal Dutch critics of the *Bildung* idea is philosopher Marli Huijer. In her lectures and articles (see for example "Marli Huijer over *Bildung*," 2015), she warns against the depoliticising dimension of this idea. By tracing the origins of the *Bildung* tradition back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, she shows how *Bildung* originated as a specific strategy to support the emergence of German 'citizens' who were not only striving for cultural refinement but also for national awareness - processes that were considered relevant to create a position in society for the citizenry between the common people and the aristocracy. The educational strategies that were designed were thus aimed at instilling a certain discipline: "Education at the gymnasiums was not limited to personal formation, students also had to be educated to become good citizens of the nation. The new, 'bilded' human being was a productive citizen who contributed to the (German) state and society" (Huijer, 2015). This anti-revolutionary approach, Huijer argues, still lingers in the contemporary notions of *Bildung*. The current interpretations do not provide an opportunity for revolutionary thinking, since the apolitical dimension weighs heavy on its educational use:

The level of commitment, the political struggle and the kind of political organisations that are required to contain climate change, fight terrorism or deal with refugee challenges are beyond the scope of *Bildung*. In addressing the problems in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the 'bilded' person is left with no resources, as well (Huijer, 2015).

Huijer's critique is perhaps not very fair, given that the notion of *Bildung* in education predates the German historical context. It can be traced back to the Greek idea of '*paideia*,' under which education is understood as the formation of the self through engagement with culture (Biesta, 2016). The narrow polit-

ical connotation with the historical German context, then, does not do justice to the rich pedagogical tradition that this idea carries with it.

In addition, it can be argued that Huijer's interpretation of the emergence of the *Bildung* idea in the German context is somewhat one-sided, seeing that the argument has been made that there actually existed a close link between critical-political awareness and the notion of *Bildung*. Walter Bauer (2003), for example, analysed the relevance of *Bildung* for democracy by pointing out that the German tradition of *Bildung* was historically closely linked to societal issues. In a short sketch, he summarises a view of *Bildung* that culminated either in cultivation of the individual or canonical socialisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as outlined by us, as well. He then inserts the remark:

This short sketch, however, neglects the fact that the subject-centred view of *Bildung* as - aesthetically tinted - inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) is already a watered down version of the 'classic' view on *Bildung*, resulting retrospectively from its decline: the debate on *Bildung* in the mid eighteenth century was initially a reaction to the challenge posed by the changing relationship between the individual and culture in the face of conflicting socio-cultural developments and social alienation experiences. *Bildung* was here conceptualised in its core as a creative reconstruction and transformation of cultural and social experiences. This critical impetus, which was directed toward a change of social structures as well as a search for new forms of possible self-world relationships, was lost in the course of the social and political conflicts during the nineteenth century and turned the initial meaning of the term *Bildung* into its (affirmative) opposite (Bauer, 2003, p. 211).

Here, Bauer argues that a transformative dynamic of the self-world relation is inherent in the tradition of *Bildung*, which is why *Bildung* should be seen as inextricably linked to the notion of democracy in our present-day educational practice. He elaborates:

Inherent in the notion of democracy is the idea that citizens should not simply endure their historical life-situation and take it as unchangeable fate but participate in a self-determined and comprehensive way in shaping their situation, and that they can acquire the necessary skills via processes of learning and *Bildung* (Bauer, 2003, p. 212).

The same critical potential in the notion of *Bildung* was observed by Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (2002), who focused on the fact that *Bildung* was an attractive concept

for thinkers in the tradition of critical theory, i.e. the Frankfurt School, because in it they “found [...] a potential resistance to the kinds of accepted codes, standards and responsibilities” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2002, p. 391). Gur-Ze’ev states:

The potential autonomy of the subject or at least the potential for a struggle for the realisation of her possible autonomy (always partial, relative, temporary and dangerous) was of vital importance for them. Extremely significant for them was the conception of *Bildung* as an edification of the deepest independent powers of the individual as an engaged and undivided element of the totality of existence, powers enabling her escape from the dominant normalisation processes and the manipulations of hegemonic hierarchies (Gur-Ze’ev, 2002, p. 392).

In the previous subsection, the argumentation was developed that focusing too exclusively on either the individual or the social approach of *Bildung* might result in ‘teaching for life’ instead of ‘teaching for citizens’ as an integral part of education in a democracy. This is a risk in education, despite the fact that there is a critical potential and level of political awareness that reveals itself when tracing the history of the *Bildung* idea. The previously mentioned research project led by Laurence Guérin on critical thinking in secondary vocational education, which is described below in more detail, aims to restore these connections between *Bildung*, citizenship education, and critical thinking.

#### **4. *Bildung*, Citizenship Education and Critical Thinking in the Context of Vocational Education**

The theoretical starting point for the research project entitled ‘*Democratising Critical Thinking*’<sup>6</sup> is the line of thought describe above: as researchers we aim to work from the idea that *Bildung* focuses on the art of living one’s individual life and simultaneously on the practice of conforming to societal norms - which are two ways of looking at, or dealing with, the same educational issue. In this project, teachers from two secondary vocational education institutions - namely the ROC Midden Nederland and the ROC van Twente - collaboratively designed teaching materials that interrelated critical thinking, *Bildung*, citizenship education, and professional training, in which they were guided by colleagues from two research-oriented universities and one university of

6 The output of this project, in the form of teaching materials, articles, and so forth, can be found online via [www.werkplaatsburgerschap.nl](http://www.werkplaatsburgerschap.nl).

applied sciences. In a forthcoming publication, members of this research project will provide a theoretical justification for this interrelation.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter I will focus on illustrating the interrelatedness of these concepts by analysing a movie scene, and by describing the discussions that watching this movie sparked.

The design process on *Bildung*, critical thinking, and citizenship education was carried out within so-called 'Teacher Design Teams': teams of teachers employed in secondary vocational education who, within the framework of this NRO-project, collaboratively designed and implemented teaching strategies and classes, and collaboratively reflected on these. The design process was initiated by supervisors of the Teacher Design Teams by means of engaging the participants in a detailed discussion of a 2008 French drama film, *Entre les Murs* ('Between the Walls,' directed by Laurent Cantet) - specifically a discussion from the perspective of *Bildung*, critical thinking and citizenship. The film follows a school year in the life of a young teacher, François Marin, who teaches French language and literature in a working class district of Paris, where many inhabitants are foreign born. The film focuses on his experiences with a class of 14 to 15 year old students he takes on, most of whom are first or second generation immigrants. The movie addresses the themes of citizenship and *Bildung* in many ways, and according to the teacher-participants of the Teacher Design Team I supervised, the situations portrayed were highly recognisable. Here, I would like to focus on a single scene from the movie and provide a close reading of this excerpt, which allows me to outline the project's conceptual starting points more clearly (Cantet, 2008).

In the movie, when discussing the French word 'succulent' with his students, François uses an example sentence: "Bill enjoys a succulent cheeseburger." Two students in the classroom question him about his use of example sentences and the names he systematically uses: they are mostly 'French' names. Why not use names like Aïssata, Rachid or Ahmed? This remark catches François off guard. He asks his student Esmeralda if this means that she

7 Zuurmond, Guérin, van der Ploeg & van Riet (forthcoming). In this article, we seek to justify the avenue of research and the educational practice of interrelating critical thinking, *Bildung*, citizenship education, and professional training - and this from two perspectives. First, we argue that this combination is appropriate from an historical perspective: by means of a historical overview we aim to show how the notions of *Bildung*, critical thinking, citizenship education and professional training have historically been conceptualised as interdependent. Secondly, we adopt a contemporary perspective by arguing that policy documents and legal texts on citizenship education, *Bildung*, and critical thinking leave problematically little room for autonomy. Only by combining these concepts, we contend, can educational professionals create teaching materials that are more geared towards autonomy.



does not consider herself French - which she first confirms, then grudgingly admits that she is indeed French, to which she adds: "But I'm not proud of it." Khoumba, Esmeralda's friend, proposes using 'non-French' names more often, to which François replies that it is impossible for him to take all the different cultural backgrounds of his students into account when making up example sentences, since "there would be no end to it." Khoumba and Esmeralda press him more, and he finally asks which name they would choose for this sentence. "Aïssata," they answer after a short discussion, and with this proposal the scene ends.

This two-minute scene from the movie provides ample room for reflection, since it reveals many dimensions of the complexity of educational practice. Moreover, the scene also illustrates the interrelatedness of *Bildung*, citizenship education, critical thinking and professional practice. In watching this scene, the Teacher Design Teams discussed in what sense it can be argued that François is working systematically - in a socialising way - on *Bildung* in his classroom, by introducing his students to canonical literature and expanding their linguistic capacities - even though "no one on the streets talks that way," as his students tell him. His approach evokes resistance: the dominant culture, reflected in the use of 'French' names, is experienced as too pervasive and Esmeralda and Khoumba position themselves in the classroom as individual representatives of non-dominant cultures. This kind of awareness of the tension between a dominant culture and one's personal cultural background can only come about when an individual has developed a certain awareness of his/her personal values and cultural heritage. In other words: this kind of awareness can only arise when an individual has gone through a process of personal growth in the sense of *Bildung*. So, both sides of *Bildung* are represented here. In addition, in this scene, Esmeralda and Khoumba are not only aware of the tensions: they also *act* on them. Firstly, by critically engaging with their teacher about his systematic affirmation of a dominant culture in a classroom full of students with different cultural backgrounds, and secondly by proposing that he handles his grammatical explanations in a different way. It follows from this that they have thought critically about the dilemma, weighed the importance of example sentences and possible solutions, and moreover: they take the responsibility to suggest concrete alternatives. Esmeralda and Khoumba's reflections and the brief discussion that follows address issues of nationality and citizenship, and their concrete suggestion shows how they are trying to bring about a change in the classroom. In summary: in this scene, *Bildung* processes (in the sense of socialisation and individual development) are combined with critical thinking (engaging in a discussion with a teacher) and the 'political' act of bringing about change in the classroom, which can be

seen as an expression of citizenship. This movie excerpt therefore shows precisely the fruitful combination of key notions underlying the research project '*Democratising Critical Thinking*.' The *Bildung* concept highlights the tensions between canonical culture and individual experiences, while the concepts of 'critical thinking' and 'citizenship' reveal, through their explored content, how they are inextricably linked to the *Bildung* process. The scene does a good job of illustrating how students exhibit critical engagement in the form of starting a discussion, and take the responsibility to bring about change for themselves and their classmates, through which they launch a 'revolution' in the classroom - albeit a very small one.

In addition, this movie scene depicts something beyond the interrelatedness of *Bildung*, critical thinking and citizenship education. It shows the compelling presence of these issues in the background of professional practice, something that was also discussed in the team meetings. The discussion taking place in the film between a teacher and his students is not only about the idea of citizenship, but also about the question of how to teach correctly - i.e. about François' professional values and practices. It can be argued that this moment of *Bildung*, critical thinking and citizenship is not only instructive for the students; it is also enlightening for the teacher (see also Wessels, this volume). His students urge him to reconsider his teaching habits. It is precisely these kinds of *professional* dilemmas that bring up issues that are not only about individual values, but also about the norms of a vocational practice and the societal impact of one's professional actions. It is for this reason that we argue that it is especially crucial in secondary vocational education institutions to invest in *Bildung*, critical thinking, and citizenship education, as a cluster in educational practice. Students undergoing vocational training are precisely the kind of students that encounter dilemmas that have repercussions on the societal level. Therefore, during their training, they should be given the necessary tools to address these issues as authentic citizens and professionals, who are able to understand the norms of their profession, to reflect on these norms from an individual perspective, to critically engage with others on such issues and about the societal dimension, and to act accordingly. An argument can even be made that it is precisely in the formation of a *professional* self that the lens of *Bildung* is especially useful, as has been pointed out by Martin Fellenz (2016) in his publication on *Bildung* and professional education. In this text, Fellenz states that the formation of a 'professional self' navigates between autonomous reflective self-formation and interaction with societal norms, professional values and external normative elements (a process that thus involves the individual and social aspects of *Bildung*). Fellenz maintains that the 'individual self',

(...) has an important role in choosing *which* external expectations, demands and requirements it integrates into the formation and enactment of the professional self, as well as *how* they are integrated and enacted in professional practice (...) (T)he concept of *Bildung* highlights the duality of (internal) self-formation processes and of (external) relationships between self and its social, political, technological and cultural context, it can help to consider how the formed professional self can retain enough autonomy to challenge professional orthodoxy, for example, in situations where unique circumstances contribute to the failure of standard practice to deliver intended outcomes; (...) or in the context of ethical dilemmas that require unorthodox responses (Fellenz, 2016, pp. 278-279).

In the research project *Democratising Critical Thinking*, project members set the goal of clarifying the interrelatedness of *Bildung*, critical thinking and citizenship education by elaborating a number of definitions. Citizenship education was defined as a form of “shared responsibility,” *Bildung* as “individual responsibility,” vocational training as “task responsibility,” and critical thinking as a ‘condition of possibility’ for these various forms of responsibility. *Bildung* as “individual responsibility” was more specifically understood as “finding your own values, and engaging from this position with existing societal norms and practices.” By linking these concepts, we sought to prevent the individualising, socialising, and depoliticising effects that these notions might have in the educational practice ‘on their own’: by proceeding in this manner, *Bildung* becomes a necessary part of professional formation.

Here an example can clarify our perspective. Students in sport colleges are educated to guide and support people in a ‘healthy lifestyle.’ However, it is also possible to reflect on the notion of ‘a healthy lifestyle.’ In starting this reflection at the level of the individual student, one might discuss issues such as: how do you personally strive towards the ideal of a healthy lifestyle? How can we interpret this concept from our individual responsibility? Taking the discussion a step further, towards task responsibility, might involve asking questions such as: Look at the policy of the sports club where you are doing your internship. How is a healthy lifestyle promoted in the canteen, or by colleagues? And in what ways do you, as a professional-in-training, promote such a lifestyle? Finally, the societal and political dimension can be addressed in class as well, by discussing how policy documents might create our idea of health, or by researching how social media might influence our perspective. In addition, it can be investigated whether any other ideals of ‘health’ might be imagined besides these mainstream ones. By moving from individual responsibility to task responsibility, and from task responsibility to shared

responsibility, students can be stimulated to develop their capacity to link personal and professional dilemmas with a broader political dimension. In this progression, critical thinking is crucial, every step of the way.

After discussing the concepts of critical thinking, citizenship education, *Bildung* and vocational training - in order to provide input for a personalised understanding of these concepts in professional practice - the next step in our research design was for participants in the Teacher Design Teams to start a process of designing their own educational activities. Based on a literature review of the concept of critical thinking in education and its many possible interpretations, which was part of the empirical research tied to this project<sup>8</sup>, the Teacher Design Team I supervised decided to zoom in on the theme of supporting students' capacities to reflect on their own actions and thoughts, engage in analysis and evaluation, and have an open mind to new perspectives. The focus of a different team of participants, who taught at the Sport college (part of the ROC Midden Nederland), was to combine a part of their citizenship education curriculum - which focused on the increasing of empathy - with a training in critical thinking. As a final assignment in this project step, the participants were asked to create a short vlog in which they related these issues to their personal professional context. For example, one of the participants created a vlog on how he tried to deal with situations in which students called their teammates names during training, and attempted to strike a balance between his capacities to understand these pupils and draw clear boundaries. To give another example: two teachers, who taught at the Health & Welfare college (part of the ROC Midden Nederland), paired up to combine teaching materials from two subjects: Dutch language education and citizenship education. Together, they arranged for their multicultural group of students - with a range of national backgrounds - to explore a series of meaningful issues, some of which related directly to the (future) professional context of these students. To illustrate: during citizenship education classes, the two teachers asked their students to reflect - among other topics - on the notion of 'old age', prompting them through questions like: what can you tell about the way the elderly are regarded in your culture? How is care for the elderly arranged in your country of origin? How do you feel about the way the elderly are cared for in the Netherlands? The students were asked to explore their own thoughts and values first, and then to conduct an interview on these issues with a classmate from a different cultural background. In addition, during Dutch language classes, these students were

8 Project member Michiel Waltman is currently working on this part of our project, and is preparing a publication on this topic.

trained to formulate argumentations and conclusions. These cognitive skills were then deployed for a final class assignment, which was to write a short argumentative text on the issues explored during the citizenship education classes. Even though it proved challenging for some members of the Teacher Design Teams to combine all the key concepts in their own educational activities (*Bildung*, citizenship education, critical thinking and professional development) - it was especially difficult for teachers who taught students with limited language proficiency, or students whose (future) professional context was not as relevant - all participants strove to realise a fruitful combination of these concepts in their teaching materials. Currently, the research project is entering its second year, during which the Teacher Design Teams will improve and expand the developed teaching materials, create opportunities to share insights with colleagues, and evaluate materials with students.

There is one more aspect to the scene in *Entre les Murs* that I did not explore above: the fact that in the movie setting, this crucial educational moment occurred by accident. The discussion about the use of 'French' first names in example sentences caught the teacher by surprise - and unfortunately, he did not seize the opportunity to truly turn it into a moment of learning. In the movie, François Marin cuts the discussion short by stating that it is impossible for him to take all different nationalities into account when making up example sentences, and he does not inquire further when Esmeralda grudgingly admits that she is indeed French, but not proud of it. This may well be understandable: education professionals continuously face the challenge to adapt their lesson flow to a fixed curriculum, an upcoming exam, or a school bell that is about to ring - these may all be reasons for bypassing such valuable moments. Still, in discussions we had in the Teacher Design Teams, we all agreed upon the importance of creating space for these unplanned moments - 'golden teaching opportunities,' we called them - that cannot possibly be taken into account during the design process. For one of the participants, for example, one of the unexpected outcomes of working with teaching materials on argumentative writing might have been the fact that, at the end of the school year, her students took the initiative to write a letter to the school management explaining why they did not agree with the management's plans to relocate them to another building.

In weighing up the research findings, our experiences confirm the observation that "*Bildung* (...) provides each planning with the index of uncertainty, (...) [which] through pedagogical action at best can be supported, though never can be effected" (Rucker & Gerónimo, 2017, p. 578). In summary, the dimension of teaching that emerged in the Teacher Design Teams is precisely the one that is being investigated in the Research Group on Normative

Professionalization: the unexpected moments of learning that occur during classroom interactions, and how teachers might respond to these. One of the ways in which this dimension can be reflected upon, might be found in the arts: movies and literature are media that allow for the process to analyse crucial moments in the teaching process, repeat them, and look at them again from another perspective. Taking advantage of this possibility, I have referred to a scene from the movie *Entre les Murs*, as discussed in the Teacher Design Teams, to illustrate my line of reasoning in this chapter. In addition to the project result that the Teacher Design Teams are currently in the process of strengthening their educational design capacities, all the teacher-participants in the teams became more aware of the unplanned dimension of teaching. This awareness might urge us not only to create a 'space' for *Bildung* in curricula, but also to experience 'time' in a different manner: with a greater sensitivity to golden teaching opportunities, and an increased ability to seize a moment that arises in a two-minute interaction and turn it into the subject of an entire lesson. It is precisely in the *there and then* that teachers may sometimes find the most valuable moments in regard to critical thinking, *Bildung*, citizenship education and vocational training.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter I explored different theoretical conceptualisations of the notion of *Bildung*, and juxtaposed these with recently released Dutch education policy documents. In part 1, I outlined how philosophical reflections on *Bildung* in recent education policy debates in the Netherlands invite us to negotiate between the social and the liberal or individual approach to *Bildung*. However, a selection of quotes from the above-mentioned policy documents indicated that socialising interpretations of *Bildung* are prevalent in the current societal climate - a conclusion that is consistent with the observations of other scholars who have analysed similar government-issued documents, in which the goals of citizenship education are laid down (Blaauwendraad, 2016, Guérin, 2017, van der Ploeg, 2015). To avoid the pitfalls of *Bildung* as either the 'individual art of living' or 'social discipline,' part 1 concluded on the possibility to link *Bildung* with critical thinking and issues of democracy.

In part 2, this overview of contemporary Dutch debates and policy documents enabled me to situate an NRO-funded project, entitled *Democratising Critical Thinking*, in current discussions on *Bildung*. The central contention of this project - in which I participate as a supervisor of a Teacher Design Team - is that *Bildung* needs to be paired up with citizenship education and critical thinking, in order to show how the individual and the social dimension are

inextricable linked. In this chapter, I illustrated this promising link by means of a close reading of a scene from the 2008 French drama film *Entre les murs*. In addition, I argued that the interrelation of *Bildung*, citizenship, critical thinking and the professional dimension is especially important in vocational education: by investing in this educational cluster, students in vocational education not only learn how to get to know themselves better, but also learn how to (critically!) position themselves in the domain of societal norms and professional codes of conduct (Fellenz, 2016). Currently, the project is entering its second year, during which a number of Teacher Design Teams will use the project's conceptual starting points to create improved and expanded teaching materials which were created for specific groups of students. By means of these materials, students' capacities to reflect on their own actions and thoughts, engage in analysis and evaluation, and to be open-minded towards others with regard to their profession and broader societal issues, are stimulated.

Within the parameters of the project, the goal to create a 'space' for *Bildung* is then, firstly, understood as a teaching strategy, which can be implemented by systematically interrelating the elements of *Bildung*, citizenship, critical thinking and professional training. In the Teacher Design Teams the understanding also emerged that moments of *Bildung* in the classroom may occur wholly unplanned: seizing the opportunity to utilise issues that emerge in the interactions with students to create a space for *Bildung* should also be part of the teacher's attitude. By drawing on the various opportunities that present themselves, the creation of a space for *Bildung* in vocational education may then have the result that students will be able to create a space for themselves as critical professionals as well, within a network of professional norms, personal values, and the political dimension of their vocational practice - while navigating between these components responsibly.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the members of the research group Normative Professionalization and the members of the project *Democratising Critical Thinking* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

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