

Pedagogical Considerations: A New Discourse Based on Academic Bildung

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Education – a normative enterprise

Let us start by summing up some of the important assumptions and conclusions from the theoretical chapter concerning the concept of Academic Bildung. And then let us see how we can – now inspired by the different cases of teaching and learning in net-based higher education – rethink net-based higher education through a new discourse based on a Scandinavian conception of Academic Bildung.

One of the first things which must be mentioned is a basic difference to be found between those fields of human activities that *must* be talked about in normative terms, and those that *can* be talked about in such terms. We would say that education, and thus teaching, is a necessarily normative enterprise. The main reason for this is that education and teaching concerns relations between people, between teacher and student. Teaching in a university cannot be a neutral craft, as the teacher's interpersonal relation to the student is normative. Teaching thus cannot be *reduced to* a skill, the competence of bringing about effective learning in the students. Subsequently, effective student learning is not the only goal for university education. There is an *attitudinal and normative* side to education, and this is not covered in the concept of learning, at least not in the concept of learning as cognition. Nor are the concepts of knowledge, skills and competences, the three main learning outcomes defined in the EQF, the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning, inherently or unquestionably normative. Just as the concept of education is an inherently normative concept, so is the concept of Academic Bildung. It is timely that the normative concepts in

education are coming into focus again. Education as well as research also has existential dimensions. We believe that choosing Academic Bildung as the optic through which to look at net-based higher education will enable us to see the *values* in and of education.

As noticed in Chapter 3, Academic Bildung is a concept covering personal development processes in relation to formal and informal learning in higher education. It is connected to critical thinking, society-oriented reflection and autonomy on the one hand, and to ethical dimensions of human formation and self-formation, existential- and being-oriented reflection and authenticity on the other hand. We have elaborated on this through our descriptions of how Kant and Gadamer in different ways connect Academic Bildung to both a critical and an existential form of reflection and attitude. But the concept also draws heavily on Scandinavian conceptions of education, which is to say welfare state conceptions of education, and we have also linked it to adult education, People's enlightenment and Enlightenment for Life. Bildung is an egalitarian project in Scandinavia.

We also saw, that when it comes to higher education Wilhelm von Humboldt's thinking about the university is at the historical roots for a concept of Bildung, and also for our concept of Academic Bildung. A Humboldtian idea of particular importance for our understanding of Academic Bildung is the idea of the unity of research and education. Thus, the Bildung process to be expected in the research university is first of all the process of a search for new knowledge. This search is not about acquisition of knowledge already available, though that is most definitely a prerequisite for finding new knowledge. Humboldt's idea of the freedom of research is still crucial here.

We do not think there is a particular form of Academic Bildung for net-based education. What we have been asking in this book is whether the principles of Academic Bildung that traditionally has applied to education on campus in Scandinavian higher education, in terms of development of autonomy and authenticity, can apply to net-based higher education as well. The question posed in this chapter is: *How can we rethink net-based higher education through a new discourse based on a Scandinavian conception of Academic Bildung?* If a new discourse can lead to new analysis and make us see things differently, what practical differences can this bring about when it comes to, firstly, the quality of net-based courses and programs and, consequently, to the Academic Bildung of the students? And what difference could this make for the empowerment and meaningfulness of the life of the individual, for the quality of the new knowledge produced, and for the overall capability for innovation in societies?

We first sum up the different Bildung dimensions found in the case studies of this book and discuss these dimensions and their corresponding conceptions of Bildung in relation to the concept of Academic Bildung developed in Chapter 3. Based on the case studies we explore what we can say about the relation between Academic Bildung and the conditions of net-based education. Can net-based learning environments mean “value added” when it comes to Academic Bildung dimensions? Do net-based learning environments block processes of Academic Bildung? Is the balance between the critical and existential dimension in Academic Bildung, which chapter 3 saw as crucial, seen and retained in the cases of contemporary net-based higher education learning? Finally, we discuss whether the (theoretical and practical) empirical reality uncovered in the case studies has implications for the concept of Academic Bildung. We also discuss the extent to which this concept can function as a basis for a new

discourse on net-based higher education. But now, let us look at the Bildung conceptions and the Bildung dimensions of the case studies.

Conceptions of Academic Bildung in the Case Studies

What kinds of understandings and practices of the phenomenon of Academic Bildung emerge when we read and reflect upon the case studies? We focus on the ways in which they do (and do not) touch upon the topic of Academic Bildung in light of the concept of Academic Bildung developed in the first part of our book. We also comment upon commonalities as well as differences between the unified Bildung approach of the book and the diverse approaches of the case studies.

The *first* study in Part II, “Philosophical Orientations of Teaching and Technology: A Scandinavian Case study”, is not a case study in the same sense as the four other case studies in Part II. It is in a sense a view of Scandinavian net-based education from the side on rather than from within, as Scandinavian higher education teachers’ beliefs and opinions concerning teaching and technology have been studied in comparison to teachers in four other countries. In this respect, the study can function as a test of a claim of an existence of a specific Scandinavian approach in net-based higher education. Kanuka has examined opinions and beliefs held by teachers concerning what they see as the aims of university education and why they use educational technology. She found that all the Scandinavian participants selected the same orientation, the Progressive one, as closest to their own teaching philosophical orientation. This orientation is illustrated by the statement that “the aim of a university education is to promote personal growth and maintenance, as well as a better society”.

When it comes to the Scandinavian oriented concept of Academic Bildung developed in our book and the philosophical orientations of teaching of the Scandinavian scholars, found in this study, there are close connections on some dimensions. The participants' focus on "personal growth" is perspicuous, and this is at the core of many conceptions of Bildung. That the personal, individual growth connects to the social systems is expressed to be important by the participants, and as we have seen in Chapter 3, this is at the core of the society-oriented Kantian concept of Bildung. It is also a central element in the Scandinavian orientation of the concept of Bildung, particularly when it comes to the critical emancipatory tradition of pedagogy and adult learning. Furthermore, the view that knowledge is constructed as a social process, aimed to support personal growth with a critical stance is common among the Scandinavian interviewees. This orientation also aligns well with the autonomy dimension in our concept of Academic Bildung.

Why is this group of Scandinavian higher education scholars in the area of educational technology so unanimous? Are these views a feature of a general Scandinavian university culture in the field? We must of course be careful to draw peremptory conclusions on the basis of a small cohort, but it certainly is remarkable. Kanuka's study seems to some degree to support our original assumption of there being something that is common in Scandinavian net-based higher education, and that this "something" is different from the world of English-speaking higher education that we otherwise compare ourselves with. However, we must remember that the study covers the opinions and beliefs of the 15 specific teachers and not their practice.

It must be noted that Kanuka's study has not explicitly touched upon existential and Being-oriented dimensions of Academic Bildung. When Kanuka identifies six teaching

philosophical orientations (Radical, Liberal, Progressive, Analytical, Humanist, and Behaviourist) she has not included teaching philosophical orientations such as existential pedagogy (Bollnow 1969, Dupont and Hansen 1998) or phenomenological-oriented pedagogy (van Manen 1991, Friesen 2011) or ‘Enlightenment for Life and People’s enlightenment Pedagogy’, which indeed is a unique Scandinavian pedagogical approach. Other results could then of course have come up.

In the *second* case study, “Educating pharmacists – the perfect prescription”, Bildung is professional proficiency. Professionalism is defined as the combination of good reflective practice and a well-developed awareness and understanding of oneself as professional. This is expressed in the idea that it is not sufficient to exercise the pharmacy profession - one must also *be* a pharmacist. Professionalism, as it is here stated in terms of being the aim of vocational education, does however not concern only those attending courses at the higher education level. It applies to all professional training. Thus, Englund and Wester have indicated a general Bildung- or professionalism-ideal. A question that remains to be answered is whether vocational education at tertiary level should or must include something more, something different or more special than such a universal authenticity ideal of professional proficiency.

The concept of authenticity at play here includes not only ethical awareness and self-formation, it is also about learning through action and in practical life, where the personal lived experience is both the starting point and the goal. They differ from the other case-contributions in terms of their emphasis on experience and practical knowledge as part of their Bildung ideal. However, Englund and Wester’s conception of Bildung focuses less on the existential- and being-oriented sides of Bildung than the concept of Academic Bildung

developed in Chapter 3. Englund and Wester are not directly focusing on the autonomy side of Academic Bildung.

In the *third* case study, “Net-based Guerrilla Didactics”, Academic Bildung is seen mainly as a form of autonomy, where the autonomous action of the students takes the form of “disobedient” dislocation of intended contents of communication between the various platforms in use in the course. Bengtsen, Mathiasen and Dalsgaard further argue that each platform takes on a life of its own and “becomes a pedagogical world in itself with its own subcultural norms, habits and values”. This means that the autonomy exercised, the freedom from the teachers didactical design, is not exclusively in the hands of the students. The students share this freedom from the intended design with the platforms in which they operate, and the authors also argue that communication itself is an autonomous being. Together this creates a disturbance in the didactical design made by the teachers.

When the students become aware of the different criteria for interaction and norms of communication across different platforms the authors hold that they will experience a pluralism of perspectives. They see this as the student’s gaining a critical and hermeneutic attitude. Students and teachers are in this form of didactical design invited to be mindful about different criteria for interaction and norms of communication across different platforms, and thus learn “not to assume that their own presuppositions about the world are universal and valid for everyone else”. Development of perspective expansion as a form of Bildung is not directly touched upon in our two dimensional concept of Academic Bildung, however it is vital in the concept of Bildung developed by the Norwegian pedagogical philosopher Paul Martin Opdal, on basis of the British pedagogical philosopher R. S. Peters (1919-2011) (

(Opdal 2000) (Opdal 2008). Perspective expansion does seem to have favourable conditions in net-based education of the sort described in this case study.

In the *fourth* case study, “Learning, Meaning, Bildung – Reflections with Reference to a Net-based MBA-programme”, the possibilities of Bildung is seen through the question of the possibility for deep learning. As opposed to surface learning, deep learning is defined as “going ‘behind’ the text in order to understand ideas and seek meaning”. Deep learning can be achieved through looking for patterns and principles within themes and subjects, by relating to one’s own experience, forming and testing one’s own hypothesis, and by creating wholeness and coherence. Students who have this approach to learning are also conscious about themselves as learners and their own learning situation. According to the understanding of the authors the process of Bildung should, in short, be about stretching towards the ideal of “the exploratory human being”. Here they adhere to the American liberal arts tradition, which they connect to the philosopher and psychologist John Dewey’s (1859-1952) thinking. From this Anglo-American, pragmatic and society-oriented view on Bildung it follows that the ultimate goal of education is to be able to take an active part in a democratic society.

Grepperud and Holen thus see Academic Bildung as inevitably connected to development and learning, and they connect Bildung with the higher levels of taxonomies for cognitive learning, attitudes, and skills, which they find that higher education must promote. They also emphasise that Academic Bildung must include all dimensions of the individual (“the whole person”). They find that there is a lack of a deep learning approach in the students of the programme due to lack of time and a possible lack of experienced meaning. In this way they touch upon both the autonomy and some parts of the authenticity side of Academic Bildung. Autonomy, since they find that independent time management could have helped the students

in reaching the higher levels of the taxonomies, and “experienced meaning” belong to the authenticity side of Bildung. However, they do not focus on authenticity as existential- and being-oriented. They do not go into how the students could have done better when it comes to dwelling, wondering and listening to and leaning from ‘experienced meaning’, but it seems that the time factor could be of importance also here.

In the *fifth* case study, “Cross-Professional net-based health education”, Bildung is about academic values and skills, and Academic Bildung is about developing an academic identity and behaviour, and an academic mode of being. Fosslund includes development of the students’ professional identity as health workers into her understanding of Academic Bildung. Fosslund also uses the term academic socialization about this phenomenon, a socialisation which she holds will have somewhat different expression depending on the professional and academic sub-culture students are in. She focuses on the conditions for realisation of an ideal of Academic Bildung, and she finds that little has been achieved in terms of development of the students’ Academic Bildung. This is the case at the least when judged by the potential of the didactic design of the program, and the impression is no better neither when judged by the development of academic skills nor by the development of academic identity. Fosslund thus relates to factors on both sides of our two dimensional concept of Academic Bildung in that she sees professional identity as being connected to the personal dimension and to authenticity (albeit not to authenticity as existential- and being-oriented) and academic skills, such as critical thinking, as being connected to autonomy.

Conditions for Academic Bildung in the Case Studies

The many entrances and understandings of Bildung launched in this book notwithstanding, let us agree that Bildung as a superior quality in higher education requires enduring "virtues" in

teaching and learning, like peace, commitment, reciprocity, processing, specialisation, wondering and personalising. Our task as educators and educational institutions is to facilitate and provide the best possible conditions for this, but ultimately the responsibility lie with the learner him- or herself. Learning at the level of higher education cannot and should not include consumerist students, who effectively are being served easily digestible "dishes" of smart educators and convenient technology. This is just the way it is; Academic Bildung must and should in all respects be a bold and demanding as well as a wondrous exercise.

If we apply this view to the case studies presented in Part II of this book, there are two conclusions that stand out. Firstly, it is, on the basis of these cases, difficult to say anything definitive about the extent to which the courses have contributed to the individual student's Bildung. However, all cases are saying quite a lot about the conditions that must be present for Academic Bildung to take place. If we look closely at the parts of the courses that take place in net-based environments, the second, and most obvious conclusion, is that the net-based / technological solutions that have been employed, does not seem to have made the road towards the goal of Bildung considerably better and wider. As such, it is not surprising that when Englund and Wester are looking for Academic Bildung in terms of professional proficiency in pharmacy students, they see this as a result of the whole academic programme (four years), and thus as a result of all and any measure (including the students' own work). They find that this form of Bildung, professional proficiency, is not a consequence of a limited didactic experiment that only covered half of the student group. For this reason, it is not straightforward to assume a simple and unambiguous relationship between Bildung and educational technology.

Let us elaborate on these two conclusions. The most prominent in the cases presented, is that they both directly and indirectly highlight some key conditions - or in some cases lack thereof – that are necessary to safeguard and fulfil the ideal of Academic Bildung. This is particularly visible in Fossland's chapter, which points out a number of factors that specifically led to students' experiences (and probably also their learning outcomes) far from mirrored the program's goals and aspirations. Evidence indicates that the ambitions were far too extensive in relation to the existing frameworks and the complexity of the course. After exploring Fossland's analysis, there are in particular two questions that arise; is it possible to develop an interdisciplinary professional identity in such a short time (cf. Englund and Wester's analysis in Chapter 6) and is it possible to develop cross professional identity without the participants having developed their own professional identity?

One of the matters stated in Fossland's analysis is what we might call the classic blunder of the curriculum. This means that, with the best intentions, a large amount of subject matter material and many different means are included in a four-month 10-credit program, to the extent that it almost seems to be counterproductive. We find reading, writing and discussions, face-to-face-meetings, use of the net and case-based assignments and supervision. The students were to work both individually and in different groups. In addition there were the examination tasks. Moreover, Fossland points out that the instructional design was insufficiently anchored among the teachers and in the different professional disciplines. The result of this appears to be that qualities such as calmness, specialisation, wondering and reflection have not had particularly fertile ground.

A similar accumulation of good measures is found in Bengtsen, Mathiasen and Dalsgaard in their chapter on "Net-based Guerrilla Didactics". The designers of this course have been

inspired by the possibilities inherent in various digital media for communication.

Interestingly, they have attempted to divide and distribute the student's communication within the different media according to purpose and function: academic, social, and administrative. The authors draw inspiration from Harman (Harman 2005) and his concept of “guerrilla” to explain why the strategy fails. It turns out that the students made use of these arenas in their own way, which can be summarised briefly as them, more or less, talking about everything everywhere and frolicking verbally at venues where the teacher was not present. This might show that it is neither possible nor desirable to divide the academic, social and personal dimensions of the teaching and learning context. Bengtson, Mathiasen and Dalsgaard recognise that students’ “didactic disobedience” suggests that it is impossible to establish watertight bulkheads between the various themes and dimensions of students' digital communications. In face-to-face teaching on campus the students interact and communicate about subject, learning, leisure, and other more personal matters both within and outside the lecture theatre, and both during and after lectures. We would suggest that it is this web of ideas, input, and relationships that together make up the academic culture. From the perspective of Bildung, it could thus be argued that the goal must be to unify and strengthen these dimensions, not split them up according to digital solutions.

There are a number of conditions for teaching and learning in net-based environments, inside or outside the teacher’s control, that influence and override the teacher’s wishes and aspirations. In other words, teachers' attitudes to teaching and learning are not easily and directly expressed in their teaching practice. It is interesting that Kanuka, in spite of somewhat limited empirical data, finds that the Scandinavian higher education staff she interviewed appears to be unified in their views on learning and teaching, at the least when it comes to the progressive emancipatory pedagogy. In relation to the aspirations of this book, it

is encouraging that the values and perspectives expressed to some degree are located close to a general Scandinavian Bildung perspective for higher education. What we lack, however, is the 'second track', the existential and being-oriented perspective in our double-tracked concept of Academic Bildung. Although we believe this second dimension to be of equal importance as the first one in the Scandinavian educational culture, it nevertheless seems to live a more quiet or invisible life. Perhaps it lies inherently in the more existential and being-oriented experiences and events of educational life as for example van Manen has shown through his phenomenological investigations (van Manen 1991) (van Manen 2002a) (van Manen 2002b).

Having mentioned both the visible and more invisible sides of Scandinavian educational culture, it is also important to point out that this hardly reflects only the academic culture of the three Scandinavian countries. We would posit that it primarily reflects some of the most fundamental values of the Nordic countries. And, as Solberg and Hansen point out in Chapter 3, these values have been central to the diverse Nordic People's Enlightenment traditions that, with their many stakeholders, have been key carriers and disseminators of this egalitarian as well as life philosophical culture. We consider it a clear strength of higher education in our countries that it reflects fundamental and important aspects of social culture as well as what Grundtvig would call the 'School of Life': Anything else would have been questionable. At the same time, such a realisation means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to assume that universities are isolated and closed institutions that manage and develop knowledge regardless of social and human interests and values.

The egalitarian perspective is particularly evident in Grepperud and Holen's chapter. The main topic here is the students and their preconditions. Over the past 30-40 years higher

education has passed from being an education for the few, to being available to the large majority. This is often described as a transition from elite- to mass education, and it challenges our educational institutions in a number of areas. One of them is about teaching a very heterogeneous group of students, not only in terms of skills, abilities and interests, but also in terms of background, age, and life situation. With an increasing number of mature flexible students, life situation is a variable that must be considered when optimal learning situations are planned for. This presents challenges. In light of the unambiguously positive rhetoric that flexible education provides opportunities to study when you want and where you want, the authors draw a somewhat more pessimistic picture. It appears that the everyday living conditions have the power to control study behaviour in a direction where Bildung loses out to more strategic and instrumental perspectives. It appears that this force is strong enough to override even the most creative and advanced didactic solutions, as everyday life often strikes where it hurts the most: right in the time squeeze. In such a study and life situation Bildung can seem a luxury that only a few people can indulge in. There is every reason to take into account experiences like this, not least since students' living conditions gradually become more influenced by work outside their studies.

For all four Scandinavian cases the net-based component constitutes a part of the program, albeit to varying extents. In Fossland's and in Grepperud and Holen's chapters digital media play a relatively peripheral role, both for students and teachers / tutors. The authors also point to issues outside educational technology and digital media as being of importance when explaining processes and outcomes. Despite their finding that students choose their own ways in and between the platforms, Bengtsen, Mathiasen and Dalsgaard do not provide definite answers as to whether digital communication led students closer to qualities we associate with Bildung processes and Bildung outcomes. The closest we come here is to reiterate what we

know from other contexts; students can communicate online and this communication thematically revolves around the same issues that can be found in face-to-face communication. But communication itself is notoriously no guarantee of Bildung taking place, as Mathiasen also argue in Chapter 2. There must at the least be a communication, or a discourse, that is characterised by certain qualities. The qualities of the discourse are not a topic in the chapter by Bengtson et al.

Through their analysis of the relationship between authentic learning situations and use of virtual worlds, Englund and Wester's chapter touches on the basic tenet of this book, the question of how net-based education can help facilitate Academic Bildung. Simulation, with or without technology, is basically a form of working and learning that fits well in professional studies because it is based on the specific profession and not the subject as such. This form of learning is thus well suited to develop and strengthen that which Englund and Wester describe as occupational or professional proficiency, what we could call professional Bildung. For that reason, this has been widely applied, also in health sciences, and good results are reported. With the development of technologies related to virtual worlds, many opportunities open up to further develop simulation as a teaching method and form of learning. In part, it is about providing students with an expanded repertoire of training practices that they can "reuse", without involving a number of practical and economic incremental costs. Moreover, it is about expanding the simulation to areas where in practical life it would be impossible for students to test their knowledge and skills. An interesting result presented by Englund and Wester is that students' backgrounds determined the extent to which they considered the virtual case study realistic. It turned out that those who had previous experience with pharmaceutical work or with the pharmacy as a workplace perceived the case to be equally realistic as those without such experience.

The four case studies from Scandinavian net-based higher education in this book clearly show the complexity teachers face in their net-based teaching practice. We also see that none of the four cases explicitly focus and articulate issues or experiences concerning the more existential and being-oriented dimension of Academic Bildung. We would guess that one of the reasons may be found in the theoretical framework used to describe and analyse those cases. The four cases are mainly using a learning theoretical and pragmatic constructivist or critical emancipatory approach to learning and Bildung. What would have happened, we wonder, if the authors and researchers had arrived with a phenomenological or Socratic philosophical approach to cases of net-based higher education? Would that have opened up for experiences and visions that seem to be covered up by the vocabulary used here? Answers must be sought in further investigations.

Can we now say more about the relation between net-based education and Academic Bildung? Does net-based learning environments seem to mean “value added” as concerns Academic Bildung dimensions, or do net-based learning environments block processes of Academic Bildung? Based on the case studies we have found that the didactic design of the courses can seriously hamper the possibilities for development of Academic Bildung. We have, however, not found there to be something inherent in a net-based environment in itself that hampers these possibilities. We have further found that the time-factor is vital, both the time spent within and outside of the net-based environments. Moreover, communication in a variety of digital platforms and media can open new horizons for the students and give good opportunities for perspective expansion. With this exception, the case studies of this book do not suggest that ICT and the digital necessarily means “value added” in terms of development of the student’s Academic Bildung.

A New Discourse on Net-based Higher Education based on Academic Bildung?

What can we now say about the concept of Academic Bildung developed in the first part of our book? Have the case studies revealed a need for an expansion, or other forms of revisions of this concept? Does the actual reality of Scandinavian net-based education in the case studies have implications for the status of Academic Bildung as an ideal? Or is the situation rather that the case studies have shown that we need to increase the effort and rethink the didactical designs of net-based higher education in order to facilitate development of Academic Bildung?

We have seen that there are many different conceptions of Academic Bildung at play, and when considering the Scandinavian literature on Bildung, it seems that all that is valuable, good, and virtuous in education constitutes Bildung. The concept of Academic Bildung can thus be at risk of losing any distinct meaning and significance. The case studies have found Academic Bildung to be all the following: (i) professional proficiency, (ii) professional identity, (iii) autonomy in terms of being able to free oneself from didactical design, (iv) ability for perspective expansion, (v) being exploratory so as to achieve deep learning, (vi) being able to take an active part in a democratic society, (vii) being a whole person, (viii) having acquired academic skills, (ix) having acquired academic values, (x) having acquired academic identity and behaviour, (xi) ability to critical thinking, (xii) ability to personal growth and maintenance, and (xiii) having aims of a better society. And indeed we do find all of these aspects to be connected to Academic Bildung. In the first part of the book we have, on a more general level, developed a concept from a Scandinavian educational perspective where Academic Bildung is about becoming an academically oriented person with integrity and creativity, a person with an autonomous and authentic presence in academia and in

society. And these different understandings of Academic Bildung are all pointing to the transformation that is expected and desired in students of higher education.

All the case studies of this book deal with different disciplines, and consequently, there have been different kinds of contents that the students of these different courses have met. On this basis, we should expect there to be differences in the understandings and practices of the phenomenon of Academic Bildung, and consequently we should expect the authors of the case studies to focus on different dimensions of Academic Bildung. There is indeed a close connection between acquisition of disciplinary content knowledge and Bildung. Formation of attitudes and Academic Bildung can hardly come about without a specific content. The Norwegian philosopher Jon Hellesnes said in an interview in 2012:

“My main point is that we must avoid a principled opposition between Bildung and acquisition of knowledge. Professional training is possible without Bildung, but the converse is not possible. A process of Academic Bildung must always also involve acquisition of knowledge. Critical thinking without relevant knowledge is opinionising. Opinionising is exercising prejudices, which makes them stronger.” (Our translation) (Finstad 2012)

We agree to Hellesnes’ views on this point, Academic Bildung without knowledge is impossible, and we need to add: different contents do make a difference to the very processes of Bildung.

But equally important, to remind us of what Ronald Barnett (Barnett 2007) calls the “ontological turn in higher education”, is also to emphasise that Academic Bildung without

‘the voice of Being’ is a spiritless and instrumental approach to Bildung and higher education. Therefore we also acknowledge the fundamental importance in research and academic work that the truth- and knowledge-seeking person engage in another more also existential and contemplation seeking movement. And in this ‘movement’ the truth-seeking person is driven not by an epistemological ethos of knowing, but rather by an ontological ethos of wanting to be, and ‘be-in-a-relation-with-the-phenomenon’ in order to understand-from-within’(see also Shotter 2010). Thus, in other words, there should also be time and space in net-based higher education for this kind of Socratic ‘not-knowing’(Docta Ignorantia), and being in a fundamental community of wonder and dialogue about our deeper longings, inspirations and intuitions of what we experience as important values and meaningfulness in our lives. In order to exercise one’s practice in the university (research, teaching, and learning) in an optimal manner, one needs to be and form oneself in this practice. Maybe this calls for a new wonder-based and phenomenological-oriented pedagogy in net-based higher education?¹

So, where does this leave the normative concept of Academic Bildung? The concept actually has helped us to see values in and of net-based higher education, even if the existential dimensions have been difficult to pinpoint. On this basis we find it hard to deny that all these different conceptions of Academic Bildung are valuable in a further discourse on net-based higher education. Can we live with a concept that demonstrably has an empirical life of such multitude and that seems to have such blurry boundaries? Can we live with a concept that has so many different theoretical interpretations and empirical instantiations? We believe that the need for strict definitions in this case should be weighed up against the fruitfulness of rethinking and rephrasing, over and over again, this basic educational concept that has proved

¹ For an interesting attempt to connect a critical-emancipatory pedagogy with a more phenomenological approach to higher education, see also Dupont (Dupont 2012), and a so-called ‘4-voiced Bildung pedagogy’ in higher education is developed by Hansen (Hansen 2010) (Hansen 2014). See also chapter 9 and 11 in this book where the four-voiced pedagogy is addressed and employed.

its value as an optic in our pedagogical understanding. It might be that such a seeking and open, yet critical, attitude is itself the proof of the pudding.

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