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Theorising VET: European Differences, Commonalities and Contestation

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Abstract

Context: VET is faced with profound challenges in the post-COVID era: fundamental questions about the purposes of VET, its limitations and its theoretical justification, have acquired renewed importance. Across national boundaries in Europe, the theorisation of VET has been approached differently. One of the oldest theoretical rationales for VET was developed over a century ago in Germany under the name of *Berufsbildungstheorie*. The difference between this and other countries has been variously associated with different VET systems, academic traditions and relationships to broader socio-economic policies in each country, each with their own continuities and ruptures over time. In several European countries we can point to a shift from early philosophical writing about VET and education more generally to the use of techniques from the social sciences, and the profusion of post-foundational approaches has further undermined the claims of normative theory; yet, both in general education and increasingly in VET, an increased interest in the notion of *Bildung* as a more humanistic approach to education than the narrow calculations of human capital theory is also evident.

Approach: In this paper we therefore ask whether these approaches retain relevance for contemporary VET, addressing this through three related perspectives that build in various ways on these theoretical traditions. The first compares the development of *Berufsbildungstheorie* by key architects of the German VET system to theorisation of VET in English-speaking countries, which has drawn on a wider range of social sciences, especially since the 1980s. This contrast is discussed here drawing on an extensive review of VET literature emanating from English-speaking countries. The significance and limitations of the *Berufsbildungstheorie* tradition is illustrated further in the second of these three sections, when the German vocational transition system is analysed using social systems theory. Finally, neo-institutionalism is used to demonstrate the process by which countries aspire to imitate visibly successful models of VET despite



cultural, institutional and theoretical differences that make the transfer of policies from one jurisdiction to another a highly problematic exercise.

Findings: These illustrative cases provide important insights into the continuing relevance of *Berufsbildungstheorie* or any normative theory of VET. The theorisation of VET in the English-speaking countries has taken place through a critique based mainly on the social sciences, which has drawn attention to VET's positioning within the networks of neoliberal policy in these countries and its reproductive logic. The discussion of German VET as a transition system also illustrates the way that classic theories are perceived to have less explanatory value for contemporary systems. Finally, the paper on neo-institutionalism provides an explanation for aspirations to imitate the perceived successes of other jurisdictions in spite of the barriers to 'policy borrowing' across national contexts, suggesting once again that such approaches can have explanatory value in different contexts.

Conclusion: Each of these accounts illustrates in its own way how the social sciences have come to dominate the theorisation of VET, even in German-speaking countries. Yet the importance of constructing and connecting normative, pedagogical and critical dimensions of VET can hardly be disregarded in an age where international policymaking so often advances a unifying, purely economic imperative. Therefore the future of both theory and practice of VET is likely to depend not only on 'rational' analysis of VET and its context but on the development of criteria that enable us to judge the value, human potential and social justice of our ideas and actions. Therefore, the analytical power of social science theories could be enriched by a normative dimension, possibly retrieved from *Bildung* or *Berufsbildung* concepts. However, as concepts that were developed in Europe, they need to be renewed and revised with attention to contemporary issues and understandings, for example with attention to ideas that draw on and recognise fully the experience and contribution of the global South.

Keywords: *Berufsbildungstheorie*, comparative VET, educational theory, neo-institutionalism, social systems theory

1 Introduction

VET faces new challenges in the wake of pandemic, economic crisis and European war. Policy discourses have been dominated by the challenges of economic recovery, emphasising retraining, advances in digitisation and artificial intelligence (AI). However, the rupture of COVID, calling forth emergency responses and undermining societal norms has raised possibilities for thinking about VET in new ways (Avis et al., 2021). This process has correspondingly accelerated interest in the different ways that VET has been theorised at different times in the past, and in different national contexts, as well as how these theoretical foundations developed in different spaces of knowledge production. In addition to wider European interest in the concept of *Bildung*, the field of VET has begun to take interest in classical theories of VET (Kuhlee et al., 2022; Zuurmond et al., 2023; bwp@, forthcoming). This last-named Special Issue explores the distinctive role of foundational VET theory in Germany, sometimes described as *Berufsbildungstheorie*, including the 'classical' work of Georg Kerschensteiner (1966/1904), Aloys Fischer (1967/1932) and Eduard Spranger (1923) as well as critical accounts that helped to shape modern VET systems (e.g. Siemsen, 1926, 1948; Lempert, 1971; Blankertz, 1974) and which have significant implications for other European countries. Our aim in this paper is to build on this discussion and to examine the continued relevance of these foundations for VET systems in Europe today.

The theoretical foundations on which VET research builds are diverse, and have an international provenance: in this, not only different theoretical traditions, but distinctive patterns of knowledge production are significant. Whilst these sites have received less attention than the path-dependent differences among European VET systems (e.g., Greinert 2005; Crouch et al.

1999), the location of research in education departments that also provide VET teacher education programmes has been significant in generating and building on various forms of theorisation. VET research has also drawn on concepts from outside the discipline of education departments, as well as from countries such as France and the USA which lack a substantial tradition of VET research or even practice, all of which has extended the range of theoretical resources available to the field. These institutional aspects together represent the social basis on which educational research has been constructed.

The field is also subject to powerful external forces in the shape of policy discourses supported by powerful international institutions with universalising prescriptions. Thus, international bodies as the European Union, UNESCO, ILO World Bank and OECD have generated a significant volume of well-resourced empirical research, although this tends to be under-theorised and sometimes explicitly seeks to reframe VET around a universalising neoliberal model. Correspondingly, not only university departments but other research institutions and national agencies contribute to thinking about VET that can often serve very different ends from those accepted in educational practice.

This paper seeks to provide insight into the way that recognised theoretical approaches are still able to inform policy and practice and to what extent these are subject to distinctive national approaches. It will examine how far a reinvigorated theorisation of VET, addressing contemporary challenges, can draw on these older concepts in order to reaffirm educational aims and practices within VET, and across its boundaries; and whether the future of VET also requires augmentation by new theoretical approaches that can enable researchers to answer questions posed by contemporary crises of health, inequality, globalisation and technological change.

The following sections in turn discuss the differences between German foundations of VET theory and the distinctive approaches in the ‘Anglosphere’ or English-speaking countries; the continuing relevance of theory in the light of contemporary issues for German VET, specifically its role in youth transitions; and the relationships among VET systems and theorisation of VET in the light of neo-institutional understandings.

2 Theorising VET without VET theory

By contrast with the German ‘in-house’ foundations of VET theory described as *Berufsbildungstheorie*, VET research elsewhere in Europe positions itself to varying degrees outside such boundaries. The countries where distinctive VET pathways, and consequently VET research, emerged later, have produced neither the extensive state support that characterises the DACH countries, nor the endogenous theorisation of the field peculiar to Germany. The influence of international bodies promoting economic perspectives, marketisation and neoliberal concepts has been pervasive in its influences on education policy in all European countries but has encountered resistance from various national traditions (e.g., Dovemark et al., 2018). Consequently, a more heterogeneous theorisation of the field, drawing on a wider range of disciplines and theoretical resources, has informed research in most other European countries.

This distinction is especially salient in the English-speaking world, or ‘Anglosphere’. In these countries both the practice and study of VET emerged later than in continental Europe, usually taking the form of post-school, and often part-time education. Developing in tension with a neoliberal reframing of education as early as the 1970s, VET research has a more diversified institutional base, is liminal to the broader field of education research and competes with alternative institutional and external claims to expertise. Here we can speak not of ‘VET theory’ but of a theorisation of VET that draws on concepts from other disciplines.

The distinctive features of VET in these countries are widely associated with the long-term consequences of the UK’s early capitalist development and a liberal market philosophy

based on the ideas of Adam Smith (2012 [1776]; see e.g., Winch 2000 for an extended discussion). As the economic structures and forms of organisation that sustained VET in the early post-war years gave way to more service-based economies, these countries came to occupy the front rank of the neoliberal ascendancy and its diminution of VET to the acquisition of narrowly defined occupational competences (Brockmann et al., 2008; Wolf, 1995). In international comparisons of VET systems, as in comparisons of welfare states, or of political economies, Anglophone countries tend to be associated with ‘liberal market’ approaches to economic and social issues that frame education, in contrast to ‘collective’ German models (e.g., Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). The Anglosphere has been especially influential in an international ‘policy-making assemblage’ (Thompson et al., 2022) in which well-resourced research contributes to an international reframing of VET on neoliberal lines (e.g., OECD, 2010, 2014).

Yet these are also countries where such ideas have been strongly contested; where liberal and democratic educational ideas have strong roots that include Dewey’s (1916) critique of vocationalism; and with their own traditions of the collective and critical. If Britain’s industrial revolution of ‘artisan discoveries’, mechanised mass production and colonial markets needed little education for its working-class children, a relatively privileged but ever-growing layer has long needed schooling for technical and administrative purposes, which reformers have sought to extend on civic lines. These tensions are recognised in Dewey’s admiration of vocational learning and critique of ‘narrow trade education’ (1916, p. 372). Also, they are reflected in Anglophone critique of neoliberal reforms and of human capital theory from the 1980s to the present (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; McGrath & Badroodien, 2006).

Thus, the first commentaries on VET to emerge from the further education teacher institutions in England and the journal they founded in 1948, *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, at first discussed contemporary policy and practice largely independently of theoretical considerations; but from the 1980s these began to be joined by increasingly critical voices, such as Gleeson and Mardle’s (1980) study, written at a time when UK policy discourse demanded ‘synchronisation’ of education and training with ‘manpower’ requirements. Illustrating the central role of socialisation in sustaining ‘the affectual skills which underpin the social relations of production’ Gleeson and Mardle (1980, p. 5) drew on contemporary concerns with autonomy and ideology to argue that the apparent freedoms of further education enabled young people to enter the production process imagining this had been done voluntarily. By the 1980s, however, even these limited labour market opportunities, facilitated by the part-time education of apprentices, became overshadowed by state provision of training for the young employed. Moore’s (1987) argument that this process supported ‘a particular ideological representation of „the needs of industry”’ (Moore, 1987, p. 230) represented a shift in critique to the way that further education prepared the model citizen of ‘post-industrial’ society. This theoretical critique of the ‘new vocationalism’ offers a nuanced explanation for the ‘work-based’ (but often unrelated to any meaningful employment or expertise) qualifications that came to dominate these countries, including the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England, Competency-Based Training (CBT) reforms in Australia and similar ‘occupational’ routes elsewhere. Over the next 40 years, a critique of this narrow approach, based on critical sociology, came to dominate VET research in the Anglosphere, not least in relation to the reduction of knowledge to competencies.

Compelling as these explanations of VET policy in the Anglosphere may have proved, these accounts have exercised considerably less influence over policy than even more critical approaches in the DACH countries (for example, the influence of critical theorists on Germany’s 1969 Vocational Training Act). To some extent these limitations of Anglophone approaches to theorising VET reflect their more diversified institutional base (c.f. Bates et al., 1999). This competes with alternative institutional and external claims to expertise and is liminal to a broader (but also marginalised) field of educational research. Whilst VET research has drawn on educational perspectives to critique VET as a marginalised and marginalising

educational pathway, educational theory itself has been strongly influenced by submission to external disciplines, notably the idea of ‘foundational subjects’ (philosophy, sociology, psychology and history of education) which reflects the historical emergence of UK education departments (Furlong & Whitty, 2017).

Critique of VET based on the social sciences has made important contributions to the study of VET in the Anglosphere and this is likely to continue during ongoing crises of health, economy and environment. Yet understandings based on the social sciences alone have limitations for determining the future direction of VET. Philosophical work that echoes the *Bildung* tradition (but perhaps lacks its idealist or exclusionary aspects) can have an important role to play here: it is unsurprising that Winch, who has made the strongest philosophical contribution to VET in recent years, has sought to publicise the *Berufsbildungstheorie* tradition in recent years (e.g. Kuhlee et al., 2022). Certainly, the Anglosphere already draws on important philosophical concepts of capability and social justice as tools to conceptualise a renewal of VET at a time of economic, social and climate crisis (e.g., McGrath et al. 2022; Alla-Mensah & McGrath, 2023; Esmond & Atkins, 2022). Additional concepts and criteria old and new, with origins in Europe, the Americas or especially the global South, may prove necessary not only to understand VET’s challenges and difficulties but to imagine and map out the way to its future possibilities.

3 Theorising transitions as a function of the welfare state

Besides examining the genesis of VET theory and dealing with basic concepts, norms and premises of VET, theoretical studies also offer starting points for analysing the connections between VET on the one hand and social, political and economic conditions on the other hand. Such an investigation may already have strong normative connotations a priori by drawing on social philosophical foils such as Critical Theory. However, they can also become explanatory analyses of high complexity by drawing on social science concepts, which in turn do not have to dispense with normative conclusions – an approach pursued in the following discussion.

According to Stauber and Walther (1999, p. 9), the educational system of a society must be characterised as a structure of inclusion and exclusion, i.e., of the social opportunities that are opened or closed to young people. This observation is essentially true for the German educational system, which is characterised by a strong institutional autonomy and delimitation of the different types of schools and educational programmes, as well as a strictly formalised system of entitlement (cf. Kutscha, 2005, p. 165; Kell, 1995, pp. 291–295; Beck et al., 1980, p. 52; Schweikert & Grieger 1975, pp. 1–2, 6–7).

A particular challenge for young people leaving secondary education is the transition from lower secondary education to fully qualifying VET in the dual apprenticeship system (cf. Lex & Zimmermann, 2011, pp. 604–605; Bojanowski & Niemeyer, 2009, p. 14). This is particularly noteworthy because, under formal legislation, taking up VET in the dual apprenticeship system does not require a school leaving certificate (cf. Euler, 2012, pp. 322–323). Thereby, a considerable proportion of young people, especially young people leaving *Hauptschule* (basic secondary school) after nine years of schooling at age 15, or *Realschule* (advanced secondary school) after ten years of schooling at age 16, do not manage this transition successfully (cf. Euler, 2012, pp. 322, 324; Biermann et al., 2009, p. 28). As a result, a new segment has emerged, the so-called vocational transition system (VTS). The programmes offered here do not represent fully qualifying VET but are merely intended to prepare for it (cf. Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006, p. 79) to increase the chances of the young people for successful transition towards VET or gainful employment by further promoting their general vocational skills (cf. Euler & Severing, 2006, p. 69).

Despite this intention, the measures and educational programmes of the VTS have increasingly taken on the function of an educational retention for young people. The VTS

guarantees that they remain in the educational system until they have accessed VET, found employment or reached the end of their compulsory education (cf. Kutscha, 2010, p. 314; Euler & Severing, 2006, p. 70). Due to the lack of standards and regulations, the VTS includes a wide spectrum of offerings from different providers (VET schools, educational companies, independent providers) in conjunction with a variety of support measures and governmental responsibilities (cf. Frommberger et al., 2012, pp. 124–125; Kutscha, 2010, p. 313).

To analyse the factors and effects of VTS, recourse to systems theory seems promising. According to Luhmann, modern society is characterised by the primacy of functional differentiation, on the basis of which self-referential and autopoietic functional systems are differentiated from the social system as a whole (cf. Luhmann, 2012, pp. 404–406; 1998a, pp. 42–43, 571; 1998b, pp. 738–739, 743–746, 761, 778–780). From a system-theoretical point of view, against the background of the welfare state, the VTS and its location as an anomaly in the order of social systems and subsystems can be highlighted, as defined initially and in a formative manner by Niklas Luhmann with his theory of social self-referential, autopoietic systems (cf. Luhmann, 2015, pp. 132–133; 2002, pp. 124, 198). In order to work out this anomaly, the corresponding reference systems and concepts must be defined in a first step. The primary aim of the transitional system is to reduce the educational weaknesses of young people, e.g., through pre-employment measures or by catching up on general school-leaving certificates (cf. Kutscha, 2010).

On the one hand, the VTS is connected to the educational system, since it is analogously involved in the development of individual educational biographies and awards entitlements as a result of participation in measures. At the same time, it is justified by the selection function of the educational system, since this system produces the addressees of the transition system in the form of young people who cannot be placed. On the other hand, the VTS is just as close to the economic system, which in turn enables and regulates the utilisation of social human capital for economic purposes via the employment system as its sub-system. In doing so, it ties in with the educational system and the entitlements provided by it and transforms these into labour power required by the economic system. The employment system is therefore also the buyer of the entitlements granted by the VTS and at the same time defines its success conditions by accepting the previously unplaceable young people or not. Ultimately, however, the existence of the VTS is based on the idea of welfare and thus the welfare state (cf. Luhmann, 1981). This is not constructed as a system or sub-system, but manifests itself as a regulatory function of the political system, and becomes effective as an intervention in other functional systems. It is not constructed as a subsystem of the political system because it follows a different logic and fulfils a different function. Accordingly, the function of the welfare state is the social inclusion of precarious strata of the population; it is depicted in the binary „code” (Luhmann, 1998a, p. 388) as *cared for* or *not cared for*. But in turn it cannot be constructed as a separate functional system, since it is based on the fulfilment of the function for the political system. The welfare state primarily serves its need to retain power, which is the self-referential basis of the political system, and which in turn can be realised most securely and with the least effort under conditions of social stability, which is promoted by caring for precarious sections of the population.

With this statement, the welfare state justification of the vocational transition system becomes clear. Since young people without direct or prospective access to the employment system after their school career tend to become part of the social precariat, the welfare state initiates a social mechanism with the VTS that tries to prevent or at least weaken this tendency. The primarily political function of the VTS is fulfilled by taking in and keeping unplaceable individuals without excluding them from social participation and, at best, ensuring that the educational qualifications required for participation in the neoliberal labour market are obtained in the form of an entitlement.

4 Theorising internationalisation of VET

Historically, VET systems and practices are considerably national in scope (Gessler et al., 2021). So far, the development of VET systems has been dominantly described as a consequence of a variety of the capitalist economy. Historical institutionalism and its core concept of path dependency, however, are (in their strict forms) unable to account for increasingly important international influences on VET systems. Here, competing ‘best practices’ of VET on how to reduce youth unemployment, how to efficiently train professionals, how to match skills and the economy and how VET can be used to prepare for participating in society beyond work are dominating the international reform discourse. These agendas, however, are highly normative in their nature.

In this regard, sociological neo-institutionalism can contribute to a critical examination of if and how global institutions, both formal and informal, change VET (Hatch, 2018). It explores how (VET) organisations adapt and conform to institutional norms, rules, and practices in order to gain legitimacy and maintain social acceptance. Central to this theoretical approach is that decisions of organisations are following institutional pressures, normative expectations and symbolic legitimacy, which could lead to practices that are not necessarily the most rational or optimal from a functionalist perspective. Thus, the understanding of organisations as rational actors is challenged, and a broader examination of the socio-institutional context is needed to grasp the intricacies of organisational behaviour.

Following Türck, we can distinguish three levels on how neo-institutionalism is used. Therefore, the operation of an organisation (micro), the way an organisation is influenced by their environments (meso) and finally the way organisations influence their (larger) environments (macro) can be analytically separated. Particularly the latter macro perspective is interesting when it comes to analysing the impacts of international organisations on VET systems.

Looking at current trends dominating the international discourse, one inevitably is confronted with two approaches: on the one hand the Germanophone dual apprenticeship model is internationally advertised as a (‘complex but effective’) youth unemployment killer (e.g. Lascárez Smith & Schmees, 2021), on the other hand Anglophone competency-based training (CBT) is an international bestseller when it comes to (‘simple and efficient’) skills development (critical Gessler, 2020). Both ‘best practices’ are highly successful and can be described as ‘international blueprints’ as they are representing standardised frameworks, guidelines, and/or models that are designed to guide and shape practices or policies at an international level. These blueprints often emerge through collaborations among multiple countries, organisations, or experts, addressing global challenges or promoting desired outcomes in various domains. Chabbot and Ramirez (2006, p. 174) conceptualised links between discourses from the global through the national, and further to the local level. In this conceptualisation, national actors adopt these ideas to create reform pressure. In doing so, these actors prove their willingness to acknowledge current problems concerning VET, as well as their willingness to implement solutions perceived to be rational.

Both observations can be associated with the same mechanism: As successful perceived VET policy in a particular country is decontextualised by the import of ideas through IOs and also national (non-)governmental organisations that create international blueprints for ‘best practices’. The process of isomorphism (Boxenbaum & Johnson, 2017) helps explain how VET organisations tend to develop an international discourse around these blueprints. Critical examination of such shared beliefs in their search for legitimacy and rationality reveals unreflected import of non-contested assumptions of which system layout will optimise the training. From a neo-institutional perspective, the theory explains how countries can implement policies more on the basis of shared beliefs than because of rational arguments (beyond the discourse). Accordingly, the discourse entails a narrative causal relationship of these blueprints (described by

sociological institutionalism as a ‘myth’, see Koch, 2009, p. 113), e.g., that implementing the dual apprenticeship system will lead to a low youth unemployment rate (see OECD, 2010).

The theory of sociological neo-institutionalism, as well as the mechanisms explained by it regarding the internationalisation of VET systems, complement existing VET theories that are functionalist in nature by explaining how *Bildung* unfolds, how skills gaps can be closed, or how literacy spreads. While these attempts are important, they need to be accompanied by theories (further developed in VET research and by VET researchers) that examine these functionalist approaches and practises in a critical way. In this regard, sociological neo-institutionalism enables new forms of organisational analysis in VET research. At a macro level, neo-institutionalism helps us understand the structural similarities and isomorphic tendencies that exist among VET systems across different countries. This understanding is particularly valuable when questioning assumptions related to the exporting or importing of ‘best practice’ ideals in VET. By using a neo-institutional lens, we can question the assumption that what works well in one VET system will automatically lead to positive outcomes in another.

An open question when using neo-institutionalism (in any field) is, however, on which ontological base blueprints, reforms agendas, or current trends are assessed: as a myth or as irrational? Sociological Institutionalism can describe and analyse the process by which these international myths are constructed, how they work, and finally diffuse in different ways, at different levels and around the globe. However, it fails to provide criteria for being able to assess a myth (in VET) as myth. From our observation, these classifications are done so far by gut feelings, logical arguing, or empirical evidence – actors are asked to provide their opinion on these reforms. However, the overarching theoretical base is missing in all these approaches. Therefore, in order to analyse the described phenomenon, neo-institutionalism as VET theory should (and need) to include a normative dimension, in order to contribute to the value-oriented world of education and training.

5 Conclusion

This paper has illustrated the significance of *Berufsbildungstheorie* through very different accounts. Each has shown that the fruitfulness of theoretical approaches lies in their ability to provide different analytical angles and insights into the multifaceted nature of VET. The diversity of theoretical approaches in VET across European countries (and beyond) reflects the existence of different perspectives and academic traditions. They illustrate both commonalities and differences: future VET theories may strive to bridge national differences but are also likely to be attentive to divergences in VET across countries.

Whilst the starting point of these contributions is the recovery of *Berufsbildungstheorie*, in each case the powerful explanatory role of the social sciences is illustrated. Their rise has been significant in the declining influence of older philosophical approaches. (In this, we count not only *Berufsbildungstheorie* but the work of Dewey which is still widely referenced but rarely forms the basis of policy and practice in the Anglosphere, although this is more the product of atheoretical instrumentality.) Correspondingly, the explosion of post-foundational approaches near the end of the twentieth century has raised questions about whether normative theories can be constructed in any sphere of human action. Yet the claims of social science to provide any ‘rational’ analysis of VET also require criteria to determine what may be rational, notwithstanding the need to be attentive to questions of space, discourse, power and identity in formulating either. We therefore suggest that the concepts of *Bildung* and specifically *Berufsbildung* concept have the potential to be renewed and revised with due attention to the experience and contribution of the global South. These theories can also themselves delve into the normative functions of VET systems, shedding light on the underlying values, goals, and societal expectations they aim to fulfil. By doing so, they can provide a deeper understanding of intentions as well as manifest and latent functions embedded within VET practices and

policies. Moreover, future VET theories should serve as a basis for critique, offering analytical tools to critically examine and evaluate the effectiveness, equity, and relevance of VET.

The striving towards *Bildung* in general education (e.g., Biesta, 2002, 2011) reflects a thirst for meaning, critique and coherence instead of the technicist instrumentality that so often pervades contemporary education in all settings and countries. This has already found echoes in European VET, notwithstanding critique of the way *Bildung* can construct exclusionary identities (Wischmann, 2015). German models of *Berufsbildungstheorie* are no less open to critique, especially their earlier national particularism and submission to authority. Yet alternatives are possible: Bostad and Solberg (2023) for example oppose the more inclusive ‘folk’ origins of Nordic versions of *Bildung* (Norwegian *folkedanning*, Swedish *folkbildning*) to Horlacher’s (2017) depiction of German *Bildung* as a class-differentiated concept (which Kerschensteiner and Spranger adapted for their own VET rationale). Just as the former provided a rationale for a folk education and the comprehensive school, could a more enabling and socially just concept of *Berufsbildung* emerge from the present global ferment of ideas around VET?

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