

Open issue: Introduction

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In the third issue of Confero we received contributions in response to an open call for papers. This issue included essays on the topics of liberal education and *bildung*, the teaching profession and its current conditions and political mobilization in adult education. In line with the interdisciplinary focus, essayistic scope and social critical position of Confero, we present in this issue a variety of papers contributing to such subjects. Two contributions engage with the concept of *bildung*, but in quite different ways.

Ronny Ambjörnsson attempts to characterize Ellen Key's educational vision and, more precisely, the concept of *bildung* as it was understood and presented by Key. Ambjörnsson places Key in the European intellectual tradition. She was, Ambjörnsson argues, a European intellectual in the best meaning of the word, and one of the last people in Swedish cultural history for whom the whole European tradition of ideas was real. Key often associated herself, where education was concerned, with traditions that had roots in other times. Thus in order to properly understand Ellen Key we must learn to understand the writers and philosophical traditions of the age in which she lived, as well as thinkers of earlier times, such as Goethe, Rousseau and Montaigne. However, as the idea traditions in which Key believed are central in the history of ideas in the Western world, we must also learn to understand these traditions in order to understand our own time.

While Ambjörnsson's main effort looks backward, Bernt Gustavsson's mission is to look forward, attempting to trace the recent changes and developments of the *bildung* concept. Gustavsson argues that a more inclusive concept of *bildung* is about to emerge, as its classical form has been criticised for being too exclusive. Above all, Gustavsson wants to point out a tendency or movement towards a global concept of *bildung*. The author calls attention to similarities between postcolonial thought and the various interpreters of the *bildung* concept, aiming at synthesizing a variety of contributions including both ancient and modern philosophers and "world literature" writers.

In tracing the intellectual history of the concept, Gustavsson not only reviews different interpretations aiming at convergence, but takes a stand and makes suggestions regarding the proper one (using value statements such as "wise" and "fruitful"). Thus, there should be a "balance" between on the one hand *bildung* as a free, endless process and on the other *bildung* as the ideally educated man. However, the main idea of the paper concerns another balance, that between universalism and particularism. Using the balance, or rather the tension between the two, Gustavsson tries to widen the concept of *bildung*: "Read in a hermeneutic tradition of transposing the particular to the universal, the understanding of *bildung* can be widened if it is related to other parts of the world".

Marcela Milana analyses UNESCO as a global actor through a global polity perspective. The focus is on political mobilisation. From her adopted perspective she argues for three modes of mobilization in adult education: landmarking, brokering and framing. Her paper stands out in its recognition that UNESCO, she argues, has both intellectually and conceptually contributed to the production of an explicit adult educational ontology. Such processes, however, overshadow processes where UNESCO has mobilized political will across a broad set of actors, when it comes to pursuing a global agenda in adult education. It is with an eye on these processes that she suggests that three modes of mobilization can be elicited. Such an analysis draws attention to the ways a shared past in adult education can be co-constructed

(landmarking) and how a viable future can be envisioned (brokering) through interactions between UNESCO and other political actors. This led to the creation of specific standard setting and monitoring instruments, in an attempt to produce material changes (framing) in adult education. She concludes that such an analysis calls for further investigations that, by incorporating multisite and multi-actor perspectives, can extend our knowledge about these processes as well as about the materiality of the changes they are (or are not) able to produce.

Kane Xavier Faucher analyses how public universities are under pressure to adopt more neoliberal practices. He argues that this has led to a variety of challenging consequences for contract faculty. He argues that the enduring plight of contract academics must be addressed, and action cannot be deferred until there is an enforced policy for suitable data collection, as this may never materialize. Although it is essential that data be collected, the complex and differentiated nature of the Canadian university sector presents several major obstacles that may not be overcome without a strong national strategy. He argues that union participation that is inclusive and representative of all faculty rank interests not only promotes solidarity, but also may work to diminish the more subjective feelings of alienation among a credentialed, professional, and arguably essential labour force. It cannot be stated that the current political and economic conditions have caused the “adjunct crisis,” but that university administration responses are to blame. The preliminary solutions tendered in his piece are an attempt to reframe the discussion of academic labour that values the human inputs as primary over the economic concerns. Dispelling myths and misperceptions about contract academics, and among them, may serve to be an initial step toward eliminating one of the most significant obstacles to the improvement of working conditions, which is alienation.

Ott and Mirjam Puumeister are concerned with the changing role of the teacher in the Estonian society. They do not concentrate on the educational system as a whole, but on one specific and crucial element in this apparatus, i.e. the teacher. Their concern is to understand the teacher as an actor in power relations. In

the analysis they make use of the concepts of surveillance and sousveillance practices. They conclude that the position of the teacher in Estonian society is far from that of a political agent, or, in other terms, a socially influential subject. Instead, the teacher is a public servant who is obligated to produce individuals capable of economic innovation. If, indeed, the teacher's position and reputation is to 'improve', it cannot be done through these established practices that fix his or her position. It would, instead, be necessary to dismantle and reconfigure the social practices of power that constitute the currently dominant position of truthful knowledge.

We hope these papers will promote further discussion and we invite you as readers to take part in this deliberation in coming issues of *Confero*. We encourage readers to contribute to the ongoing debate concerning education and social criticism, and in doing so take up new interesting themes and challenges that are in need of scrutiny.