Forum Oświatowe Vol 34, No 1(67) (2022) ISSN 0867-0323
https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2022.3

Sabrina Bacher
University of Innsbruck, Austria
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4004-6989
Hana Cervinkova
Maynooth University, Ireland
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1333-1349
Christian Kraler
University of Innsbruck, Austria
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7333-5002
Lotar Rasiński
University of Lower Silesia, Poland
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8172-8172

Independence, Interdisciplinarity, Internationality: Toward "Higher Bildung" in Doctoral Education

ABSTRACT: In this article, we introduce the concept of "higher Bildung," which we developed as a pedagogical approach to doctoral supervision and mentoring guided by principles of emancipation and individual freedom. The pedagogical framework builds on a combination of higher education and the educational concept of Bildung to foster an idea of higher education that highlights growth, cooperation, and sustainability. We discuss three fundamental pillars for this concept – independence, interdisciplinarity, and internationality – and explain how we applied this conceptual framework in an international seminar for early-stage researchers, which resulted in articles published in the special section of this peer-reviewed journal.

KEYWORDS: doctoral education, Bildung, higher education, paradoxical effect, neoliberalism, Humboldt, Foucault

Kontakt:	Sabrina Bacher Sabrina.Bacher@uibk.ac.at Hana Cervinkova Hana.Cervinkova@mu.ie Christian Kraler Christian.Kraler@uibk.ac.at Lotar Rasiński lotar.rasinski@dsw.edu.pl

Jak cytować:	Bacher, S., Cervinkova, H., Kraler, C., Rasiński, L. (2022). Independence, Interdisciplinarity, Internationality: Toward "Higher Bildung" in Doctoral Education. *Forum Oświatowe*, 34(1), 43–54. https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2022.3
How to cite:	Bacher, S., Cervinkova, H., Kraler, C., Rasiński, L. (2022). Independence, Interdisciplinarity, Internationality: Toward "Higher Bildung" in Doctoral Education. *Forum Oświatowe*, 34(1), 43–54. https://doi.org/10.34862/fo.2022.3

INTRODUCTION

This special section of *Educational Forum* derives from a continuing collaboration of researchers from three European universities: the University of Lower Silesia in Poland, the University of Innsbruck in Austria and Maynooth University in Ireland. The main goals of this collaboration have been to support emerging researchers in their professional development by helping them develop their ideas in the field of educational research and to turn their research results into publications. The publication process is often framed as a purely technical or procedural matter tied to publishing in a particular journal or as content-specific supervision and advising. The individualized and competition-driven culture of academic publishing requires that experts know how to publish findings in their fields of interest. Early-career researchers are under particularly heavy pressure from the fast publication culture, which demands high quality, excellence and speed. Failures are not an accepted part of a scientific career. Immediate success, high scores, citations and third-party funding seem to be the only road to success. But science and scholarship are based on patient scientific thinking, theoretical modelling, circular reflection and a thorough, comprehensive knowledge of one's area of research, which takes time and cannot be accelerated arbitrarily (Rosa, 2015, 2020).

In line with this rationale, we, as editors of this special section, have begun organizing an international seminar dedicated to supporting early-stage researchers in thinking through and writing up their research projects in a safe, collaborative environment. Underpinning our work is the premise that, rather than a short-term, economically driven strategy toward externally defined excellence, research and scholarly publication is a process of continuing growth, cooperation and sustainability. The project stems from the collaboration of individuals and institutions within the Horizon 2020 Initial Training Networks project – EDiTE (European Doctorate

in Teacher Education, 2015–2019). When the formal project concluded in 2020, researchers from two of the partner universities, the University of Lower Silesia and the University of Innsbruck, decided to continue their cooperation by establishing an annual international Ph.D. seminar, "Society, Policy and Education: Glocal Perspectives." The seminar takes place either online or at one of the participating universities; it is free, with no external funding provided. Voluntary participants, both students and supervisors, are recruited from within the participating institutions. Each year we identify and invite motivated emerging researchers (doctoral students as well postdoctoral or advanced M.A. students) as well as our colleagues to this international, interdisciplinary research space guided by principles of collaboration and supportive supervision.

The seminar focuses on helping early-career researchers grasp the rules of scientific publishing through a well-defined opportunity of writing for a peer-reviewed journal, which channels their creativity by providing clear structure and framework. Learning the rules of developing and communicating ideas in this way, we believe, can lead to independence and scholarly freedom. An important aspect of such understood independence of scientific thought is that it grows by exposure to other fields of science. Therefore, our seminar encourages interdisciplinarity (Chettiparamb, 2007), which not only enriches methodological knowledge but also shows emerging researchers the limits of authorities in their very own field. Finally, since science should not be limited by national borders, the seminar brings together early-stage scientists from different institutions and countries.

The section of the Educational Forum that follows is the outcome of our latest seminar, in which advanced graduate students and postdoctoral researchers worked together to develop, present and discuss the results of their empirical and theoretical research. Through a structured process of peer feedback and supervision by senior scholars, most participants were able to prepare and submit their work in the form of journal articles, which you find here.

In this introduction, we discuss the conceptual framework of our pedagogical work, which we refer to as "higher *Bildung*," and which brings together the educational concepts of "higher education" and "*Bildung*." Through "higher *Bildung*" we want to emphasize the importance of freedom in the process of individualization as socially embedded scientific self-realization. In our approach, we build on our experience in exploring the potential of critical doctoral pedagogies to create the conditions of possibility for the construction of subjectivity and emergence of new knowledges under the conditions of neoliberal domination (Rasiński, Dopita, Cervinkova, 2021). Rather than focusing on the constraints imposed by economically driven trends in higher education (Al-Haija/Mahamid, 2021, Mintz, 2021, Olssen, 2005), we are thus inspired to use the critical pedagogical potential to exploit neoliberalism's "paradoxical effect" (Foucault 2008) – the unintended consequences of neoliberal conditions – in higher education.

"HIGHER *BILDUNG*"

"Higher *Bildung*" is a neologism, which we introduce as the conceptual framing for this article and our work. Combining the concepts of higher education and *Bildung*, refers to a specific form of higher education based on the educational idea of *Bildung*.

Immanuel Kant (1803/1900) argued that education is situated between the opposing poles of constraint and freedom:

> How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint? I am to accustom my pupil to endure a restraint of […] [their] freedom, and at the same time I am to guide […] [them] to use […] [their] freedom aright. Without this all education is merely mechanical, and the child, when […] [their] education is over, will never be able to make a proper use of […] [their] freedom. (Kant, 1803/1900, p. 27)

Education, Kant wrote, constrains young people by aiming to integrate them into society and the working world; in this process, they learn to meet others' expectations, fulfill duties, uphold laws, and accept societal traditions, conventions, norms and values. On the other hand, education aims to individualize young people, freeing them to fulfill their unique potential. In this process, they learn to emancipate themselves from unquestioned social obligations and live autonomous lives, take responsibility for their actions, and justify their moral convictions, decisions and actions. According to Kant (1803/1990), the way out of this paradox is a heightened emphasis on reason from early ages onward; he argued that people should "accustom themselves early to yield to the commands of reason, for if a [hu]man be allowed to follow […] [their] own will in […] [their] youth, without opposition, a certain lawlessness will cling to […] [them] throughout […] life." (p. 4)

Nevertheless, in the balancing act between constraint and freedom, the pendulum has historically swung toward a specific econometrically shaped constraint. The expansion of neoliberalism into education has introduced market-oriented modes of regulation and organization of educational policy and practice, generally constraining the emancipatory element of education (Nussbaum, 1998; Liessmann, 2006). Critical scholarship extensively describes the negative effects of neoliberal developments on the educational sector, where these trends introduced processes of privatization (Lipman, 2011), market competition (Hill & Kumar, 2009), vocationalization (Giroux, 2001), massification (Altbach, Becker, & Moretti 2012), standardization (Kempf, 2016), commercialization (Kleinman, Feinstein, & Downey, 2013), commodification (Miller, 2010), corporatization (Kivisto, 2016; Broucker, De Wit, & Verhoeven 2017), managerialization (Beckmann, Cooper, & Hill, 2009), and centralization and control (Torrance, 1997). Much existing research on neoliberalism and education focuses on policy analysis and the critique of neoliberal ideology (Apple, 2006a, 2006b; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Giroux, 2014). Taking these important critiques into account

and drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, we have proposed to focus on neoliberalism's "paradoxical effect" (Foucault, 2008) – the unintended consequences of neoliberal logic and policies and their critical pedagogical potential (Rasinski, Dopita, Cervinkova, 2021). In our analysis of doctoral educational reforms in Central Europe, for example, we considered how exploitation of such paradoxical effects, through pedagogical approaches to doctoral education based on practical critique (Foucault 1984), can paradoxically produce critical subjectivities capable of discerning the neoliberal entanglement of practitioner-researchers' professional work and their own role in the implementation of neoliberal policy (Rasinski, Dopita, Cervinkova, 2021).

The rationale behind the seminar "Society, Policy and Education: Global Perspectives" follows this logic and aims to explore the potential for building critical subjectivities created in the spaces of individual freedom generated by neoliberalism's paradoxical effects. In the pedagogical framing of the seminar, we therefore place a heightened emphasis on the notion of education that focuses primarily on freedom – in the sense of autonomy, individualization and maturity – as opposed to constraint.

We work with the educational concept of *Bildung*, which builds on a foundation of freedom in the spirit of fulfilling individual potential. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, German philosophers (e.g., Fichte, 1800/1962; Humboldt, 1793/2000; Kant, 1803; Schleiermacher, 1820-21/2008) extensively discussed the concept of *Bildung* and redefined it as an inner formation of humans as individuals. One of the leading figures among them was Wilhelm von Humboldt, who made a substantial contribution to the theory and practice of *Bildung* through his holistic perspective as a philosopher, linguist, diplomat, functionary, educational reformer and one of the chief initiators of the creation of the University of Berlin (today Humboldt University of Berlin). Humboldt (1792/1854) elaborates on the conditions necessary for the implementation of *Bildung* and reflects on the imperilment of *Bildung* through the curtailment of freedom because of social, religious, political and economic constraints. He argues that only free individuals can realize their full potential because freedom is a necessary condition for humans to emancipate themselves from authoritarian structures, as well as to act critically, independently and responsibly. Freedom not only fosters individuals' personal fulfillment but also eventually helps all humankind flourish because the self-realization of enough people in the long term transcends to humanity overall –among free humans "emulation naturally arises" (Humboldt, 1792/1854, p. 69).

In "Higher *Bildung*" we work with three pillars directly intertwined with the concept of *Bildung* itself: independence, interdisciplinarity and internationality. The figure below illustrates the relationship between these three pillars and "higher *Bildung*."

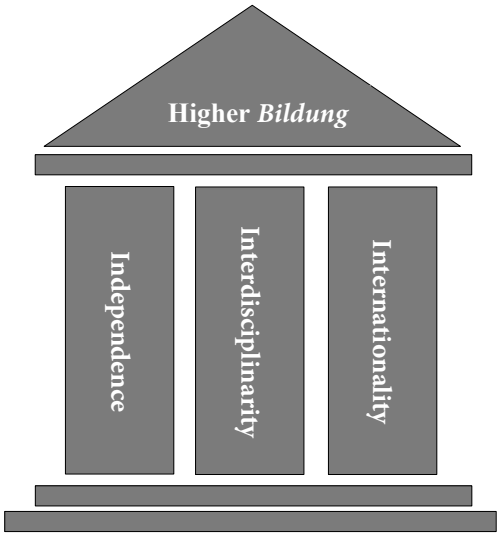


Figure 1. The three pillars of "higher *Bildung*"

In what follows, we first outline the project structure and then elaborate on the suggested three pillars of higher *Bildung*, explaining how we attempted to respond to them in our joint international seminar with illustrations from participants' feedback.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project process involves several stages and varies from year to year, but it always involves many conceptual discussions among the core team of supervisors. The last edition was launched with a general online session in which participants introduced their research and publication ideas in concise, structured presentations. Rules of engagement during the project were discussed, including the prerogatives of ensuring safe space, openness to offering and receiving feedback, speaking out regardless of English-language proficiency level. At this stage, each participant was offered initial feedback from both peers and senior researchers and supervisors. After this initial session, we divided participants into working groups of three or four and also assigned researcher with two different supervisors who would give support throughout the process. Over the next four months, researchers met repeatedly in their working groups and were also in contact with their supervisors, working on multiple drafts of their publications. When the supervisors deemed the articles ready for publication, they were submitted to the journal and underwent a regular double-blind peer-review process. At the end of the process, the participants were asked for their feedback on the project.

PILLAR 1 – INDEPENDENCE

In the spirit of *Bildung*, formal education is a process towards maturity and independence. Humboldt (1809/2022) categorizes formal education into three levels – elementary, secondary and tertiary education – and justifies his classification by arguing that each stage fulfills a specific purpose. The major goal of elementary education is the acquisition and development of competences that are prerequisites for instructive learning. Secondary education focuses on learning in school settings and aims to help young people mature. Students are mature when they have learned enough that they can eventually emancipate themselves from their teachers and continue their lifelong learning autonomously and with intrinsic motivation. After the matriculation examination, the tertiary level of education – higher education – follows. In Humboldt's words, "[t]he limits of education, where it has not reached its endpoint, [is] the university, with its emancipation from actual teaching (as the university instructor only guides independent learning from afar)" (Humboldt, 1809/2022). He argued that universities should focus on independent research by students, guided and supported by teachers. In his view, while teachers in the traditional sense are necessary in elementary and secondary education, they are superfluous in tertiary education. According to Humboldt, university teachers are no longer teachers but rather mentors who guide and support their students' research. Vice versa, university students are no longer students; instead, they conduct research in collaboration with their mentors. In this context, universities enable students as researchers to understand the integrity of science and to make use of their creative forces. Therefore, strictly speaking, university education has no endpoint.

In our seminar, our main approach to fostering independence has been to create a positive, affirmative atmosphere in which the students/emerging researchers are encouraged to share their ideas without risk. Supervision sessions, both collective and individual, focus on discussing students' work in the context of preparing a scholarly journal paper. Particular attention is paid to nurturing individual students' capacity to articulate their ideas and research results. We are explicit in framing our seminar as a safe space in which initial and unfinished ideas are to be shared for critical but constructive, non-judgmental feedback. One student commented on how this open environment contributed to their intellectual development, enabling them to learn how to better articulate their thoughts: "Being able to formulate complete thoughts about complex issues is the most important skill I learned. I was glad and relieved to encounter this, and I credit the open environment of all the sessions. I am especially happy that the real focus was on learning something new and creating an atmosphere of intellectual achievement" (P1). Collective discussion or analysis in small peer groups followed the strict rule of resource orientation: One participant commented: "The coaching within the peer groups was very enriching. The exchange enabled new views and perspectives on one's own research focus" (P2). Another said: "For me it was interesting to see how my colleagues work, what their topics and ideas are. Talking to them, getting their feedback on my project and also discussing our

problems (in the small group) were very useful for me.“ In the participants‘ comments, the safe space governed by collegiality has proved critical to students‘ emancipation by achieving scholarly independence through publishing.

PILLAR 2 – INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Another essential component of higher *Bildung* is interdisciplinarity. According to Humboldt (1792/1854), exposure to a variety of situations is a fundamental condition for *Bildung*. It can be divided into three subcategories: educational content, personal experience and social interaction. Humans broaden their horizons by gaining a wide range of theoretical and practical knowledge in combination with exchanging ideas, allowing them to grow and evolve. Diverse intellectual experiences, such as a broad general knowledge, travel and human relationships, enable us to develop a complex view of the world. In Humboldt's own words (1792/1854):"[e]ven the most-free and self-reliant […] [individual] is thwarted and hindered in […] development by uniformity of position" (p. 11). He further states that humans are by nature versatile and thus should avoid one-sidedness. Instead of focusing on one subject, they should broaden their minds holistically. Therefore, Humboldt (1809/2017) promoted a broad general education for everyone, regardless of social background or anticipated career. In his Königsberg and the Lithuanian School Plan (1809/2022) he states that "[g]eneral secondary education is devoted to the complete human being […] in the principal functions of […] [their] natural being." He advocated that curricula be rich in variety so that individuals can find and fulfill their potential.

Supporting interdisciplinarity in our seminar came quite easily, as all of us work in different fields – our small supervisory group included educational researchers, philosophers and an anthropologist – and our students were equally diverse. We were connected by interest in education as a field of research and social practice. The importance of disciplinary diversity and respectful atmosphere was reflected in some of the participants' comments, one wrote: "By bringing together representatives of various paradigms, the seminar offered a fruitful confrontation of different perspectives. I soon found that my opinion was not only welcomed but also respected by my peers and professors." Working in small peer groups during the article-writing process, the participants not only saw but also immediately experienced different methodological traditions and approaches to research questions drawing on different disciplines.

PILLAR 3 – INTERNATIONALITY

Internationality constitutes another important pillar of "Higher *Bildung.*" In the spirit of *Bildung,* a cosmopolitical mindset is essential to broadening one's horizons holistically. A lively intellectual exchange with people from different national backgrounds exposes individuals to a diverse set of ideas and helps them not only learn from one another but also reflect critically on their own status quo. Humboldt

(1792/1854) regarded diversity as an essential part of *Bildung*. In his own words: "[t]he grand, leading principle […] is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity" (p. 65) and "[t]he diversity that emerges […] induces a plurality and innovation of opinions and ideas; and the human spirit might never have achieved its most sublime findings without the rousing spectacle of a heavy and almost universal friction of human powers" (p. 8). International collaboration makes people aware that humans are citizens of the world and ideas can transcend national borders. According to Humboldt (1836), social interaction benefits both individuals and society alike, fostering personal development as well as political and social harmony. He pointed out that a necessary condition for international exchange is a certain proficiency in at least one common language. Speaking a variety of languages not only enables international communication but also helps individuals understand the richness of the world in its diversity.

In our seminar interdisciplinarity is one way to foster creativity and open-mindedness. The other fundamental accelerator is internationality. Students from different countries and different universities bring different traditions of study, research cultures and languages, creating an inspiring challenge. In this context, one pivotal aspect of our seminar is language awareness. We emphasize using English as a *lingua franca*, a working language, independently from one's own proficiency. Some of our participants do not use English on a daily basis. In retrospect, however, they appreciated this particular challenge: "Further, writing an article in English is not the same as writing in German. ;-) An important exercise for me personally, which I would like to devote myself to in the future in order to further develop my skills.' (P4) The seminar explicitly encourages people to talk; the goal is to be understood. People expose themselves in a foreign language. Encouragement to speak, present and write in English is a key and integral part of building the seminar as safe space with an atmosphere of trust.

CONCLUSION

> *When I started working on my article for this publication I had a hard time. After the first review it was suggested to be rejected …but after working hard on the article I had a major breakthrough in answering one of research questions for my PhD thesis. This also supported me in learning how to write an article and what the process looks like for future research. I am thankful for the role that this seminar played in my research progress.* (P5)

In this paper, we outlined our approach to doctoral pedagogy guided by principles of emancipation and individual freedom. We described our conceptual framework, which we refer to as higher *Bildung,* building on a combination of higher education and the educational concept of *Bildung* to foster an idea of higher education that highlights growth, cooperation and sustainability. We suggested three fundamental pillars for this concept: independence, interdisciplinarity, internationality. We ex-

plained how we followed a conceptual framework in the international seminar for early-stage researchers, which resulted in articles published in this special section of *Educational Forum*. This is an unfinished and continuing project. Looking forward to its future editions and reiterations, we invite colleagues – both early-stage and experienced researchers – to join us.

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NIEZALEŻNOŚĆ, INTERDYSCYPLINARNOŚĆ, MIĘDZYNARODOWOŚĆ: IDEA „HIGHER BILDUNG" W KSZTAŁCENIU DOKTORSKIM

ABSTRAKT: W niniejszym artykule wprowadzamy pojęcie „higher Bildung," którym posłużyliśmy się w naszym podejściu pedagogicznym do opieki nad doktorantami, odwołując się do zasad emancypacji i indywidualnej wolności. Owa rama pedagogiczna opiera się na połączeniu szkolnictwa wyższego z pojęciem *Bildung*, a jej celem jest promowanie idei szkolnictwa wyższego, które kładzie szczególny nacisk na współpracę i zrównoważony rozwój. W artykule omawiamy główne filary tego podejścia – niezależność, współpracę oraz międzynarodowość – i wyjaśniamy, w jaki sposób zastosowaliśmy owe ramy koncepcyjne w międzynarodowym seminarium oferowanym dla młodych badaczy, którego efektem są artykuły opublikowane w specjalnej sekcji tego czasopisma.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: kształcenie doktorskie, Bildung, szkolnictwo wyższe, paradoksalny efekt, neoliberalizm, Humboldt, Foucault._