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Reflecting on the educational notion: From “Learning: The Treasure Within” (1996) to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (2015)

A literature-based thesis entailing critical points from formal *Bildung*-theoretical perspectives.

Reflexionen über das Bildungsverständnis: Von „Learning: The Treasure Within“ (1996) bis zum nachhaltigen Entwicklungsziel 4 (2015)

Eine literaturbasierte Bachelorarbeit, die kritische Punkte aus formalen bildungstheoretischen Perspektiven enthält.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis portrays a literature analysis that reflects on the educational notion promoted by two milestone documents: 1) The Report “Learning: The Treasure Within”, submitted to UNESCO in 1996 by the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century and 2) the Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, more specifically Goal 4 to: “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*”, unanimously adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The thesis interrogates their understanding of education utilising Klafki’s theory of Categorical *Bildung*, which endorses a balance between material theories of education (materiale Bildungstheorien), focusing on encyclopedic content, and formal educational theories (formale Bildungstheorien), focusing on the students’ behavior and subjective needs. The thesis illuminates the asymmetry between material and formal education found in the two documents and, referring to critical points from formal *Bildung*-theoretical perspectives, warns against the dangers of the global promotion of an educational notion that mainly anchors on material *Bildung*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the entire post-World War II period and the beginning of the post-Cold War interval, neoliberal efforts materialized educational reforms that stimulate competitiveness, financial growth and training over *Bildung*. In the latest phase of globalization, known as *knowledge capitalism*, the autonomy of the sociocultural reproductive and cohesive functions of schooling and the endorsement of critical thinking appear to be even more restrained (cf. Lundahl 2012, 215f), since education is market-oriented, explicitly linked to capital accumulation and the economy (cf. Giroux 2011, 4; Phipps and Guilherme 2004, 11ff). Since the end of the Cold War, this endeavour is supranationally fostered via numerous policy statements and reports; from Cresson's White Paper on "Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society" (European Commission 1995) to more recent reports and programs like the "OECD¹ Learning Framework 2030" (OECD 2018), which views education as a functionalist project. The skills to be acquired are adapted to the market's needs, and international benchmarks like the PISA study, commissioned by OECD, are the prelude to national education reforms that reduce *Bildung* to verifiable achievements dependent on their valorability. The rapid production of commodified human capital is supported by corporate consultancies like McKinsey which intervene in education debates and promote the business optimization of qualification requirements in the interest of dominant groups (Borst 2020, 14f). Shortly, in the globalized world education and its notion are under constant politico-economic contemplation.

In my thesis, I investigate two international documents that have shaped educational targets and influenced how education is perceived. Unlike other papers that discuss difficulties in achieving the proposed goals², I reflect on the targets' aims and their potential impact. I interrogate them from a philosophical viewpoint rooted in Klafki's theory of "Categorical *Bildung*". Under Klafki's term of "formal *Bildung* theories" I incorporated ethical and political concerns of critical thinkers about a notion that mainly anchors on "material education". Under scrutiny are the 1996 Report "Learning: The Treasure Within" and the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2015).

Starting with the Report, I diagnosed problems deriving from recommendations serving a rather neoliberal capitalist agenda. I found the Report's direction to emphasize the economic benefits of education and neglect targets such as self-realisation, social justice and cultural preservation. Consecutively, I researched its scope of influence, the implementation of its proposals and

¹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

² Like Ball (1998) arguing that the 1996 Report is overly ambitious and unimplementable.

investigated pertinent recent documents. After concluding that “Education 2030: Incheon Declaration (ID) and Framework for Action for the Implementation of SDG4”³ is currently the most relevant framework, I decided to focus on the perception of education as promoted by both the 1996 Report and SDG4. By questioning their aims, I tried to ascertain my indirect research question: whether an educational notion based on material *Bildung* is favored over one based on formal *Bildung* theories.

2. INTEREST IN KNOWLEDGE

According to Giroux, pedagogy is central to politics since it constructs critical agents and the formative culture that is vital for a democracy (2011, 4). Herein being politically conscious means to assess the motives of education and be aware of how it secures elitist modes of authority (Giroux 2011, 48). Even though “quality education” is a global political goal, its *good quality* translates differently depending on how one perceives education. To shed light on the supranationally transmitted educational notion in the era of *knowledge capitalism* and reflect on education’s *good quality*, I attempt to unmask the notions of “Learning: The Treasure Within” and of recent policy developments such as SDG4.

2.1. Interest in the 1996 Report. Before all else, it is productive to reminisce on the time of the Report’s publication. The Cold War’s end in the early 1990s provided the epilogue of global bipolar geopolitics and wrote the prologue for the emergence of a monopolar world order of socioeconomic liberalism and capitalism. After the failure of the socialist development model, the market was consistently esteemed as the main determinant of regulation and, thus, a more traditional utilitarian approach to development prevailed, in which education was reduced to financial terms (Tawil and Cougoureux 2013, 4). In 1991, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Director General convened the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century to reflect on education for the coming century. Chaired by J. Delors, it was comprised of fifteen -primarily political- figures with different cultural and professional backgrounds, who from 1993 engaged in consultations and working-groups sessions with teachers, researchers, students and representatives of governmental (GOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (UNESCO 1996, 249–52). Submitted to UNESCO in 1996, the Delors Report was a key reference for the conceptualization of education and learning. Its scope embraced both formal and informal education from pre-school to university, and its recommendations were directed to GOs, private agencies, decision- and

³ ED-2016/WS/28.

policymakers. Unsurprisingly, it generated interest in education policy debates and curriculum development and was communicated to UNESCO's Member States, National Commissions and partnering (N)GOs (UNESCO 1996, 255). By 2008, it had influenced 50 major policy conferences and UNESCO and World Bank policies⁴ and by 2013, it had been translated to 30 languages and sparked national initiatives beyond 50 countries.

The Report promoted its own approach to education (Tawil and Cougoureux 2013, 5), the aims of which I wish to elucidate (4.1.). Taking for granted the prevalence of globalization (UNESCO 1996, 14) and dictating how to prepare minors to become functional parts of (inter)national economy, it promotes a *camouflaged* material education view (4.2.). Believing that this deprived students in the first two decades of the 21st century from appreciating broader dimensions of learning⁵ (4.3.), I am interested in displaying how its functionalist notion reduces *lifelong learning* to opportunism, financial prosperity and employability.

2.2. *Interest in exploring the contemporary understanding of education in SDG4.* The Report's traces were visible until its influential role was passed to the Agenda 2030 and SDG4 to “*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*”, unanimously adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015. After over two years of consultations with civil society and other global stakeholders, the Agenda 2030 was created to end poverty and hunger, combat inequalities, build peaceful and inclusive societies, protect human rights, promote gender equality, empower women and girls and ensure the protection of the planet and its natural resources. Its integrated and indivisible 17 SDGs and 169 targets aim to balance economic, social and environmental sustainable development and ensure the Agenda's full realization by 2030 (General Assembly 2015, 1ff). Succinctly, the Agenda 2030 guides international action in various development areas, and in our case, SDG4 and its targets envision transforming lives through education. Perceiving education as a main developmental driver, ID pledged for a new education agenda, contributing to reaching all SDGs, such as eradicating poverty (SDG1) and achieving full employment (SDG8) (cf. UNESCO 2015, 7). My interest in discussing SDG4 lies in my assumption that education is linked to self-realization in terms of

⁴ Like “Reimagining our Futures together: a new social contract for education”, which builds upon the Report (Azoulay in International Commission on the Futures of Education 2021, v). It reflects on changes that have emerged, explores new directions, but raises similar concerns regarding its holistic approach. It transcends the 1996 Report (ibid. 2021, 66–71), but also actualizes it by accentuating education's economic and technological-development aspects and the preparation of students for the changing nature of learning (online platforms) and employment (working remotely) (ibid. 2021, 72, 100).

⁵ Ferrall cites a 2007 study by GDA Integrated Services, Three Cues newsletter (www.dehne.com) in which 92% of students stated that career preparation was the most important factor in choosing colleges (in Roth 2014, 159).

capital accumulation for *better* life prospects (concerning survival) and for stimulating the economy. Although the Agenda pledges for more than only financial development, I am eager to reveal how social and personal development are overridden (5.1.) and share my observations on the SDG4 targets that show how the promotion of its educational understanding resembles the 1996 Report (5.2.). Finally, it interests me to explore the dangers of a global notion, predominantly embracing material education, while not undervaluing its positive impact (5.3.).

3. THEORETICAL BASIS

As pedagogy reflects on theories and practices integrated in socio-historical processes (Borst 2020, 10), it was necessary to start with historical retrospection. Now, prior to elucidating the rationale behind my theoretical basis, I shall clarify the distinction between two important words in education theory: *Erziehung* and *Bildung*, both of which translate as education; complicating the comprehension of *Bildungsphilosophie*. Although many English academic papers use the German term (s. Biesta 2002), this translation problem sets *philosophy of education* at risk of losing its utility since the concepts of *Bildung* and *Erziehung* have different semantics and functions. *Erziehung* refers to integrational social actions in which the learner has *object* status and absorbs traditional norms. Contrariwise, in *Bildung*, adolescents develop an awareness of themselves and the world. They become *subjects* because they participate and shape their *Bildung* which endows them with a critical attitude towards the already internalized status quo (Borst 2020, 25f). Agreeing with Kivelä that “*Bildung* should be the key concept of the philosophy of education” (in Lensch 2022, 26f), I differentiate between *Erziehung*, mostly referring to it as “upbringing”, and *Ausbildung* as “training”, and use *Bildung*, when I refer to German terms or intellectual and reflective self-development.

3.1. Formal *Bildung*-theories. There are various *Bildung* perceptions from contradicting or kindred epistemological provenances. To further concretize the term in my thesis, I chose Klafki’s theory of Categorical *Bildung* (1959), which centers around a structural concept, influenced by the Frankfurt School’s *Kritische Theorie* and H. Roth’s *realistic turn* in pedagogy. Klafki endorses learning and knowledge acquisition in the sake of societal demands, while emphasizing the importance of subjective consciousness, which has the potential to reveal power dynamics, domination interests and their resulting limitations. He advocates for an education that empowers learners to grasp the interconnected dynamic between the external world and themselves, aligning both dimensions. The goal is to avoid one-sided approaches and

instead establish a harmonious connection between personal growth and knowledge acquisition. Hence, Klafki split *Bildung* theories in two categories:

1. material *Bildung* theories, where material education is characterized by the content of knowledge, i.e., the material that needs to be conveyed and acquired, and
2. formal *Bildung* theories, where formal education refers to the development of subjective qualities, abilities and competencies. As the name suggests, it pertains to the forming of one's personality (Borst 2020, 139f).

Material *Bildung* theories make the quality of the *human* dependent on the possession of certain content, thereby supporting the societal privilege of mastering such distinguished material. This content-oriented understanding of education has emerged in the form of encyclopedism (the all-knowing ideal), scientism (the science's validity ideal), and the theory of the classics (the timeless past ideal). Despite the specific problems associated with each of these educational theories, they all share the common feature of legitimizing the historical and social changes in the objective demands placed on education based on a pedagogically justified hierarchy of values. Contrariwise, formal *Bildung* theories define education from the *subject's* perspective, emphasizing the development and enhancement of their capabilities. According to this interpretation, these theories ignore predetermined societal demands and derive learning material from psychological-anthropological premises (Wulf 1984, 67).

For Klafki, it is crucial to connect material and formal education to provide individuals with possibilities to rationally explore the world, while exploring themselves; knowledge acquisition and self-development should occur in a mutually influential process. Excessive emphasis on one dimension leads to sabotaging the other. By neglecting knowledge content, one encounters the risk of anti-intellectualism, whereas neglecting individuality foreshadows functionalization, often driven by the vested interests of external parties, like the labor market. Both anti-intellectualism and functionalism fragment the individual and cast doubt on the holistic nature of their intellectual, sensory, creative abilities, which are potentially innate and interconnected (cf. Avrich 1980, 253; Borst 2020, 140).

3.2 Critical pedagogical insights: Focussing on the *subject*. Conjecturing that the 1996 Report and SDG4 prioritize material over formal *Bildung*, I gathered arguments elucidating this unbalanced promotion. Under the umbrella-term "formal *Bildung* theories", I was able to study theorists from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds like Freire's *Pedagogia Crítica*, Horkheimer's *Kritische Theorie*, Giroux's *Critical Pedagogy* and Biesta's postmodern

approach. Herein, I shall note that I have not examined the differences between them. Instead, I focused on their shared critique on globalized market-oriented education (Biesta 1995, 2002; Giroux 2011), treating students as passive knowledge recipients (Freire 2000, 2005). Their concerns as well as my argumentation against a dominant material understanding of education favoring *Erziehung* over *Bildung* (Horkheimer 1953) unfold in chapters: 4-6. The choice of the term “reflecting” for the main title, rather than “criticizing”, is, however, deliberate. It is rooted in the recognition that not all suggestions pose threats or are incompatible with the aspirations of critical thinkers (cf. 5.3.). For instance, the eradication of poverty and illiteracy, and lifelong learning are desired outcomes across all the approaches.

4. THE NOTION OF EDUCATION IN “THE TREASURE WITHIN”

4.1. *The Delors Commission: Mandate, aims and principles.* The Commission’s mandate was to study educational challenges and formulate suggestions for policymakers. The challenges were framed as problematic tensions: between the global and the local (T1), the universal and the individual (T2), the traditional and the modern (T3), long-term and short-term considerations (T4), competition and equality of opportunity (T5), the unlimited expansion of knowledge and the limited capacity of human beings to assimilate it (T6) and finally, the spiritual and the material (T7) (Delors et al. 1996, 15f). To overcome these problems, the Commission intended to dynamize education’s role, recommended approaches to policy and practice, considering the unique situations and aspirations of countries and regions, and adhered to six principles that were regarded as common to all participants in educational processes. The principles included education:

- P1. as a fundamental human right and universal value pursued throughout life,
- P2. as a means to promote knowledge creation and accessibility,
- P3. as a collective responsibility of society, fostering partnerships beyond institutions,
- P4. policies emphasizing equity, relevance and excellence,
- P5. reforms based on understanding successful practices, tailored to specific conditions, and agreed upon through mutual agreements,
- P6. development within diverse contexts and approaches, aligned with international values.

Another purpose was to address the “all-encompassing question: what kind of education is needed for what kind of society of tomorrow?” (UNESCO 1996, 253f). 27 years later, I rephrase it and inquire: What kind of education was promoted for what kind of society of today?

Already before 1995 educational policies were being pushed for financial reasons (UNESCO 1996, 13); thus, endorsing a neoliberal capitalist society (cf. Cole 2009, 95–99). The Commission claimed to have aimed to transform education by considering its new roles and demands in a world of accelerating economic, but also environmental tension and social change. It confidently claimed to have studied the implications for education of the major societal trends as well as “the state of knowledge and experience of the *best* educational practices in various cultural, economic and political settings” to identify the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary policy. The Report claims to have set new priorities, universal: “based on *inevitable* and *indispensable* responses to a changing world”, and region- or nation-specific: based on differing economic and sociocultural situations (UNESCO 1996, 253).

4.2. [The Report’s Paradoxes based on its own recommendations](#)⁶. The above claims serve as a narrative of triumphalism for the globalized capitalist society and its educational model (Giroux 2011, 4f). Let us examine whether the promising picture outlined above was coherent or just a façade and if the Report’s aims and principles were actively promoted through its recommendations. To illustrate the Report’s paradoxes, I discuss its depicted *realities* and contradictory suggestions. Firstly, its title: “The Treasure Within” implies that the treasure lies in learning oneself. This infers that cognitive and affective capabilities are not commodified human resources to be *qualitatively* advanced (in a material sense) and instrumentally exploited in society, but personal treasures to be cultivated and cherished (Power 1997, 188). Even though the Report explicitly manifests this, it implicitly conveys an opposite message, by framing education as a means to meet “the requirements of science and technology [and to promote] the development of skills enabling each person to function effectively in a family, as a citizen or as a productive member of society” (Delors et al. 1996, 17). Its language emphasizes material *Bildung* by prioritizing scientific and technologic requirements and promotes market-driven education, by associating the development of skills to the *functioning* of a *productive* citizen. Education seems to aim at a functionalist society prioritizing production.

Nevertheless, according to the Commission, “all-out economic growth [is not an ideal] way of reconciling material progress with equity [and] respect for the human condition” (Delors et al. 1996, 13). Herein, the Commission supports that financial growth is not always equivalent to progress, that material progress is not enough to overcome plaguing social problems, and rightly foresaw that this issue will constitute “an intellectual and political challenge” in our century.

⁶ In 4.2. I used the *Highlights* version of the Report (Delors et al. 1996).

However, it contradicts itself by preaching that “developing countries [should not] disregard the classic forces driving growth”, particularly regarding “their need to enter the world of science and technology, with all this implies in terms of cultural adaptation and the modernization of mentalities” (ibid.). This promotes a westernization of mentalities rather than modernization since it endorses cultural adaptation to enter the *classic* capitalist forces and the material scientific world. This contradicts both P5 and P6 and the belief -regarding T1- that people need to become world citizens “without losing their roots and while [playing a part in their] local community” (Delors et al. 1996, 15). Thus, the Report does not mitigate the presented tensions (T1-T7 in 4.1.), it sharpens them, while negating its own principles (P1-P6).

Considering T2, the Commission praises the uniqueness of individuals and explains that “it is for them to choose their own future and achieve their full potential [...] within their traditions and [...] cultures” (ibid.) Comparing this with the above, one encounters the irrationality that cultures and individuals are unique and can decide their own future, but only if they *adapt/modernize* their culture and knowledge and envision a future in the established global order. Similarly, by framing “the attempts to transfer technologies to the most impoverished countries” as “failures” (Delors et al. 1996, 18), the Commission contradicts itself again regarding the value of cultural preservation. The methods of knowledge acquisition and accumulation differ among countries. Thus, failing to *modernize* the impoverished ones might show resistance against neo-imperialistic endeavours in the form of globalization and does not demonstrate a failure, which implies incompetence. An uncritical adaptation of the globalized knowledge production methods could prevent teachers and students from challenging the social construction of diverging knowledge forms, thereby legitimizing the dominant culture in society’s miniature level, the classroom. This argument is linked to Gramsci’s *cultural hegemony*, which is said to be instrumentalized by governing elites to sustain politico-economic power. Through socialization agencies like schools and other ideological state apparati, they promote the internalization and naturalization of predefined “common sense” beliefs and social processes (in Giroux 2011, 22), which manipulate people towards uniformity (Borst 2020, 119).

Similarly, the Report claims to emphasize “the moral and cultural dimensions of education, enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other[s and] understand the world’s erratic progression towards a certain unity”. It dictates that “this process must begin with self-understanding [...] whose milestones are knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism” (Delors et al. 1996, 17). Knowledge is again mentioned first, emphasizing material *Bildung*, while self-criticism, a formal *Bildung*’s element, is monodimensionally presented.

Although it implies a critical direction, it does not promote thinking, with which the *self* is enabled to reflect on the world. It rather transcends the sense of responsibility from the former (nationally) educated bourgeoisie to one comprised of citizens of a westernized *unity* (Bildungs- to Weltbürgertum). This leads individuals to antiquate their spiritual and moral strivings with the economic, technical, sociopolitical and cultural shaping of a universal civilization. For the reproduction of such a bourgeoisie, globalization is a primary educational task (Albrecht 2001, 76), and its undoubtful prevalence is a *reality* interfering with the educational worldview. By praising itself on doing “its best to project its thinking on to a future dominated by globalization” (Delors et al. 1996, 12), the Commission normalizes the sociopolitical system and its expansion and leaves no room for reflection and change. According to Freire, if people are incapable of changing reality, they adjust themselves and become *objects* of adaptation. To overcome their oppression, they should attain their humanity by becoming *subjects* changing and dynamizing their reality (Freire 2005, 4f) and transform knowledge rather than just consume it. Hence, it is important to have an imaginative, alternative vision to familiarize us with something beyond the given and commonplace (Giroux 2011, 5ff).

Conversely, the Commission deterministically states that “nothing can replace the formal education system, where each individual is introduced to the many forms of knowledge, [and] the teacher-pupil relationship, which is underpinned by authority” (Delors et al. 1996, 19). Thereupon, it negates its modernization argument considering T3 since it demonstrates a conservative approach preventing education’s re-politicization, while favoring a notion that anchors on knowledge practices and *Erziehung* rather than *Bildung*. Even though Delors et al. “imagine a society in which each individual would be in turn both teacher and learner”, they contradict themselves by fostering an asymmetrical dynamic between teachers and students, whereby it “is the responsibility of the teacher to impart to the pupil the knowledge that humankind has acquired” (1996, 19f). The Report promotes the idea that students need instruction, yet it simultaneously pledges that they need to reject imitation and have faith in their *treasure*. The portrayal of the teacher-student relationship favors disciplined material-based instruction over a two-sided teaching process between *subjects* who can draw their own conclusions. Such an understanding impacts negatively on the designated *superior* group as well. Educators, as the only *subjects* transmitting knowledge are conceptionally deprived from learning from their students, who function as *objects* in one-sided learning processes. Herein, the Report conceptionally negates P1, because it does not portray teachers as learners and, thus, undermines the value of lifelong education. The students will view teachers as specialists who

deliver the commodity of certain knowledge or security guards who put them in order (cf. Giroux 2011, 11; Horkheimer 1953, 28).

The Report claims that there is “no substitute to [this; which] has been argued time and time again by the great classical thinkers who have studied the question of education” (Delors et al. 1996, 19). Nevertheless, throughout time there have been intellectuals and practitioners who disagreed with this conservative understanding, -even though they represented different *schools* of thought-, like A. Gramsci⁷, P. Freire, F. Ferrer, J. Suissa, T.W. Adorno, A. Gruschka, E. Goldman, and A.S. Neil⁸; to name a few. The Report implies that only the classical neoliberal thinkers and material *Bildung* theorists are *great*. Hence, it opposes again its modernization wish regarding T3, -unless the modernization of mentalities relates to “new information technologies”. It also negates P3. Reformation efforts are not depicted as advertised: “a collective societal responsibility fostering partnerships” (Delors et al. 1996, 15), since a significant number of theorists promoting formal *Bildung* are not even taken into account.

Proceeding with additional paradoxes, the Commission’s responses to T4 and T5 contradict themselves. Regarding T4, the Commission explains the difficulty of accessing education, because years must pass to witness its impact on individuals and societies. It claims to sorrow over the prioritization of short-term solutions and policies, believing that education requires policies with “a patient, concerted, negotiated strategy” (Delors et al. 1996, 15). However, regarding the tension between competition and equality of opportunity (T5), it revealed that solution proposals “never stood the test of time” (ibid.). It remains unclear: 1. if these proposals became measures that failed, 2. what was it exactly that did not pass the test of time, 3. for how long and 4. how they were tested. Without some justification references, this normalizes the impossibility of finding an alternative except from this here: to “rethink [...] the concept of lifelong education so as to reconcile [...]: competition, which *provides incentives*, co-operation, [...], and solidarity” (Delors et al. 1996, 16). By promoting this notion, the Report disregards P4, since it does not emphasize equity and excellence, but competition - the opposite of solidarity and cooperation. This stance evidentially proves the push for competition (provoked by the neoliberal turn) that fuelled international comparisons like the PISA study in the 2000s.

⁷ Gramsci believed in a nuanced and dialectical endorsement of a critical and disciplined educational practice. Unlike Ferrer, who strictly opposed authority, he, like Horkheimer, distinguished between classroom authority working instructively in the service of critical agency and authority promoting conformity and state allegiance (cf. Giroux 2011, 56; Horkheimer 1953, 30).

⁸ Founder of the Summerhill School; developed and running as a libertarian educational experiment. Neil’s intention was to create a school that fits the child rather than making the child fit the school. Summerhill’s educators are regarded as equals of students and have no institutional authority or control over them (Haworth 2012, 31).

It welcomed quantitative and technical-utilitarian definitions of excellence, led to the enactment of instruments promoting this kind of *quality* and enabled the adaptation of performance-based approaches and their dominance in curricula worldwide (Lundahl 2012, 217).

Recognizing the “increasing pressure on curricula” due to the “extraordinary expansion of knowledge”, the Commission proposed the allowance of choices to avoid overstimulating students, who might otherwise exceed their “capacity to assimilate it” (T6). To counter this, the Report suggested to include subjects ensuring “physical and psychological well-being” (Delors et al. 1996, 16), yet without reducing the amount of mandatory knowledge. Remarkably, a proposal aiming at well-being, against burnouts and performance-approaches, simultaneously emphasizes material education as a determinant of life improvement (ibid.). Finally, the Commission claims to have prioritized the formation of a moral society but has disproportionately worked towards “a knowledge-driven” one (cf. Delors et al. 1996, 16, 18), which is, regarding T7, counterproductive. By referring to *buzzwords* from formal *Bildung*-theoretical propositions, the Report seemingly pledges for ethos, cultural preservation and self-embrace in solidary world communities, but genuinely pursues the continuation of a production-driven “information society” (Delors et al. 1996, 22).

4.3. The “Four Pillars of Education”. In 4.2., I illuminated contradictory elements regarding the tensions and principles outlined in 4.1. According to my observations, the Report was coherent only regarding the provision of the necessary means to promote knowledge creation and accessibility (P2), proving an emphasis on material *Bildung*; something also witnessed in the Report’s four pillars of learning, which became a catchphrase and were cited frequently in policy reports and scholarly papers (Elfert 2015, 94f). Until 1996, education systems strongly focused on the first pillar: *learning to know* and coped adequately with the second: *learning to do*. The Report included in the conception of learning two additional dimensions pertinent to formal *Bildung*: *learning to be* and *live together*. Still, there is hardly an education system rewarding formal *Bildung* achievements by evaluating individual formative progress or rewarding a deliberate focus on the latter two (cf. Power 1997, 190). I assume that this derives from an overemphasis on the first two pillars (cf. 4.2.) and a functionalist formulation of the last two, which also allude to material notions.

4.3.1. Learning to know or *learning to learn* (L1) was at the core of liberal education since the middle of the 19th century (Roth 2014, 159). According to the Commission on Education for the 21st Century:

“Given the rapid changes brought about by scientific progress and the new forms of economic and social activity, the emphasis has to be on combining a sufficiently broad general education with the possibility of in-depth work on [selected] subjects. Such a general background [gives] people a taste [while laying] foundations for learning throughout life.” (Delors et al. 1996, 21)

Although lifelong learning is a desired outcome for both supporters and critics of the Report, I am sceptical about the established connection between scientific progress, general education and one’s will to never stop learning. While Horkheimer agreed with L1 (cf. Horkheimer 1953, 30), he would disagree with the Report’s idea of general education, believing that *Bildung* does not represent the relationship of the general to the particular but rather embodies the consciousness of the scientific spirit. It is not an umbrella organization of knowledge, and its generalization transforms *Bildung* to a branch of sciences with coordinated function. Accordingly, *Bildung* can neither be compartmentalized (Horkheimer 1953, 37), nor adjusted to the sub-branches of technologic production. Nonetheless, the Report supports a “flexible system that allows greater curricular diversity” to respond to the “mismatch between supply and demand on the labour market” and “reduce school failure and the tremendous *wastage* of human potential resulting from it” (Delors et al. 1996, 18). This is not accentuated as a wastage for the *subject* but for the labor market; justifying Klafki’s argument that an emphasis on material *Bildung* signalizes functionalization. Furthermore, after the Report’s publication, most curriculum discussions approach general education in epistemological terms, meaning that they perceive knowledge as universal, based on one objective mainstream reality.

Corroborating the functionalization argument, research on the sociology of knowledge shows that educational materials are the provisional outcome of a struggle between interest groups. Such groups transcend their worldview to official knowledge and legitimize it by making it part of general education. Thus, what is perceived as universal is a specific manifestation of the particular (Biesta 2002, 380ff). Moreover, education’s notion of freedom to judge is exploited because a concealed political function keeps certain areas exempt from scrutiny via a general education detached from socioeconomic references. Shielded from reflection, powerful politico-economic structures are treated as unquestionable training imperatives (cf. Wulf 1984, 68). Finally, although education should offer us a taste to discover the kinds of work we find fulfilling (Roth 2014, 59), Horkheimer warns against the narrow-mindedness of specialisation. Losing oneself in a subject and becoming competent in it does not equal being educated, while the accumulation of many trivialities does not constitute the truth (Horkheimer 1953, 11f).

4.3.2. *Learning to do*. Regarding *Learning to do* (L2), the Commission believed that education should go beyond learning a job and, thus:

“entail the acquisition of a competence that enables people to deal with a variety of situations, [and] work in teams [...] Such competence and skills are more readily acquired if pupils and students [...] try out and develop their abilities by becoming involved in work experience schemes [...] while they are still in education.” (Delors et al. 1996, 21)

As long as this pillar is not developed in disproportion to the other three, L2 could foster formal *Bildung*. It pledges for the cultivation of social skillsets which transcend job training and the development of abilities in extracurricular activities. Nevertheless, this is to be implemented via acquiring actual work experience, e.g., through internships. This connotes usability in future workplaces and thereby, the Commission negates its initial pledge. This extends to *lifelong learning*, which is oriented to the needs of the labor market. Delors et al. wish to bridge work-life with further training to alleviate “the mismatch between supply and demand” and eliminate the *wastage* of human capital (cf. 4.3.1.). So, L2 is equated with work related competencies, and this applies to learning in and outside of schooling, where informal learning is measured by the expansion of key qualifications (cf. Delors et al. 1996, 20).

4.3.3. *Learning to live with others* or *live together* (L3) is the pillar which the Commission claims to have emphasized on, to build the foundations of education by developing:

“an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and [...] creating a new spirit [...] guided by recognition of our growing interdependence.” (Delors et al. 1996, 20)

According to Roth, learning to become citizens eager to understand those around us is a cornerstone of liberal education and a crucial understanding to be produced in classrooms to create a culture that recognizes the value of engaged diversity (2014, 94). Nonetheless, in 4.2. we encountered proposals contradicting diversity embracement, since Delors et al. sacrificed cultural preservation in the altar of technological improvement and interdependent financial stability (1996, 13). This educational notion presents diversity in a shared framework but uses it to uphold the ethnocentric model of commodity relations that shape people’s experiences in global capitalism. According to Mc Laren, conservative multiculturalism in education disavows racism while upholding corporate power. It fosters curricular transformation that includes selected multicultural content, which distorts the sociohistorical reality of the affected peoples. Although there are representations of minority groups in curricula, they are marginalized in special features, while the dominant narrative remains uninterrupted. Furthermore, left-liberal

education seems to exoticize differences by *selling* artefacts of cultures like ethnic foods, traditional songs, dances and folktales. Herein, L3 deals with the pedagogy of poverty, by helping poor urban students enter the capital's social universe, while benefiting from profitable cultural elements. It neither delegitimizes stereotypes about multicultural groups nor develops educational praxes enabling them to challenge sociopolitical spaces that oppress them by reproducing dominant social relations and narratives (in Cole 2009, 66–70).

4.3.4. *Learning to be* is portrayed as an imperative so that:

“none of the talents [..., the] buried treasure in every person [, are] left untapped. These are, to name but a few: memory, reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, the aptitude to communicate with others and the natural charisma of the group leader, which [...] prove[s] the need for greater self-knowledge.” (Delors et al. 1996, 21)

Learning to be (L4) could serve as the epitome of formal *Bildung*. However, the methods conventionally used to stipulate the talents raise concerns. For instance, memorization is a technique used to strengthen memory through absorbing information. Neoliberal conservative governments promote methods bound to memorization and testing to train future workers. They prepare students to become passive members of a culture of commodification, standardization and conformity (Giroux 2011, 7f) by promoting the *banking* concept of education which allows *objects* to be active only in storing the deposits (educational material). The more students accept their role as depositories, the more they adapt to the status quo. This minimizes the learner's creativity and serves the interests of elitist oppressors (Freire 2000, 72f). Moreover, although the Commission claims to value cultural background and talents, it advocates for the stipulation of reasoning power and aesthetic sense, only if they align with societal expectations (cf. 4.2.). Consequently, I fear L4 is a camouflaged *learning to adapt* imperative promoting acceptance, rather than autonomous thought and practice enabling diversification.

The pillars seem to neglect formal *Bildung*, yet UNESCO based a plethora of sourcebooks for educators and learners on them. The UN Economic Commission for Europe used them as well to define the curriculum development of the Education for Sustainable Development and the relevant competencies required by educators (Tawil and Cougoureux 2013, 7). Thus, it is possible that the SDGs inherited this asymmetrical promotion of a material *Bildung* notion, as I argue in 5.








5. THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

5.1. *The Agenda's vision and SDG4.* In 2015, the UN unanimously adopted the Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs, including SDG4 to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Like the Delors Report, SDG4 links education policy to public policy (cf. Power 1997, 189), since it associates educational targets and desirable outcomes to all 16 remaining SDGs, dealing with other policy fields. It claims that its vision transcends “a utilitarian approach to education and integrates the multiple dimensions of human existence” (UNESCO 2015, 26). As part of the wider development landscape, SDG4 requires education systems to respond to various challenges such as labor market changes, technology, urbanization and environmental issues. Its main goal is to equip individuals with adaptable skills and competencies (L2 parallel) throughout life to succeed in a sustainable knowledge- and technology-driven world. It promises to ensure that everyone acquires a knowledge foundation (L1), and develops collaborative skills (L3), resilience and critical thinking (ibid.), though the latter is reduced to *rational* criticism. *Rational* critique is circumscribed within the realm of linguistic, textual and artistic appraisal, while humanity's socioeconomic engagements are isolated from reflection (Wulf 1984, 68). Under instrumental rationality, individuals abide by systemic imperatives and cannot emancipate themselves (Gurze'ev 2002, 396), since the right to freely criticize is manipulated.

Through critical lenses, such a rationalization is oppressive and also irrational. The Agenda 2030, utilizing SDG4, promotes education as a response to labor market needs (firstly mentioned) and as a driver of technology and knowledge production (second reference) (cf. UNESCO 2015, 26). It links education with the training of skills and competencies which enable instrumentalists to succeed in life, as success is measured in financial terms. SDG4's emphasis on material *Bildung* contradicts the Agenda's declared vision to integrate various dimensions of human existence while outstripping utilitarian approaches (ibid.). In 5.2. I examine the formulation of the SDG4 targets. As language is intrinsically linked to individual consciousness, thinking and understanding, I explore connotations in the expressed truths and common-sense beliefs (cf. Borst 2020, 83ff) to determine the kind of educational understanding they promote and whether there is an asymmetry between material and formal *Bildung*.

5.2. *SDG4: promoting a rather material Bildung-theoretical perspective.* SDG4 has ten targets encompassing different educational aspects. The first seven stress out the expected outcomes and the rest present means of achieving them.

Outcome-Targets (OTs = OT1-OT7)⁹ (in UNESCO 2015, 20f):

	4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
	4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
	4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
	4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
	4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
	4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
	4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

Evaluating the OTs, SDG4 urges for *quality* education as well as *relevant* and *effective* learning outcomes (OT1) in terms of their usability, since it wishes to increase the *number* of people with technical and vocational skills for employment, *decent* jobs and entrepreneurship (OT4). I am intrigued to understand whom/what this learning outcomes ought to be *relevant* to and if SDG4 implies that *decent* are only the jobs that contribute to the capitalist order, where entrepreneurship related skills are among the targets of a worldwide educational project (OT4). Moreover, OT2 frames *quality* early childhood care as a preparation process for primary

⁹ To differentiate the targets: 4.1 - 4.7 from the thesis' chapters, they are abbreviated as OT1-OT7.

education without mentioning any relevance to the personal dispositions and the healthy psychological and physical development of individuals, while OT3 pledges for technical, vocational and tertiary education; connotating *quality* with technological educational outcomes or entry to universities, where individuals can widen their knowledge (material *Bildung* focus). OT5 wishes to ensure equal access to education for marginalized groups, but regarding higher education it pledges for *affordable* -not free- education (OT3) signaling the phenomenon of the corporatization of universities, which deconstructs education as a public good and universal right and promotes it as an affordable (if so) commodity (Giroux 2011, 51). This phrasing corroborates Mc Laren’s observation that multiculturalism in liberal -mostly higher- education is based on interracial intellectual sameness, which permits races to perform equally. It praises efforts for equal opportunities and meritocracy, but without disturbing the bourgeoisie norm and the power structures that created these inequalities in the first place (Cole 2009, 66). OT6 is not controversial, since there can be no *Bildung* without some basic knowledge, which enables the individual to understand and reflect on the world (cf. 5.3.1.). The problem is that SDG4 envisions only outcomes that are knowledge-based and technology-driven. It transcends basic knowledge only regarding OT7, which supports outcomes that humanize the learners’ reality by promoting sustainable lifestyles, human rights and a globalized culture of peace appreciating diversity. It seems to use cultural diversity as a *buzzword*, more as a means towards a *global citizenship*, rather than a goal. It reduces self-realization to citizenship in neoliberalism and fosters a *culture of contribution*, where every global citizen -irrespective of being dispossessed or privileged- is equally responsible for the planet’s sustainability (cf. OT5; Cole 2009). Thus, SDG4 resembles the 1996 Report, since broader learning dimensions are neglected; OT1-OT7 articulate only material goals and do not mirror the promising vision of the Agenda 2030 (5.1.).

Means-Targets (MTs = 4a-4c) (in UNESCO 2015, 21):

	<p>4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all</p>
	<p>4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries</p>
	<p>4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States</p>

Since the desired outcomes (OT1-OT7) aim for results pertinent to material *Bildung*, the means and measures to be enacted, unsurprisingly, concentrate on material improvements. 4a suggests the establishment or enhancement of education facilities, and 4b the proliferation of scholarships to least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries by 2020. Based on the wording, this seems to apply only to people striving for careers in areas affected by the technological changes and promotes brain drain to cover the labor market's needs in selected fields. Hence, 4b is opportunist, not in favor of the *subjects* but of the economy and, more specifically, of states or interest groups profiting, for example, from the advancement of *information and communications technologies*. Finally, 4c promotes the westernization of teaching in developing countries and the *supply* increase of *qualified teachers*. Herein, I consider the choice of the word *supply* problematic - because it commodifies educators - and understand *qualified* teachers (according to the OTs) as technically skilled individuals who imitate their international trainers and impart the neoliberal mindset to their students.

Both OTs and MTs promote an educational notion that defines material *Bildung* and lifelong training as *quality* education. Accordingly, the SDG4 targets follow the rules of the market and scientism. This overemphasis, in conjunction to the lack of proposals supporting formal *Bildung* practices, supports my assumption of an unbalanced promotion. However, there are always two sides to a coin, and I do not wish to undermine the SDGs and their achievements. Thus, in 5.3.1. I demonstrate the positive side of the targets' impact.

5.3. The two sides of the UN effort

Being aware that approx. 84 million children and young people have no access to school and that circa 300 million students lack the basic numeracy and literacy skills (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2023), I do not wish for my analysis to be isolated from reality. I rather aim to bridge philosophical considerations with practical prospects and partly justify why the Delors Report and SDG4 focus on material *Bildung*.

5.3.1. *No formal Bildung without material education*. Like SDG4, Delors et al. wanted basic education to extend to the 900 million illiterate adults, 130 million children not enrolled in school, and the more than 100 million children dropping out of it. Remarkably, the UN technical assistance and international partnership projects have contributed to the decrease of children not having access to school by 76 million (cf. Delors et al. 1996, 23; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2023). Regarding OT1, between 2015 and 2021, the completion rate increased from 85% to 87% in primary, from 74% to 77% in lower secondary and from

54% in 2015 to 58% in upper secondary education (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2023). An emphasis on education access and completion rates is justifiable. According to Delors et al.: “although people need to take every opportunity for learning and self-improvement, they will not be able to make good use of all these potential resources unless they have received a sound basic education” (1996, 19). In this regard, OT6 is -as stated in the *progress and info* webpage of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs¹⁰- prioritized (2023). Material *Bildung* focuses on knowledge acquisition, and literacy (OT6) is the foundation of knowledge (Roth 2014, 23). Thereafter, all OTs and MTs entail ways via which knowledge foundations can be built and flourish. For instance, 4a thematizes the facilities’ improvement to create safe learning environments.

Liberal education supporters like Hirsch believe that giving everybody more knowledge (4b parallel) makes people more competent and creates a fair society (in Roth 2014, 179). Accordingly, OT3 and OT5 claim to work constructively against discrimination, pledging for universal access to (tertiary) education. Living in the era of *knowledge capitalism*, it is logical to promote skills guaranteeing employability (OT4), since this decreases poverty (SDG1). Moreover, considering the current interdependent order, OT7 is not irrational, -if one consciously wishes to be part of the *Global village*’s privileges, rules and economy. In this case, reflexivity is redundant; theories that prioritize material *Bildung* argue that critical ability is only one aspect of a well-rounded education, that its overemphasis leads to sterility rather than creativity (Roth 2014, 5) and that critical thinking might undermine belief in received wisdom. Analogously, the *imitation* method is applied to students expected to develop capacities for disciplined study and material absorption (Roth 2014, 58ff). Thus, the overall UN effort’s emphasis on material *Bildung* rests on pragmatic concerns; not only functionalist interests.

The promotion of material *Bildung* could be seen as a step towards achieving formal *Bildung*, since the systematic provision, differentiation and stabilization of accomplished development stages form the basis for the unfolding of *Bildung*. Hence, education is impossible without *Erziehung*. However, *Bildung* generates a different relationship with the world than upbringing ever can, as it empowers the individual to reflect on what was taken for granted and cast doubt on it. Thus, *Bildung* constitutes the condition for the possibility of subjecting the socially affirmed conditions to critical analysis. Consequently, material education is a prerequisite for *Bildung*, but *Bildung* is not determined by the former (cf. Borst 2020, 27). Both material and

¹⁰ Progress and/or stagnation of OTs & MTs provided in: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4> under “Progress and Info”.

formal *Bildung* are required for an individual to be educated, and material education could serve as the means to approach *Bildung*. Nonetheless, the documents seem to have turned the means to goals; a common anthropological tendency (Horkheimer 1953, 36). In 5.3.2., I examine whether the ends (ex. increase of school completion rates) justify the means (a disproportionate promotion of material *Bildung* in the Report and a complete negligence of formal *Bildung* in SDG4) and examine whether material education has become the ends of international efforts. Lastly, I raise my concerns regarding a global educational understanding only or excessively anchoring on a material *Bildung* theoretical notion.

5.3.2. *A notion reproducing Davids and Goliaths in the 21st Century.* Education is an instrument of both domination and liberation, and one must remember this when examining different theories and notions (Borst 2020, 37). Market-driven material *Bildung* and opportunist education governance are key factors of *knowledge capitalism*, but formal *Bildung* and emancipatory, thought-provoking education deriving from unbiased education governance can become obstacles to it (Lundahl 2012, 217). Even though the 1996 Report and SDG4 wish for people to lead prosperous and successful lives, they aspire to realize this only in the established world order, and as Adorno once said, there is “no right life in the wrong one” (in Lensch 2022, 18). Endorsing Klafki’s Categorical *Bildung*, I herein explain why neglecting the promotion of formal *Bildung* in policy-shaping documents contributes to stabilizing the *wrong life*.

Starting with the Report, the main difficulty confronting the Commission concerned the diversity of educational situations and conceptions: “the obvious impossibility [...] of digesting more than a small proportion of [the information provided] in the course of its work” (Delors et al. 1996, 43). This excuses the Report’s imperfections; however, it also justifies the impossibility of the globalist approach. Du Bois believed that people need different kinds of educational opportunity (in Roth 2014, 67) and would oppose OT7 and OT3, which create a global bourgeoisie by viewing education as a mere socialization process (cf. OT2), where students “take over the moral and political common sense of the society as it is” (Rorty in Roth 2014, 178f). Both documents stabilize the status quo at an international level. Even 4c, which seemingly aspires to strengthen international cooperation for teacher training - something that could familiarize educators with diverse teaching practices and learning approaches worldwide - stipulates competition and creates an asymmetrical dynamic between More Economically Developed (MEDCs) and Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) (cf. 5.2.). Accordingly, LEDCs are the ones to receive help from MEDCs in form of teacher training, although development is not only measured in financial terms (an argument that the SDGs raise

and claim to support). So, LEDCs are not necessarily ‘behind’ in *Bildung*. Such an international ‘cooperation’ leads to adaptive and conformist practices steering the *wrong life*.

The Wrong Life

Reflecting on the above, the prerequisites of *Bildung* have turned into the goals of education. There is a distinct focus on knowledge-oriented *Erziehung*, and this educational notion is being applied and legitimized globally through international efforts. Alas, conformity is the opposite of self-reliance and self-reflectiveness; a societal danger, because of its pervasiveness. It is difficult for people to find themselves if they are chasing the approval of others. In a globalized capitalist society, the pressure to conform and perform is even greater and transmitted via imitative educational practices. Mirroring what one reads without reflection is seductive and subtle. The reader normalizes and undoubtedly accepts each model presented (cf. Roth 2014, 55f). How will the new generations rebel against unfair treatment, protest, claim and demand better practices, if they have been blinded and learnt to oversee the problems? In a world, where *Goliaths* decide which notion prevails, make the rules and legitimize their ideologies via Reports and Agendas, how will the *Davids* defeat them if they have learnt to imitate them? Mirroring *Goliaths*, the *Davids* of the 21st century will aspire to become *Goliaths* themselves, and then nobody will advocate for non-conformist, formal *Bildung* and fairer societies.

Although this might sound dystopic, this metaphor embodies one of the greatest threats of a globalized educational notion reduced to material education. Critical thinkers have raised similar concerns believing that education in its current undifferentiated universality turns educational institutions into technical schools, which little scholars, technocrats and bureaucrats -with no contact to the world- leave in quantities (Scheler in Albrecht 2001, 74). Both the 1996 Report and SDG4 talk about *increasing numbers*, increasing quantities of people graduating, of scholarships etc. (cf. Delors et al. 1996, 22; OT4; 4b), contributing to the increase of the *supply* of *qualified* specialists (cf. 4c). In this vein, Horkheimer presented the cultivation of the spirit as a pivotal educational feature. Although a fixed number of materials is taught for vocational preparation, learners are not mindless machinated elements of the labor market (Horkheimer 1953, 6). The cumulation of individuals -totalized in the blind service of social and power entitlements and demands- results in the creation of masses. This mechanism of affective attachment to authorities shows that all-round rational *subjects*, free from authority and unquestioned faith in others’ judgment, no longer exist (Freud in Borst 2020, 118). Similar to Freire who believed that education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of

students, with the intent of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression (2000, 78), I fear that grasping only the material notion of education transcends *subjects* to masses, to helpless *Davids*, who accept their role as *objects* and their predetermined defeat. Not believing that they can change the world, they will either become *Goliaths* or serve them to survive.

To prevent a global dystopia full of masses of like-minded *Goliaths*, formal *Bildung* needs to be perceived as a precondition of societal formation, as an identity process entailing a kind of alienation that enables individuals to transcend what is known and appropriate what is *other*. *Bildung* transforms the primitive nature of individuals, develops human dispositions and fulfils one's *telos*, to be autonomous and control what appears as estranged and threatening (Horkheimer 1953, 14f). Under *Kritische Theorie* and Klafki's formal *Bildung*, one understands a self-reflective formative process preventing the exile of the spirit in educative practices (cf. Horkheimer 1953, 6). Therefore, international policy-shaping documents should not neglect to promote both material and formal *Bildung* in a harmonious and mutually influential manner.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS & CONCERNS

Though the investigated documents are less market-driven than pertinent policy-shaping documents proposed by the World Bank and OECD, the allure of noble intentions and visionary aspirations in "Learning: The Treasure Within" and SDG4 dissipates upon closer scrutiny. Their proposals reveal a divergence from their professed ideals, since they promote a notion that anchors on material *Bildung* theories, digresses from formal *Bildung* and formalizes bureaucratic systems of educational delivery (Elfert 2015, 90f; Power 1997, 188; cf. Tawil and Cougoureux 2013, 4). Both documents prioritize content over process and propagate *autonomy* and *lifelong learning* as tools for economic independence and employability, all within a globalized neoliberal order. This aligns with the neoliberal belief that autonomy of mind and spirit equals financial self-sufficiency (cf. Roth 2014, 62ff). Within this prevailing paradigm, education equates to self-realization solely in terms of capital accumulation for survival or to stimulate the economy. Yet, education's purpose is to embrace transformative learning through *Bildung* and nurture human development, rather than mold individuals into mere task performers. Du Bois' observation that such forging reveals a form of slavery (in Roth 2014, 67) made me wonder, whether nurturing independence of thought and spirit could yield economic prosperity, reversing the conventional capitalist causality.

Amid these discussions, the documents seem to prioritize economic advancement over social and personal growth, inadvertently confusing the means of living for the object of life. Learners

need quality *Bildung* so as not to mistake economic and material gains for cultural progress. Similarly, by translating education as learning, while equating the latter with *Bildung*, they dispossess *Bildung* of the intellectual potential for resistance that is inherent in it. If political actors do not embrace *Bildungsphilosophie* as an independent discipline and agree on a translation (cf. Lensch 2022, 28), they deliberately encourage policies that evaluate learning and individuals according to their usability score. This becomes particularly clear in the example of *lifelong learning*, which adjusts to the scientific and general competence needs of the labor market. Such learning alienates formal *Bildung* and promotes a capitalist reasoning inscribed by the maximum possible profit. This affects individuals, who - in pursuit of their interest – might be indifferent to the well-being of others. *Useful Davids* will surrender to exploitative social pressures for the sake of self-preservation and lose themselves in the act of their constitution, since their commodification becomes part of their subjectivity and erodes it.

I fear that the contemporary functionalist notion excludes education from wider sociopolitical debates and creates a global bourgeoisie comprised of passive *objects* detached from their humanity. However, I prefer to believe that it is possible to influence *Bildung* processes and that such naivety, despite the disappointments that may result from it, is preferable to a defeatism that consolidates the monopolising tendencies threatening formal *Bildung* (Mortensen 2002, 455). By emphasizing indicators of quality in education that do not only consider knowledge, rapid responses and quantitative advancements, while nurturing alternatives and cultivating active critical agents of change, education can truly catalyze a more promising future that inspires revolutionary *Davids* to emancipate themselves.

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