



Teaching and the Claim of Bildung: The View from General Didactics

Thomas Rucker¹

Published online: 24 June 2019
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Abstract

In this article, I propose a systematization of various aspects of Bildung-supportive teaching, as described in the context of German-language general didactics. I start by describing teaching as the basic form of education in which one person helps another to acquire knowledge. I then clarify the concept of Bildung. It is suggested that Bildung be understood as a process in which an individual deals self-actively with the world and thereby develops a multi-dimensional ability to self-determination under the claim of morality. Finally, against this background, I develop a description for Bildung-supportive teaching. The proposed answer: teaching aims to support the development of independence of thought; summons the student to deal with teaching contents that reveal potential present and future relevance as well as exemplary significance; and it draws the student into the practice of giving and asking for reasons, in order to trigger activities of recognition, valuation and radical consideration.

Keywords Education · Teaching · *Bildung* · Didactics · Independence of thought · Respect

What is demanded is to do it differently but at least as well. (N. Luhmann)

In philosophy of education, teaching has recently been rediscovered as a topic of basic theoretical reflection. First and foremost, Gert Biesta—in *The Rediscovery of Teaching* (2017)—has urged that teaching be restored to the center of attention, explicitly that teaching be handled within the context of comprehensive education-theoretical considerations. “Giving Teaching Back to Education” is his motto (ibid, p. 96). Krassimir Stojanov takes a different approach, while sharing Biesta’s concern that teaching—despite or perhaps even because of the attraction of a newly omnipresent learnification—not be reduced to the enabling of learning processes.¹ In contrast to Biesta, Stojanov argues that teaching should be thematized within the framework of Bildung-theoretical presuppositions (see ¹ “Learnification” refers to the emergence of a “language of learning” that decisively determines our descriptions, e.g. of teachers, students, teaching or school (see Biesta 2017, p. 27ff.). This might include references to teachers as “facilitators of learning,” students as “learners,” teaching as “the facilitation of learning,” or of schools as “places of learning”).

✉ Thomas Rucker
thomas.rucker@edu.unibe.ch

¹ General and Historical Educational Science, Institute of Educational Science, Faculty of Human Sciences, Universität Bern, Fabrikstraße 8, 3012 Bern, Switzerland

Stojanov 2018, p. 103ff.). While Biesta defines teaching as a specific basic form of education, Stojanov connects teaching with the claim of initiating and supporting Bildung processes.² Neither approach excludes the other; in fact, they are thoroughly compatible with one another, as can be seen in works that grapple with teaching in the context of non-affirmative theories of education and Bildung. For example, Michael Uljens and Rose Ylimaki recently have discussed the basic assumptions, concepts, figures of argumentation and consequences of a non-affirmative education and Bildung theory, placing the theory of teaching within this framework (see Uljens and Ylimaki 2017, p. 9ff.). The question that arises from this kind of localization is this: How can one describe teaching as a basic form of education and also subordinated to the claim of Bildung (in a non-affirmative sense)?

This question has a long tradition, particularly in German-speaking countries, and can be viewed as a central problem of general didactics (*Allgemeine Didaktik*) based on education and Bildung theory—whereby I understand general didactics as the theory of teaching in general (*Theorie des Unterrichts überhaupt*).³ This tradition plays virtually no role in the works of Biesta and Stojanov, and one also finds in the studies of Uljens and Ylimaki that the basics of a non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung is in the foreground, so that any reference to the aforementioned tradition of general didactics occurs sporadically at most. Such a finding, of course, should not lead to the conclusion that there are no commonalities between descriptions of teaching in the context of general didactics and descriptions currently developed in philosophy of education. However, these commonalities have not yet been sufficiently elaborated, so that possible connections to questions of theory formation (*Theoriebildung*) have not yet been sufficiently explored.

This may be primarily due to the fact that there is virtually no work that attempts to systematize the different facets of teaching under the claim of Bildung (*Unterricht mit Bildungsanspruch*), as described in the tradition of general didactics. A systematization of this sort would have to satisfy two expectations: On the one hand, it would have to take into account the plurality of descriptions of Bildung-supportive teaching. On the other hand, it should not be reduced to a mere presentation of different descriptions. Instead, the expectation would be to focus on connections (*Zusammenhänge*) between different descriptions of teaching. There is currently no corresponding proposal for systematization in sight. This applies as much to the German-speaking as to the international context. Such a desideratum is by no means unproblematic, because the problem of defining teaching in the context of specific educational- and Bildung-theoretical presuppositions has already been dealt with at a high level in the tradition of general didactics. If this theoretical level (*theoretisches Niveau*) receives no attention, there is a danger that this level will be undercut in

² The German language is known for distinguishing between “education” (*Erziehung*) and “Bildung.” Each word expresses different concepts. To take these differences into account, I refer in the text to “education” and “Bildung,” in keeping with a practice that has become quite common in English-speaking contexts.

³ In the English-speaking world, educational studies is understood as a multidisciplinary field, which includes such disciplines as psychology, history, sociology and philosophy. For its part, the German-speaking world has its own scientific discipline that deals with education: It is referred to either as pedagogy (*Pädagogik*) or educational science (*Erziehungswissenschaft*) (see Biesta 2013, p. 14ff.). In this context, didactics (*Didaktik*) traditionally represents the “place” where descriptions of teaching are developed (for more information on the international reception of German-language didactics, see, for example, Kansanen 1995; Westbury, Hopmann and Riquarts 2000; Hopmann 2007; Meyer et al. 2018). One can make a distinction between general didactics (*Allgemeine Didaktik*) as the theory of teaching in general and special didactics (*besondere Didaktiken*) as the thematization of teaching under specific contextual conditions (e.g. under the conditions of school or a specific subject). General didactics abstracts from these conditions and is aimed at determining the basic structure of teaching, which—in the context of general didactics oriented toward Bildung theory—means clarifying the basic structure of teaching under the claim of Bildung.

descriptions of teaching. Given this background, I would find it appropriate to first ascertain the standards that can be considered decisive, if teaching today is to be described as a basic form of education and thereby subordinated to the claim of Bildung.

I would like this study to serve as a contribution to clarifying this aforementioned theoretical level. To that end, I will develop a systematization of various facets of teaching under the claim of Bildung, and try to determine these facets both individually and in connection with one another. I will confine myself to the German-speaking area, because the tradition of general didactics, which is oriented toward education and Bildung theory, is probably most pronounced here. But the systematization that I propose can hopefully make it clear that the descriptions of teaching developed in the context of general didactics can be directly linked with those descriptions that are currently being discussed in the field of philosophy of education.

My proposal for systematization is oriented toward the basic problems of general didactics, which include primarily the question about teaching *purposes* (to what end?), the question about teaching *content* (what?) and the question about teaching *methods* (how?). By systematizing descriptions along the lines of these problems, no new description of teaching is developed. Thus this contribution is not about taking a position in *intentione recta* on the question of what Bildung-supportive teaching “is”. Rather, my intention is to take descriptions that are often unconnected, show how they are related, and place them in a new order. This is only possible in *intentione obliqua*, in other words in reflection on existing descriptions and their presuppositions (assumptions, definitions of concepts, figures of argumentation, etc.). This already addresses the decisive argument as to why the oblique intention should be cultivated at all: A systematization of descriptions of Bildung-supportive teaching is needed, in order to check whether a supposed new description can actually be considered new, and whether the respective description—if legitimately considered new—also provides advances in knowledge beyond what is accomplished through traditional theories.

To develop a systematization of descriptions of Bildung-supportive teaching does not simply mean to reproduce what is already known. The systematization is rather intended as the result of a comparative interpretation of different theoretical descriptions. That means that the order proposed here is not already found in traditional approaches of didactics based on education and Bildung theory. Rather, it must first be developed and justified through a reflection on these approaches. The new that is offered here is therefore not to be seen in the aspects of Bildung-supportive teaching, that are being ordered, but in the developed order itself. This allows us, among other things, to look at mutual possibilities for complementing descriptions of Bildung-supportive teaching, which have not yet been recognized. As I am trying to show, there are, for example, theories in which teaching is attached to the fact that students are asked to make their own value judgments with regard to acquired knowledge. From an oblique perspective, it can be pointed out that such a description of teaching is implicitly connected with a vote for certain criteria of content selection—criteria that are discussed in other didactics based on education and Bildung theory. To make such blind spots visible and—associated with this—to elaborate possible connections to alternative descriptions is an original form of theoretical work that should not be confused with the mere reproduction of traditional assumptions, concepts and arguments (see Rucker 2017).

Systematic didactics (*Systematische Didaktik*) in this sense is based on the assumption of connections between various descriptions of teaching that point beyond specific context conditions (for example, beyond certain theoretical and/or historical contexts). We cannot yet know whether this assumption is justified; it awaits proof through the investigation

itself. Given the space available, it is not possible to properly address all the problems raised by the systematization proposed here. I also do not claim that the considerations put forward to discussion sufficiently justify the preference of a description of Bildung-supportive teaching over alternative descriptions. Rather, the focus is on the question of whether and, if so, how different descriptions of teaching based on education and Bildung theory can be brought into a coherent order at all.

Teaching

As indicated, I understand teaching (*Unterricht*) as a specific basic form of education. This makes it possible to avoid prematurely reducing teaching to school lessons; instead it is described as a form of educational action that also, but not only, has its place in school.

Education is understood here in a broad sense as an aid to enculturation (*Enkulturationshilfe*), i.e. as an aid in learning culture (*Kultur*), which itself is understood broadly. This includes not only literature, art, philosophy or religion, but also natural sciences, technology, politics or economics. The concept of education as an aid to enculturation depends *firstly* on the assumption that people must acquire patterns of orientation (knowledge, abilities, norms, value judgments, principles, etc.), to participate in cultural practices. Enculturation means this kind of learning processes. *Secondly*, the concept of education is based on the assumption that there are situations in which patterns of orientation cannot be learned through everyday interaction, making it necessary to employ a certain form of cultural practice to ensure the learning of culture. This practice is called education (see Loch 1968/1976).

Admittedly, such a theoretical orientation is not without consequences: If one sees education as an aid to enculturation, the *first* implication is that the human being must be seen as not *currently* needing education; rather, the human being repeatedly *becomes* in need of education, when there is a failure to learn culture through everyday interaction. In this context, there is a learning of culture that is in principle dependent on education. Some subjects can only be learned under the conditions of education. This means that the corresponding learning processes must be initiated by education and supported by appropriate activities. Children learn how to turn on a light switch by watching their parents, for example. No education is needed in that case. But one needs more than everyday interaction if one is to learn what electric current is. To that end, this interaction must be interrupted and transformed into a specific form of interaction, in which one person helps another to understand the theory of electricity.

If education is understood as an aid to learning culture this triggers the *second* consequence: Education (and therefore also teaching) can no longer be bound to the relation between generations. Educators are not necessarily adults, and those to be educated are not always children or teenagers. Anyone can be considered an educator if they help someone else to learn culture. And conversely, anyone can be considered as someone to be educated, if another person is required to help them continue the enculturation process.

What then is the difference between education in general, and teaching as a basic form of education in particular? In German pedagogy, the orientation to a “third” has been suggested, as a criterion of difference between teaching and alternative basic forms of education. In teaching, for example according to Johann Friedrich Herbart, “there is always a *third* something with which teacher and pupil are at the same time occupied. In every other function of education, on the contrary, the pupil is *immediately* in the

teacher's mind" (Herbart 1806/1908, 227f.). In this sense, for example, we are not talking about teaching when a mother reminds her son, during a family outing, to keep an eye out for cars while crossing the street, or when a father praises his daughter because she has followed the agreed-upon rule. However, one could call it teaching when parents explain the dangers of traffic to their children and present the rules they should follow in this context. Only in this case are the educational activities oriented to a "third" to be acquired.

This "third" is the content of teaching (*Unterrichtsgegenstand*). The student's activity of acquisition (*Aneignung*) relates to this content. In contrast, the teacher's educational activity is oriented toward the acquisition of a certain knowledge by the student. That means that teaching refers to mediating (*Vermittlung*) between the student and the teaching content: The teacher tries to initiate and support the acquisition of the respective knowledge by the student. Against this background, teaching can also be described as "guidance to knowledge" (*Hinführung zum Wissen*), where knowledge in this case means two things: "to understand something and to know how to do something—theoretical and practical knowledge" (Koch 2012, p. 19). The knowledge in question has long since been discovered and is not brought up for the first time in the interaction between teacher and student. Rather, teaching means opening up ways for the student to connect with the knowledge of humankind. Successful teaching thus contributes to the continuation of this knowledge. Teaching can only be successful if the student takes an active part. Strictly speaking, the acquisition of knowledge cannot be caused by the activities of the teacher. Rather, learning is to be understood as an acting undertaken by students themselves (*selbsttätiger Akt*), which means that the individual student is constitutive (*unhintergebar*) for his or her learning process.

In this sense, both teacher and student are always to be seen as subjects of specific activities. The success of teaching must reckon with bi-subjectivity (*Bi-Subjektivität*), in other words with the fact that both teachers and students carry out specific activities that are not mutually substitutable (see Sünkel 2013, p. 31f.). Bi-subjectivity is associated with a characteristic causality for teaching (as for education overall): If educational acting (for example, an explanation) is to have an impact (for example, lead to understanding), the student must react to it with self-activity (such as following the respective explanations and trying to comprehend them). In this sense, teaching is always summoning to self-activity (*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*). To put it plainly: Summoning a student to self-activity is not a *norm* that says what good teaching is, but rather a part of the *structure* of teaching itself (see Mollenhauer 1983/2013, p. 84ff.). To describe teaching as summoning to self-activity is therefore misunderstood if its principal character is overlooked. To give just one example: To understand teaching swimming as summoning to self-activity does not, of course, mean to tell the student in the water that he or she should finally start swimming. Rather, the swimming teacher will demonstrate and explain certain sequences of movements to the student; finally, the teacher will create situations in which the student—with an increasing degree of difficulty—can carry out the corresponding movements and develop the required skills. Generally speaking: To understand teaching as summoning to self-activity expresses the insight that the teacher cannot cause the acquisition of knowledge. Ultimately, the student can only develop the respective knowledge him- or herself, i.e. through his or her own activity. However, the student is thereby dependent on a teacher who seeks to initiate and support the student's dealing with contents through activities of questioning, showing and encouraging the student to answer (for different forms of showing, see Prange and Strobel-Eisele 2015, pp. 40ff.).

The basic structure of teaching, briefly discussed here, must be taken into consideration if the problem of describing teaching under the claim of *Bildung* is to be tackled, because *Bildung*-supportive teaching has trivially to be seen as a form of teaching. If one fails to consider the basic structure of teaching, one cannot check whether statements are actually formulated about *Bildung*-supportive teaching and not about some other form of social interaction. Conversely, a description of the basic structure of teaching would not explain what is meant by teaching under the claim of *Bildung*.

Bildung

In the context of a *Bildung* theory-oriented didactics, teaching is not restricted to guidance to knowledge, but rather is charged with enabling the development of a multi-dimensioned ability to self-determination under the claim of morality (*vielseitig dimensionierte Selbstbestimmungsfähigkeit unter Moralitätsanspruch*). *Bildung* in this sense is becoming the process that is to be initiated and supported by teaching. In the following I will set out the central determinants of a modern definition of *Bildung*. I do not claim to grapple with the concept of *Bildung* in all its facets (see Horlacher 2016; Rucker and Gerónimo 2017). My concern is with clarifying the concept of *Bildung* to the point that the concept of *Bildung*-supportive teaching can be understood.

Bildung traditionally refers to the process by which the individual (whether child, youth or adult) deals self-actively with the world and thereby develops the ability to self-determination (*Selbstbestimmungsfähigkeit*). World (*Welt*) in this sense refers to human culture. What is decisive is that *Bildung* refers to a process that takes place in the confrontation with a *resistant* world, in other words with cultural objects that do not submit to every judgment and action. This resistance can lead to irritations and may cause a person to go through transformation processes (see Reichenbach 2003). It's not here to immediately think of basic biographical restructuring processes (see Koller 2011). The irritations to one's patterns of orientation, disruptions that are characteristic for *Bildung*, can rather always be identified where self-evidence becomes problematic ("I've never seen it this way ...").

To describe *Bildung* as the release (*Freisetzung*) of the individual toward a self-determined way of living should therefore not be misunderstood subjectivistically. Herwig Blankertz opposes this interpretation, defining "*Bildung*" as the release toward "judgment and criticism," but in this connection draws attention to the fact that, when it comes to "pedagogical tradition," it has always been "certain that dedication to an objective task is a precondition for *Bildung*" (Blankertz 1979, p. 43f.).

Therefore *Bildung* includes—*firstly*—"dedication to an objective task" (*Hingabe an eine sachliche Aufgabe*). Self-determination must therefore not be confused with whateverism. Rather, *Bildung* implies that the individual must experience the resistance of cultural objects. It should already be clear that teaching under the claim of *Bildung* cannot mean allowing the student to avoid the confrontation with objective tasks. On the contrary: By confronting students with such tasks, teaching opens up the possibilities for him or her to step back from habitualized prejudices, to become someone different and to look at the world anew.

Secondly, by insisting that "judgment and criticism" (*Urteil und Kritik*) are also indispensable aspects of *Bildung*, Blankertz differentiates *Bildung* from an unquestioned acceptance of claims to validity (*Geltungsansprüche*) that individuals absorb while growing up

(claims such as: living organisms consist of cells; people deserve not to be lied to and deceived; religious Christians must attend church at least once a week; climate-change is man-made, etc.). Rather, Bildung means that the individual evaluates those claims to validity and examines their power to convince (*Überzeugungskraft*), thus arriving at his or her own judgments. Given this background, teaching cannot consist solely of instructing the student, of leading the student toward true beliefs. Rather, teaching must also, and primarily, be oriented to supporting the student in their own examination of validity claims, so as to contribute to the student's ability to find his or her own place in the world.

If Bildung is described as the development of the ability to self-determination, this means the development of a *multi-dimensioned* ability to self-determination based on the assumption that modern society can be described as complex. In modern societies, people are confronted in nearly all fields with an irreducible perspectivity as well as with open dynamics. In modern societies, issues are described from different perspectives, without granting one particular perspective general acceptance. Nor is the interplay of perspectives fixed to a specific order. Orders emerge, are preserved and also changed, therefore they are only temporarily stable. Modern democratic society is complex because there is no rule available in the given situations that would transform the interplay of perspectives into an order that is broadly accepted and stable over time. "The basic problem of complexity then actually becomes the multiple meaning that everything always has—and not only in the sense of different preferences, but rather especially of different logics that have established themselves side by side" (Nassehi 2017, p. 65). One only need think of the floods of migrants in Europe today. This event is viewed from different perspectives and is presented as, for example, a legal, economic, political, scientific or even aesthetic issue—and each time completely different.

If one assumes that life and coexistence in modern societies take place in various contexts, and that these contexts function according to different logics, then it seems inadequate to describe Bildung simply as the development of the ability to self-determination. That is why the classics of modern pedagogy have already formulated the thesis that the individual should learn to relate in different ways to him- or herself and the world, and to achieve self-determination in light of these different modes of relating. Wilhelm von Humboldt describes the differentiation of the individual relationship to self and world as the all-sided "development of human forces" (*Entwicklung der menschlichen Kräfte*); Johann Friedrich Herbart refers to the appropriation of a "many-sidedness of interest" (*Vielseitigkeit des Interesse*) and Friedrich Schleiermacher uses, in this connection, the formula of the individual's "participation" (*Mitgesamttätigkeit*) in various aspects of a modern society (see Rucker 2014, p. 88ff.).

The decisive argument for developing a multi-dimensional ability to self-determination is that an ability in one specific area (such as science) does not imply the ability to determine one's own life in another area (such as religion or art). In short: If one accepts two assumptions—that Bildung means the development of the ability to self-determination, and that issues in modern democratic societies are thematized from different perspectives without one particular perspective laying claim to a general binding character—then Bildung must be perceived as the development of a multi-dimensioned ability to self-determination.

In modern pedagogy, the life of self-determination into which the individual is to be released is ultimately placed under the claim of morality. This claim means firstly that the individual should develop a basic attitude of acceptance of the fact that others also have the right to determine their lives. But the claim of morality also means, most importantly, that individuals should learn to control their actions and to orient themselves to rules that, if followed, neither limit nor restrict the self-determination of others but rather permits or

enables it in the first place. To the extent that people orient themselves toward generalizable rules, they grant one another equal status, show mutual respect and thus contribute to a successful coexistence.

Andrea English has worked out a detailed presentation of this connection, using Johann Friedrich Herbart's concept of *Bildung*: "The concept of a person who is self-determined, or autonomous, is not to be conceived of as one who is individualistic und lacking a connection to the social world. Rather, self-determination for Herbart connects directly to one's ability to make moral judgments" (English 2014, p. 372). This does not mean that *Bildung* could be reduced to the development of the ability of *moral* self-determination. It only means that the development of morality must be understood as an aspect of *Bildung*. For if one assumes that *Bildung* means the development of the ability to self-determination, and that the life of self-determination requires space that is not necessarily given within human interaction but must be produced and stabilized, then it follows that it would be shortened to understand *Bildung* only as the multi-dimensional ability to self-determination. *Bildung* must consequently be understood as the development of a multi-dimensional ability to self-determination under the claim of morality—if the development of the ability to self-determination is understood as the right of *all* people.

Without claiming to be comprehensive, this determines central aspects of a modern concept of *Bildung*. Each of these aspects would deserve to be examined in detail, criticized, defended and further developed.⁴ However, since my primary concern in this article is to address facets of *Bildung*-supportive *teaching*, I cannot now discuss the described aspects in greater detail. Suffice to say, they define the framework for the following proposal of systematization.

Teaching Under the Claim of *Bildung*

Teaching that is oriented toward the overriding task of enabling a student to achieve *Bildung* is not only about guiding a student to knowledge. As I try to show below, *Bildung*-supportive teaching is rather aimed at enabling students to reach (objective) *insights* (which

⁴ Biesta objects to *Bildung* in a modern understanding that this idea is linked to a specific conception of the good, namely that of an "examined life"—"in the specific sense of a life exclusively based on rational beliefs" (Biesta 2002, p. 348). To orient education toward *Bildung* would consequently mean to place a specific conception of the good life above alternative conceptions. In Biesta's view, this "does injustice to the other 'positions'" (ibid., p. 347). Against this background, Biesta proposes to describe *Bildung* differently, namely as a transformation process mediated by experiences of what is other and foreign.—I cannot discuss this critique and the associated alternative in detail here, but I would like to point out a few things. *Firstly*, the core of *Bildung* can also be interpreted otherwise, namely as the development of the ability to lead a life in the light of one's own view of the good. In this sense, an education oriented toward *Bildung* would not necessarily be aimed at a „life of reason" (ibid., p. 348). *Second*: As I have tried to make clear, *Bildung* has traditionally already been described as a process mediated by negative experiences. According to Biesta, the educational task is to make „the encounter with what is other and different" possible, „which in turn can lead us to reconsider our own 'position'" (ibid., p. 349). It is therefore only logical when Biesta describes "interruption" as "the main principle of education" and also assigns this principle a central place in his theory of teaching (Biesta 2017, p. 17). In this respect, there is a clear commonality between the theory of *Bildung*-supportive teaching and Biesta's position. *Thirdly*, a theory that describes education as enabling open transformation processes owes an answer to the question of how the search for orientation initiated by negative experiences is kept open so that the student can actually develop his or her own position. My answer to this question will be to understand education in general, and teaching in particular, as summoning to examine validity claims.

rules out the reduction of teaching to mere instruction), and beyond that, at leading them to making their own *judgments* (which is where it ceases to be “mere” teaching, strictly speaking). This consideration of describing teaching as the enabling of activities of recognition and valuation and—associated with this—radical reflection is based on the assumption that teaching can only be Bildung-supportive if it leaves room for the “self-relationship of the learner with what is being learned and taught” (Benner 2015, p. 289). Thus Bildung through teaching does not merge with the acquisition of knowledge, but rather includes the fact that students place themselves in a relationship with the knowledge to be acquired—whether through examining its validity claim (recognition), or asking what it means for their own way of living within a community (valuation), or questioning the presuppositions that underlie certain insights and value judgments (radical reflection).

Against this background it is possible to say that teaching repeatedly places culture at our disposal in fresh, new ways. In this sense, Bildung is not just any learning of culture, but a process in which claims to validity are examined. To encourage a student to carry out such an examination is not without its risks, but these risks may be taken with confidence that traditional validity claims owe their existence to reasons. In this respect, one can assume that the respective validity claims will pass the test. Otherwise, students will no longer recognize these claims. That is the risk that teaching must take or enter into, in order to enable Bildung.

I will now try to unfold this basic idea by grappling with and systematizing descriptions of Bildung-supportive teaching. In order to accomplish the systematization, I will refer to the traditional mix of problems in general didactics, which includes above all the questions of the *tasks*, *contents* and *methods* of teaching. This does not only bring into view the outlines of a general theory of teaching. At the same time, this marks the theoretical level at which alternative descriptions of Bildung-supportive teaching must prove themselves today.

Independence of Thought

The first problem to be addressed here is: What is the *task* of teaching and how can it be justified? For the purpose of clarifying this point, I connect to the explanations on the concept of Bildung. As I claimed, Bildung essentially means the development of the ability to self-determination, in other words the ability to act in the light of objective insights (*sachliche Einsichten*) and one’s own value judgments (*eigene Werturteile*). To initiate and support the development of this ability is considered to be, in the context of modern pedagogy, the overriding task of education. In this connection, *teaching* has a specific task, which I would like to call “independence of thought” (*Selbständigkeit im Denken*), citing Theodor Ballauff (Ballauff 1993, p. 5).

To support the development of intellectual independence (*gedankliche Selbständigkeit*) one must first assist the student in gaining *objective insights*. The development of objective insights does not involve simply comprehending traditional knowledge and unquestioningly accepting the associated validity claim. Rather, an objective insight would be achieved if a certain knowledge proves to be actually convincing for the student in an examination of its validity claim. The guidance to knowledge is thus understood in a sophisticated sense, and teaching is not reduced to instruction—which by no means precludes phases of instruction in the context of Bildung-supportive teaching. Against this background, Lutz Koch describes Bildung as “gradual understanding” (*allmähliches Verstehen*) or a “search for understanding” (*Suche nach Verständnis*) (Koch 2015, p. 83) and Andreas Gruschka

explains Bildung-supportive teaching as teaching understanding (*Verstehen lehren*) (see Gruschka 2016). To see teaching as teaching understanding means to support the student in the search for understanding, so that he or she can develop a clarified concept of the subject being taught.

When we speak of understanding something, we imply that we accept certain knowledge *as knowledge*. For example, to understand how bacteria multiply, the student must not only have understood how the multiplication of bacteria is described in biology; he or she also must have accepted this description as valid—in other words, as knowledge. This acceptance requires that examining the validity claim made with a description. It makes no sense to say that someone would accept traditional knowledge as knowledge without having examined the validity claim of the respective description. Someone could easily just accept the description and its associated validity claim without raising any questions. But this person could at most assume that the respective description is valid, in other words that the description represents knowledge. The only way to check this is through the examination of validity claims.

When it comes to didactics, this means that teaching understanding must be seen as a summoning to examine validity claims (*Aufforderung zur Prüfung von Geltungsansprüchen*) (see Mikhail 2016, p. 208). Teaching understanding implies involving the student in a practice of giving and asking for reasons, thus opening the possibility for the student to examine the persuasive power of knowledge and in this sense to appropriate it as an objective insight. In a familiar scenario, a student might comply with this request by, for example, declaring his or her non-understanding—“Mr. or Mrs. X, I have one more question!”

Accordingly, one shouldn't speak of teaching under the claim of Bildung if the student is merely instructed and thus led to an unquestioned recognition of validity claims. Instead, one should only speak of Bildung-supportive teaching if the teacher places the student into an argumentative confrontation with the subjects being taught. “The student should both pick up and keep, in other words he or she should learn, in the most elementary sense of the word, but only accept as true that which he or she has tested and scrutinized” (Koch 2015, p. 71). Conversely, one should not speak of Bildung if knowledge is merely reproduced and appropriated in this sense. One should only speak of it “if the validity claim that is indispensable to any given knowledge is examined by the very person seeking that knowledge” (Heitger 1989/2004, p. 23).

Teaching should release the student for a self-determined life defined by social responsibility. But objective insights in and of themselves are not (yet) significant for the student's way of living. One can conclude that intellectual independence cannot be reduced to the insights that the student gains through the examination of validity claims. Independence of thought also means that the individual is capable of obtaining objective insights into their own way of living.

The concept of *value judgment* refers to the judgment in which the individual takes a position vis-à-vis a fact. “Valuation means inquiring into the impact something has on me and my actions” (Rekus 1993, p. 220). Value judgments can be understood as “judgments about the meaning of the object” in relation to the individual's way of living, and in this sense they can be distinguished from “recognition of the object” (ibid, p. 100). Value judgments first create a connection between knowledge and action. Conversely, value judgments whose development is to be initiated and supported are intermediated by the acquisition of knowledge. The student should be enabled to position him- or herself in the light of objective insights. This is because an individual's value judgments can only be made on the basis of knowledge. For example, if a student knows neither

that the polar ice caps are melting nor why, this student is then unlikely to be able to value the given facts—whether ethical, religious, legal, moral, political, aesthetic or economic. An alternative would be to give the student the supposedly “correct” values. But this would be incompatible with the claim of Bildung. Instead, Bildung-supportive teaching is aimed at freeing the student for a life of self-determination, and in this connection, too, must be seen as a summoning to examine validity claims linked to one’s own values, or those of others.

Thus teaching has a dual task: supporting the development of objective insight and one’s own judgment equally as well as relating both to each other, because “Bildung involves two things: knowledge about the world, and the ability to value judgment” (Rekus 2013, p. 217). There is a potential for misunderstanding: As can be seen from the reconstruction of the concept of Bildung, an individual’s value judgments must be made in the context of a basic moral orientation. Therefore, teaching does not only address the question of the importance of objective insights for the good life of the individual. Instead, such teaching also means that the student is prompted to consider what human beings owe to each other, to paraphrase the well-known words of Thomas Scanlon. And it is important also to address the tension that arises when different forms of value orientation come into conflict. This situation is likely to be typical for those growing up under the conditions of a complex society.

General didactics cannot decide the controversy between different forms of value orientation. Rather, its role is to clarify which tasks should be assigned to teaching under conditions of complexity. So it helps to recognize that the difference between insights and judgments corresponds with a differentiation between two types of problems that people confront as they mature in modern societies—that is, problems for which there are rules leading toward a successful solution, and problems for which there are no such rules. In the *first* case the problem can be either *simple* or *complicated*. In this connection, Bildung means gaining insight into suitable knowledge for the expectedly successful solving of a problem. In the *second* case—for complex problems—knowledge for the successful resolution of a problem is not available. We are talking about problems whose solutions are controversial, largely because there are various proposed solutions but no rule that would allow one of these proposals to be identified as the only “correct” one. In modern democratic societies, questions that relate to life and coexistence are notoriously contentious. Bildung-supportive teaching takes this fact into account, by both leading the student to knowledge and summoning him or her to make value judgments.

Interim conclusion: A life of self-determination presupposes objective insights and personal judgments. One can only reasonably speak of intellectual independence in this sense if an individual examines particular knowledge or judgment and is convinced—in other words, that the critical eye finds good reasons to recognize certain knowledge as knowledge (objective insight), or to prefer one position over others in controversial matters (personal judgment). Both the enabling of objective insight and the enabling of judgment are methodologically conceivable only as summoning to examine validity claims.

Teaching is related to the development of the “circle of thought,” (*Gedankenkreis*) and for that very reason proves “indispensable on the educational path, which should lead to ‘Bildung’” (Ballauff 1970, p. 47). Similarly to the differentiation between knowledge and value judgments, Ballauff distinguishes between “two basic forms of thinking”: “knowing” (*Erkennen*) and “judging” (*Ermessen*) (ibid, p. 41). Teaching that is oriented toward enabling independent thinking leads students toward objective insights (knowing), and also draws them into situations in which controversial issues are debated, in order to guide the individual toward forming his or her point of view (judging).

However, teaching goes beyond knowledge and judgment; thus Ballauff formulates yet another task and tries to identify it as an indispensable element of the development of the “circle of thought.” The jumping-off point for his consideration is this observation: “It is not possible to have an objective statement that is not bound by presuppositions and conditions” (ibid, p. 77). From this Ballauff concludes that teaching that makes the serious claim to intellectual independence also must deal with the presuppositions underlying our knowledge and value judgments.

Ballauff uses the term “skepticism” (*Skepsis*) to describe the “basic task of teaching”—to involve the student in a radical consideration (*radikales Bedenken*) of validity claims and the arguments behind them (ibid, p. 7). This does not mean that the student should learn to doubt everything, as common parlance might suggest. Rather, it means that the student should be triggered to thematize, to examine, and, if necessary, to problematize matters that are considered self-evident in our search for orientation in the world.

The argument here is that Bildung-supportive teaching would risk taking on a dogmatic character if the student were not also asked to consider the presuppositions that underlie certain validity claims, and the arguments backing them. With this in mind, Jörg Ruhloff speaks of a fundamental “twofoldedness” (*Zwei-Gliedrigkeit*) (Ruhloff 1979, p. 182) when describing the task of teaching. In other words, before one examines the presuppositions behind knowledge and value judgments, the student must have a “relatively well-founded and comprehensive knowledge and ability to judge” (ibid.). Conversely, the development of objective insights and value judgments does not necessarily lead the student to reflect on underlying presuppositions. Thus, teaching should not merely lead the student toward knowledge and value judgments, but also toward radical consideration (see Ruhloff 2004, p. 389ff.).

To summarize: *On one hand*, teaching has the task of leading the student toward knowledge and enabling the development of personal value judgments. *On the other hand*, teaching also has the task of expecting the student to employ reason in a problematizing way (see Ruhloff 2001), since our knowledge and judgments rest on presuppositions that themselves cannot be examined in the examination of validity claims.

Present and Future Relevance as well as Exemplary Significance

The second problem is expressed in the question of which *contents* should be taught and learned, and how to justify the corresponding criterion of content selection. To clarify this question, it helps to start by reflecting on the basic idea of Bildung-supportive teaching.

Teaching should not only lead a student to knowledge, but also encourage him or her to make value judgments, in other words to open up the possibilities for students to consider the importance of objective insights for their own way of living. As I have already mentioned, this assumption is often associated with the claim that the question of teaching content could be neglected. It is then thought that it is primarily a specific quality of dealing with contents that matters, but not the dealing with a specific quality of contents (see e.g. Geissler 1976, p. 86). In doing so, it is overlooked that the aforementioned assumption does not make the question of teaching content superfluous. On the contrary: This leads to a prioritizing of teaching content that reveals potential present and future significance (*Gegenwarts- und Zukunftsbedeutung*), versus teaching content that does not reveal such relevance. Teaching content that for good reasons is seen to have a potential significance for the present and future of the individual is far more likely to enable students to relate certain insights to their way of living. Conversely, teaching whose content does not reveal

any potential present and future relevance may offer little opportunity for linking with one's own personal value judgments.

This doesn't mean that the student cannot recognize teaching content as relevant for the present and future when no such relevance has been identified by the teacher. Conversely, this consideration is not tied to the assumption that a teacher who introduces a well-considered present and future significance necessarily leads the student to a similar recognition. But there seems to be some justification for assuming that not all teaching content is equally likely to prompt the student to value the content at hand. Rather, "certain teaching content is more likely than others to provoke the student to reach a value judgment" (Rekus 2010, p. 173). One may conclude that the teacher should select teaching content "based on its significance to his or her students" (ibid.). The teaching content should have potential relevance for the student's present and prospective life, so that the he or she can ask meaningfully questions about the significance to his or her way of living. The question of whether a student actually recognizes the relevance of certain teaching content to his or her life, and—if so—what that relevance is, can of course only be determined through the student's judgment on the teaching content in question. Thus teaching must present a real opportunity for students to consider the subject's significance to their own life.

So let's summarize: teaching is always about content. Since there is a nearly endless supply of potential teaching contents, it is necessary to be selective. This raises the question of appropriate teaching content selection criteria. In the light of the concept of Bildung, selection decisions should be made in recourse to the criteria of present and future significance. If teaching is supposed to free students to a life of self-determination, it should not be left to chance that they are able make their own value judgments regarding a subject. Teaching contents that have potential present and future relevance may be more suitable for this purpose than teaching content that does not show such significance.

The question arises as to whether the contribution of general didactics to resolving the problem of teaching content has already been exhausted, with the criteria of present and future significance. Wolfgang Klafki denies this question and points out that a given teaching content "cannot be justified didactically by the present and future relevance alone (...) but rather only if its exemplary significance is also proven" (Klafki 1980/2007, p. 275). In order to understand why a specific teaching content can only be called a content of Bildung (*Bildungsinhalt*) if it can be seen as having an exemplary significance (*exemplarische Bedeutung*), one first needs an explanation of the theory of categorical Bildung (*Theorie der kategoriale Bildung*), as developed by Klafki at the end of the 1950s. For it is this theory that explains why teaching content should have exemplary significance for the student.

The basic idea behind the theory of categorical Bildung is this: Bildung means that the student, when self-actively dealing with elementary contents, appropriates categories (*Kategorien*), i.e. general insights as well as general possibilities of judgment. The appropriation of such categories is synonymous with the mutual opening up (*wechselseitige Erschließung*) of the individual and the world (see Klafki 1959/1975, p. 43). The appropriation of categories not only makes a specific content accessible; it also opens up a (smaller or larger) domain of contents. This process of opening up the world (*Welterschließung*) is at the same time to be understood as a process of opening up the student (*Selbsterschließung*), for—while appropriating categories—he or she develops possibilities of understanding and judgment that are not limited to a specific subject matter, but, quite on the contrary, that extend well beyond.

As I have asserted, objective insights are a precondition for making one's own value judgments. These insights may be restricted to a particular fact and, in this sense, cannot fulfill a self-opening and world-opening function, as described as characteristic of Bildung

processes. Against this background, Klafki has always emphasized that dealing with a specific teaching content should enable general insights. But not every content is appropriate for this purpose. In this sense, for example, I can very well gain insight into the interplay of bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments when the arm is moved, without already acquiring a category that allows me to understand the aforementioned interplay in principle, so that I could apply my understanding to other body motions. But in that case a formulated value judgment would also remain limited to the specific circumstances of arm movement. Which would mean that I could, for example, judge that it might make sense to warm up before a handball game to avoid injury; but I might not recognize the value of warm-up in advance of sport activities in general. That kind of value judgment presupposes insight into how the interaction of muscles, tendons, bones and ligaments works in general.

If insights and value judgments can be applied only to a specific situation, then one must wonder whether, in this case, it really makes sense to refer to releasing the student to a life of self-determination. For a release of this sort implies, among other things, that the individual is capable of understanding and responding to structurally similar facts, going beyond specific insights and value judgments. Here, too, Klafki expressly states that “learning that promotes independent thinking, in other words leads to more broadly applicable insights, abilities, attitudes,” requires “that the student actively develops more or less generalizable knowledge, abilities, attitudes on the basis of a limited number of selected examples” (Klafki 1983/2007, p. 143f.).

If this assumption is correct, then teaching would have to ensure that insights and value judgments not remain limited to specific facts. Instead, one could argue that the purpose of releasing students to a life of self-determination always implies leading them to *elementary* objective insights and summoning them, in the light of these insights, to make their own value judgments. In this context, Klafki notes that elementary insights cannot be taught and learned as such, but must be conveyed and appropriated in reference to specific teaching contents, so as to reveal their self- and world-opening functions. In short, elementary insights must be conveyed and acquired *by example*.

Summoning to Examination of Validity Claims

At this point, the problem of teaching *method* arises: How can one support the student in developing intellectual independence when dealing with teaching contents that show potential present and future relevance, as well as exemplary significance? Instead of tackling this problem by discussing specific teaching methods in relation to certain teaching contents, I will attempt to clarify the basic methodological structure of Bildung-supportive teaching.

As I have already explained, for the initiation and support of Bildung processes, a teaching content must be considered in its resistance. This should enable students experiences (*Erfahrungen*), whereby one can distinguish between positive and negative experiences. Experience that confirm and stabilize a student’s existing patterns of orientation may be called *positive*. In contrast, experiences with an irritating character, in other words those that lead students to question their existing prejudices, may be called *negative* (see Benner und English 2004). Due to the distancing associated with the latter, it is possible for students to face their prejudices and thus change them. Thus considered, teaching is not aimed at unnecessarily simplifying or even sparing the student from a confrontation with objective tasks. Instead, by confronting students with such tasks, teaching opens up the possibility for a student to become someone different, and to view the world differently.

Negative experiences present the student with the task of searching for orientation. Just as one cannot speak of Bildung if this search is omitted, so one could not speak of Bildung if validity claims associated with certain knowledge and values are accepted without question. Rather, Bildung implies a specific self-relation (*Sich-Verhalten*) in which the student examines validity claims. In short: Bildung does not imply merely “reflecting what is to be accepted as given, but rather taking a position” on a subject (Heitger 2003, p. 142). Teaching takes account of this fact by not only irritating the students in their self-evidences, but also by prompting them to examine validity claims. Against this background it has been proposed that Bildung-supportive teaching be designated as dialog (*Dialog*), in terms of methodology; in other words, drawing the student into a practice of giving and asking for reasons (see *ibid.*, p. 81). To understand teaching as dialog means not just to declare validity claims as binding and to be enforced, but rather to guide students in their individual situations in such a way that they can examine these validity claims and—consequently—develop objective insights and personal value judgments. In this way, the demands of culture are not merely handed down but also put on the table, which allows for a well-founded acceptance, or a justified rejection, or even a transformation (see also English 2016, p. 161ff.).

In the practice of giving and asking for reasons, the student encounters alternatives. Alternatives enable experience of difference, thus allowing individuals to step back from prejudices. In this connection, criticism, in other words the examination of validity claims, opens up the possibility of not being obliged to unconditionally accept these claims. In short, the practice of giving and asking for reasons creates leeway for self-determination (*Spielraum für Selbstbestimmung*). This leeway is necessary if the student is to develop objective insights and personal value judgments. Herwig Blankertz has summed up this insight as “the pedagogical norm that is denoted with the concept of Bildung in didactics: The teaching contents must not determine the Educandus but must be used in such a way as to trigger critical reason, which at least potentially can also direct against the contents themselves” (Blankertz 1969/2000, p. 14). Blankertz is not referring here to a (further) criterion for selecting teaching content by suggesting that some content in itself can release “critical reason.” Rather, he makes it clear that teaching contents must be imparted and learned in a certain way in order to contribute to the student’s Bildung. This insight is relevant both to validity claims that are bound to certain value orientations the student is confronted with, and to validity claims that are connected with knowledge that is to be conveyed and appropriated. And finally, it is decisive for those validity claims that refer to presuppositions that underlie our insights and value judgments.⁵

I would like to illustrate this briefly using the example of guidance to knowledge. The point is not to forget that Bildung-supportive teaching is also teaching. That means the student is guided to a certain culturally accepted knowledge that has attained the status of

⁵ Such a description presupposes in a certain sense that the student is already ‘there’ when teaching takes place. This does not mean that the self is understood ontologically. It only means that one must reckon with a history in which a self has developed that now faces the teacher in a certain form. It is of secondary importance whether the history of the self is being told from the perspective of socialization or subjectivation theory (see Ricken and Wittpoth 2017). What is decisive, rather, is that Bildung-supportive teaching addresses the student in a certain way, namely as someone who is potentially capable of relating to his or her becoming (see Ballauff 2004, p. 49). In this sense, teaching under the claim of Bildung always includes interrupting the history of the self and giving the student the opportunity to reorient him- or herself. Addressing the student in such a way is discussed today as a specific pedagogical form of recognition (see Uljens 2002, p. 361ff.; see also Stojanov 2018, p. 106ff).

tradition. The student should become familiar with the knowledge that adults trust. However, guidance to knowledge in the context of Bildung-supportive teaching has the task of supporting the student in developing intellectual independence. One consequence of this is that the student must be given the opportunity to examine knowledge. Students should agree to validity claims from insight, and this requires specific activities of the teacher. The teacher must find out what the student already knows and make the student clarify that previous knowledge. In this sense, Bildung-supportive teaching is also always to be understood as analytical teaching. Synthetic teaching leads students to differentiate their “circle of thought.” In order to initiate and support such processes of differentiation, the teacher must ask and show, provide and ask for reasons, and finally have the student examine the validity claim of the knowledge thus “imparted.”⁶ In this sense, Bildung-supportive teaching differs from teaching as instruction; the latter merely strives toward a learning that is receptive and enduring, but not toward a learning as understanding. It is not that Bildung-supportive teaching excludes phases of instruction; in fact, it usually presupposes these phases.⁷ In contrast, teaching as instruction is also possible without the student being asked to examine validity claims; thus Bildung-supportive teaching should not be regarded as the “normal case” or even regarded as trivial.

Talking about propositional knowledge or the examination of validity claims raises a number of epistemological questions that have received little attention in general didactics so far (e.g. the question of what it means to consider a belief to be true and justified, or the question of how validity can be defined in different areas of content such as science, morality, religion or art). Problems of this kind are notably thematized in contributions to critical thinking as an educational idea(l) (see among others Siegel 1988; 2017). A discussion of the arguments developed here would require a contribution of its own. I would therefore simply like to go into one aspect in more detail which seems to me to be of central importance for justifying a description of teaching as summoning to examine validity claims: It should be undisputed that teaching means a permanent raising (*Erheben*) of validity claims. Sometimes it may be difficult to find out whether and, if so, how a certain claim to validity can be proven (*bewährt*), e.g. in the case of historical events. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that the respective validity claims could not be proven. It should certainly not be asserted that validity claims cannot *in principle* be proven and that a description of teaching as summoning to examine

⁶ Klaus Prange argues that the activities of the teacher can be ultimately reduced to the basic operation of “showing” (see Prange 2012). Teaching then means to show something to someone in such a way that he or she learns to show it to other people. I have described this claim above as teaching understanding. In addition to this, Bildung-supportive teaching is also aimed at enabling the student to develop his or her own judgments with regard to controversially discussed issues. However, the student cannot be shown his or her own judgments, so that the activity of showing must be supplemented by at least two further activities: The teacher must also confront the student with questions and make him or her answer them if he or she is not only to learn something (*etwas lernen*), but also to learn to relate toward what he or she has learned (*lernen, sich zum Gelernten zu verhalten*).

⁷ In many cases it may be necessary to *instruct* the student in order to make Bildung-supportive teaching possible. For example, before students can work out the meaning of the Pythagorean theorem and examine the associated validity claim in various proofs, they must have learned which sides of a right-angled triangle are defined as “adjacent,” “opposite,” and “hypotenuse.” This does not require a dialogical, but rather an instructive approach, which guarantees solely the passing on, appropriation and storage of information. The function of *discipline* can be similarly described. For example, teaching often presupposes that certain rules are enforced as valid. Consider, for example, the situation in which a teacher admonishes two students for chatting during class. The main point is to recognize that discipline and instruction can only be considered legitimate from a pedagogical standpoint in that they enable Bildung-supportive teaching.

validity claims is therefore pointless. Such an assertion necessarily goes hand in hand with a performative self-contradiction (for this figure of argumentation see Apel 1987). That means: Someone who doubts the possibility of proving validity claims raises a validity claim him- or herself and assumes, *nolens volens*, that this can be proved. To put it plainly: Validity cannot be meaningfully denied.

Conclusion: Teaching, Bildung, and Respect

In this article, I have proposed a systematization of various facets of Bildung-supportive teaching, as described in the context of German-language general didactics. I started by describing teaching as the basic form of education in which one person helps another to acquire knowledge. I then clarified the concept of Bildung. It was suggested that Bildung be understood as a process in which an individual deals self-actively with the world and thereby develops a multi-dimensional ability to self-determination under the claim of morality. Finally, against this background, I developed a description for Bildung-supportive teaching. The proposed answer: Teaching aims to support the development of independence of thought (the problem of task); summons the student to deal with teaching contents that reveal potential present and future relevance as well as exemplary significance (the problem of content); and it draws the student into the practice of giving and asking for reasons, in order to trigger activities of recognition, valuation and radical consideration (the problem of method).

The proposed systematization does not claim to be exhaustive. But I do hope that I have at least made inroads into highlighting an awareness of issues that one must consider when aiming to develop descriptions of teaching as a basic form of education under the claim of Bildung today. Nevertheless, one might ask why teaching should have to release a student to a life of self-determination at all.

This raises the *problem of justification*—a problem that I can no longer address here with the details it deserves. But basically, the answer to this problem seems to be this: If a student is seen as a *human being*, then it is a matter of *respect* to recognize the student's right to not be required accept validity claims unquestioningly. Rather, the student has the right to develop the ability to self-determination. For this reason, students should be asked to examine validity claims, hereby receiving support in their development to intellectual independence. In my view, the principle of respect for human dignity—as Immanuel Kant famously puts it in his formula of the “end in itself”—justifies Bildung-supportive teaching. In other words, if you *first* assume that every human being has the right to lead a self-determined life; and *secondly*, if you assume that the ability to self-determination is not simply given, but develops; and *thirdly*, if you assume that one cannot expect this to develop successfully without teaching—at any rate, not without teaching that involves students in examining validity claims and also helps them to reach value judgments in the light of objective insights—then the principle of respect essentially requires a Bildung-supportive teaching, and demands that the student be helped to develop the ability to self-determination that is possible in each case.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank Toby Axelrod (Berlin) for her professional translation of the text. Special thanks too to the two anonymous reviewers who gave valuable advice on the revision of the text.

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