

Basic Skills and Bildung

– a Concept



BILDUNG

1. Complex societies demand basic skills learning opportunities through life

The multiple challenges and rapid changes in our societies in Europe demand us to rethink the role and aims of adult education. In this paper we examine how the concept of “Bildung” can foster a more holistic understanding of the needs and goals of basic skills education.

In order to function and flourish in today's complex societies we need a variety of basic skills. For instance, the endless amount and sources of information and communication channels poses a need for new kinds of literacies, as it necessitates the need for active searching, evaluating, interpreting and editing of information. We also need critical thinking, the ability to understand the ways in which we are being influenced as well as how we ourselves can act as agents for transformation. All of this impacts how we should understand the need and provision of basic skills education. What are today's basic skills? Who needs to learn them? Are they something one either has or does not have?

We suggest using the life skills approach in defining basic skills. Life skills include literacy capabilities, digital capabilities, environmental capabilities, civic capabilities, personal and interpersonal capabilities, health capabilities, financial capabilities, and numeracy capabilities.



Adequate basic skills enable inclusion and participation in the complex and rapidly changing information society. European Commission emphasises in the European Pillar of Social Rights the right of the individual to participate in society:

“Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning that develops key competences and basic skills. Key competences and basic skills are needed by all for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship.” (European Commission, 2019.)

To take it even further, basic skills are seen as a right, for where they are undeveloped there is oppression (Paulo Freire 1970).

Bildung Erasmus+ project, run by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), contributes to re-thinking basic skills by making use of the holistic concept of “Bildung”. The concept of Bildung can enrich the debates and the practice of basic skills education.

2. The contribution of the Bildung-concept to Basic Skills education

The concept of Bildung is based on four pillars: transferable knowledge, non-transferable knowledge, expansion of the sense of responsibility and civic empowerment. Bildung is not only knowing things but also having the skills and motivation to change the world for the better and acting accordingly.

We need to adopt a holistic understanding of basic skills as life skills and offer learning opportunities throughout life. Life skills need to be taught in a dialogical manner that connects them directly to learners’ needs. This is essential to equip citizens with the skills to make informed decisions and take action in a world shaped by trends such as climate change, digitalisation and the social divide.

Combining a holistic understanding of life skills with the idea of Bildung, the following aspects should be covered in basic skills education:

- A holistic approach. The understanding of basic skills needs to be widened in the direction of life skills.
- A learner-centred approach. The learning needs of participants are the starting point rather than a predefined curriculum.
- Dialogical methods. Learning cannot be “top-down”, but everyone’s knowledge is acknowledged. Peer learning is facilitated. The teacher is learning as well.
- An inclusive approach. Everyone can participate and learners from different generations and/or backgrounds are involved.
- A participatory/civic empowerment approach. Learners need to be guided on how to advocate for change and create an impact. Self-efficacy and autonomy are strengthened.





3. Recommendations

3.1. Recommendations at macro level (policy makers, decision takers... locally, regionally or nationally)

Recommendations at macro-level aim at widening the concept of learning and what are considered as necessary skills in contemporary society.

- Value lifelong learning and non-formal learning: In a rapidly changing society, we need flexible models and new spaces for learning. This should also be considered in the funding instruments.
- Adult education helps people to adjust to new realities. It should be recognised that we need learning for life, not only learning to gain employment. Broader purposed, holistic learning is needed now more than ever.
- Leave no one behind - this should be a guiding principle in all societal development and specifically in adult learning and education
- Involve civil society representatives and organisations in planning education and learning policies. They can voice the needs of the adult education providers and learners.
- Provide spaces for basic skills learning. Invest more in basic skills training. Recognise the needs of different target groups.

3.2. Recommendations at mezo level (ALE organisations, learning centre...)

Recommendations at mezo level aim at providing flexible learning environments, involving learner communities in the planning of the learning offer and finding new ways to do outreach work.

- Provide spaces where the learning community can share their views and participate in decisions concerning the organization of learning. Organise participatory practices through which learners can express their interests, needs and curiosity.
- Ensure that people can learn in a less formal environment and provide learning opportunities connected to real-life contexts and situations. Teaching can still be goal-oriented.
- Support and provide guidance about learning opportunities for adults.
- If we want to increase participation in learning, we need to be more flexible and creative in the learning provision. For example, learning environments connected to real-life situations can increase commitment and facilitate learners' emotional connection to the topic.
- Invest in outreach work: People with many learning needs are often not seeking learning opportunities. Although deficiencies in basic skills or life skills hinder the chances to learn and develop one's potential and participate in society, people do not always perceive the link between the challenges they face in their everyday life and the lack of skills.





- Network with other organisations to get information on potential learning needs. Co-designing courses help to develop learning opportunities that meet the real needs of learner groups. Also, cooperation can create pathways to further learning.

3.3. Recommendations at micro level (trainers, training the trainer courses...)

Recommendations at micro level aim at adopting a learner-centred approach and methods in learning, as well as empowering the learners in their learning path towards widening their circles of belonging, as stated in the Bildung approach. Aim at empowering the learners to personal growth and increased sense of responsibility of the environment.

- Use methods that engage learners and facilitate cross-curricular learning, such as problem-based learning, peer learning, and case studies.
- Adopt a learner-centred approach. Be open to the learners' interests and life situations and show flexibility to adapt the learning program to their needs
- Create a safe environment where everybody is a valued member of the group and a knowledgeable participant in mutual learning. Spark emotional connections to others by facilitating cooperation and sharing.
- Foster dialogue.
- Consider appealing to all the community, regardless of social status or educational background. We all learn from each other so try to gather people from different backgrounds in the learning process.

