

Education for Life: Practical Implications of the Art of Living for Education and Schooling

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Abstract

Today's societies are characterised by a host of opportunities and challenges. The pace of life is quicker than ever before, and the changes and developments in societies, science and technology come about faster every day. One of the major challenges for human beings is to make a myriad of choices every day, which will define their place in society, in life and in the world altogether. To make prudent and sensible decisions is, therefore, one of the key competencies for a successful and good life.

This paper revisits the idea of an education focused on the personal development and well-being of human beings instead of economic growth. Drawing on philosophical ideas about the good life – especially Schmid's art of living project 'Lebenskunst' – and recent research in positive psychology, an argument will be made for a shift of focus in education and schooling towards a good life and an art of living for today's students. Possible implications of this change of focus for educational practice will be discussed, including suggestions for curricula and school subjects; the structure of schools and learning environments; teaching methods; as well as teacher training.

In exploring the concept of 'education for life', this paper will bridge boundaries between educational theory and practice; between philosophy, psychology and education; and (to a certain extent) between Western and Eastern ideas of how to live well.

Introduction

Today's modern societies are mostly characterised by a host of opportunities and challenges alike. The pace of life is quicker than ever before, and the changes and developments in societies, science and technology come about faster every day. One of the major challenges for human beings is to make a myriad of decisions every day, which will define their place in society, in life and in the world altogether. To make prudent and sensible decisions is, therefore, a key competence for a successful and good life. One of the difficulties, however, is to acquire this key competency in time: in a fast moving and changing world, where children's life-experiences are very different from everything their parents encountered; in schools, where curricula are overloaded with facts and scientific knowledge; and in societies that are globalised and influenced by dozens of cultures from all over the world, the challenge to find – and define – the way one wants to live has reached a scale where people need help to learn the skills and knowledge that are necessary to live a good and beautiful life. This question of how to live a good life, however, has been discussed in philosophy for thousands of years, and answers have been found in many cultures over the centuries. Nevertheless, as Csikszentmihalyi (2008, pp. 20-22) points out, the answers today might be the same as discovered in the past, but they need to be rephrased, as people in different cultures and with changing historical background no longer understand the former wisdom. Scholars like Martha Nussbaum (2001), Alexander Nehamas (1998), Fred Feldman (2004), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008) and Wilhelm Schmid (2000a, 2000b) are only some, who have been interested in formulating an understanding of *an art of living* for people today.

There are various philosophical approaches to leading a good life – from different cultures and various times in history. One of them, and the one favoured in this article, is the “Lebenskunst” [art of living] concept from Schmid (2000a, 2000b)¹. He describes the art of living as the art of taking up responsibility for one’s own life and to try to make it a ‘beautiful’ one. Schmid does not present this concept as a prescription for how everybody should live, but as a way to enable individuals to find their own way to live a good and beautiful life from their subjective point of view. Some of the key points of his philosophy are the focus on the individual; the care of the self (Foucault, 1984) as the heart of the art of living; the importance of prudence and practical wisdom; and the emphasis that each human being is always part of a social structure.

Schmid focuses on the individual, as, despite social and cultural influences and postmodern ideas of social constructionism, in the end each human being has a core, an essence or a self that is more accessible and more connected to what one experiences as one’s own consciousness than any other being or object one can perceive. Each human being has, to a certain extent, some kind of autonomy over one’s own body, one’s mind and one’s actions in the world, which results in the experience of self-identity and in feelings of distinction from the bodies, minds and actions of other human beings. Accepting this level of individuality, which is also a very strong concept in Western culture, an art of living approach practically has to focus on the individual, as the final judgement about one’s own life as being a good and beautiful one can only be made by the individual living and experiencing this life (Schmid, 2000a, 2000b; Teschers, 2010).

However, Schmid acknowledges at the same time that each human being is a social animal and nearly always part of a social structure and community. Therefore, strong reciprocal dynamics influence not only the individual itself, but also the people one is in contact with, and the society as a whole. Some of the aspects of social interaction are ethical and moral values and considerations. Schmid bases his ethical concept, originating from the individual, on the qualities of prudence and practical wisdom. These qualities will allow the individual not only to find his or her place in and way through social settings, but also transform selfishness into a reflected form of self-interest which takes into account the desires and benefit of the Other and of society as a whole, as this is in the best interest of the individual.

An evaluation of Schmid’s concept of the art of living reveals many parallels with positive psychology research (Teschers, 2011) – although simple pleasures and happiness are mostly not the answer to a good and beautiful life – as well as a close relation to education. In fact, education, as outlined below, and the art of living seem to share a common end, even if it is not the case that the art of living is an end of education (Teschers, 2012). However, education and schooling are not the same and this article will explore these differences, as well as some implications of the relation between education, schooling and the art of living. In addition, an excursus will be made to explore differences and parallels of Eastern and Western culture in regards to the art of living. A comparison of schooling systems, however, will have to be done separately due to the scope of this paper.

Education and Schooling

Schooling, as mentioned above, is an aspect of education, but it is not all there is. Education is made up of a broad range of situations, topics, tasks and interactions of which schooling covers only a small, although significant, part in the lifespan of an individual. In the German tradition, according to Liebau (1999), the understanding of the term

Pädagogik [pedagogy/education] is based on three fundamental terms: *Erziehung* [upbringing], *Bildung* [(self-) cultivation] and *Entfaltung* [flourishing].

Liebau (1999, pp. 25-28) states, that the current understanding of *Erziehung* has its origin in the enlightenment, where Kant (1900, p. 6) claimed that “Man can only become man by education [*Erziehung*]. He is merely what education [*Erziehung*] makes of him.” Central points of the Enlightenment movement in the German and French context have been, similar to the English tradition, economical aspects of labour, property and achievement, with the emphasise on an education and socialisation towards developing sensible habits as a citizen. But, additional to that, “political questions in terms of living together as a civil (world-) society and the problems of an education [*Erziehung*] to freedom and tolerance” (ibid, my translation) have been discussed as well. Therefore, it is not only achievement and socio-cultural rules that are at the centre of socialisation and upbringing, but also ideas of freedom, tolerance and concern for the development of society on a global scale that influence the understanding of education in the German tradition. Liebau (1999, p. 26, my translation) concludes that “only a prudent education [*Erziehung*], which at the same time respects the freedom of the pupil and the freedom of other people, can lead to prudent human beings and to a prudent society.” The aim of *Erziehung* [upbringing], in this context, is the “maturity [of the pupils, understood] as economic, moral and political autonomy” (1999, p. 28, my translation).

The consequences of this aspect of education for schooling are, on the one hand, to offer a place and opportunity for all citizens to gain qualifications, and, on the other hand, to make achievements comparable, which leads straight to assessments and selection processes in schools. The challenge to mediate between these two functions of modern schooling is quite controversial but probably hard to resolve without a change in society as a whole. However, this is only the first of three aspects of education, but unfortunately often the most salient and dominant in current politics and school policies in modern societies.

Bildung, as the second aspect of education, has its origin in German Idealism: In contrast to the notion of achievement, it is “the life-long labour on the perfection of one’s own person [that] lies at the heart of the classical concept of *Bildung*” (ibid, my translation). It is the development and cultivation of one’s own self that takes precedence, as it is believed that through the perfection of individuals the development and perfection of humankind in total will come to pass. This relation, according to Liebau (1999, pp. 28-33), has two consequences: *the healthy self-interest of the individual* to further one’s own *Bildung* is to be encouraged as it is in the best interest of society, and each individual has *a responsibility to pursue Bildung* for the same reason. The concept of *Bildung*, as it is understood today, has been strongly influenced by Wilhelm von Humboldt at the end of the 18th century, who connected scientific and humanistic approaches to conceiving the world with the notion of aesthetics. Therefore, *Bildung* is closely linked with art, music and theatre, but it also refers to the beauty from within: “This one has *Bildung*, who orients oneself to the standard of aesthetic and moral perfection, and who strives to shape one’s own self accordingly” (1999, p. 29, my translation). In the end, it is the development and perfection of humankind that is of concern to the German Idealists, and, therefore, they take the economy and governments to be of lesser importance and merely supportive institutions that are necessary to allow citizens to pursue *Bildung* and their own perfection. *Bildung* is also one of the key aspects of Schmid’s concept of the art of living.

The role of schooling in this context is quite different from the earlier assessment: As *Bildung* is a life-long process, schools have to provide the foundation for each individual to be able to engage in a continuous process of self-*bildung*. Instead of focusing on facts or

scientific knowledge, learning of how to learn needs to be emphasised, not to acquire advanced technical skills and qualifications, but to enable life-long humanistic learning. It also needs to be pointed out that this level of learning needs to be accessible and achievable for all individuals as, despite “all the inequality in society, it is the equality of humans as human beings that forms the basis for the concept of public Bildung” (1999, p. 31, my translation).

Finally, the third term forming the understanding of education and pedagogy in the German tradition is Entfaltung [flourishing]. To flourish, to develop what is given at the moment of birth, is the notion of the early Romantics. The “perfect child”, lost through the shaping and norming processes of Erziehung [upbringing/socialisation] and Bildung [self-cultivation], is the starting point of “a quest for a second childhood, fortune and paradise – that is in the present and actuality [Gegenwärtigkeit]” (1999, p. 33, my translation). It is this image of the child in early romanticism, which is quite different from empirical children, that stands for “the complete, non-alienated, socially not distorted human being” (ibid, my translation). In this context, Liebau (1999, p. 34) states that “Erziehung has no other meaning than to release and to express this ideal design of one’s self, which is inbuilt in every human being.” Further, Erziehung is not limited to teachers and educationalists anymore, but everyone takes part in the upbringing and socialisation of young people – and all other people one interacts with. In this sense, education happens everywhere and mostly anytime.

The focus of this notion of flourishing points to the subjectivity of each individual (which, again, is a strong parallel to Schmid’s ideas about the development of an individual art of living): everyone has his or her own strengths, weaknesses and set of abilities. These are largely innate, but it is the part and responsibility of society to support, not hinder, the harmonious development – flourishing – of these faculties. Part of this support is not only educational interaction, but, above this, the circumstances of one’s everyday experiences. (Liebau, 1999, pp. 35-36)

Therefore, schools need to pay attention not only to what happens in the classroom, but also in the hallways and schoolyard during the breaks, as well as before and after school. In addition, it is not only the contents but also the circumstances of learning that form the everyday school experiences. Hence, it is important how the school building is designed, as well as the layout and decoration of classrooms and all other accessible areas. With an eye on Schmid’s (2000a, pp. 322-324) remarks on holistic schooling and the idea of education happening everywhere and through everyone, one should even include support staff, like administrators, cleaners, caretakers and gardeners, and take their tasks into consideration for comprehensive school design.

To sum up this section, the term education or pedagogy in the German tradition, and as it is used in this article and for Schmid’s considerations about the art of living, is based on the concepts of Erziehung, Bildung and Entfaltung. The historical development of these notions not only influenced the understanding of education but also Schmid’s understanding and discussion of the art of living. Some ideas and major points of the art of living, as discussed by Schmid, are, or have been, significant parts of the basic understanding of the concept of education. However, current trends in schooling neglect many of the humanistic elements of this concept and seem to focus, in a very limited way, on the aspect of Erziehung in the tradition of the Enlightenment. Unfortunately, we seem to have misplaced the wisdom and cultural achievements of two centuries of human history in current (Western) school design and policies, which should be brought to the fore again.

De-schooling Critique

The call for reshaping schooling, however, is not new. Ivan Illich and Peter Buckman, for example, argued for the false development of schools and their negative impact on society as early as in the 1970s. Illich (1972), who takes a slightly extreme position in his book *Deschooling Society*, makes a point for de-schooling, and even de-institutionalising, of society on a grand scale. Although not a follower of neo-liberal beliefs, he also argues for less compulsory control and structure in people's everyday life – in education in particular – and for more freedom of choice. However, as he writes in a different historical context, his position is not to encourage market freedom and to limit governmental authority, but to help citizens to get over their self-adopted helplessness and take up responsibility for their own lives and their own education. Even if the strong approach outlined in his book can, and should, be questioned and critiqued – especially in regards to the current neo-liberal context that could easily lead to misinterpretations of his original ideas – Illich offers various points that are important to consider and relevant in the context of schooling and the art of living.

The first point he makes (1972, pp. 7-10) is the dominance of schooling in education and educational processes in modern societies. The institution of school is widely recognised as the one and predominant place where education (supposedly) can be acquired. This belief, together with the assumption that education is mainly the same as skills and scientific knowledge, as well as schools' single authority over providing qualification certificates, has far ranging consequences for societies and especially for less advantaged citizens. According to Illich, poor families are robbed of alternative ways of learning and achieving relevant job qualifications, as alternative ways and areas of learning are not recognised as relevant for professional development. However, he also points out (1972, p. 28) that most relevant skills for a successful working life are not learned in school, but in everyday life. Even skills like reading, writing or speaking a second language properly are hardly learned well in school, but more so through out-of-school opportunities and support. Illich (1972, p. 17) argues that school curricula are not well suited to teach skills, and, therefore, are both inefficient and very expensive. Alternative models like apprenticeships or flexible courses that can be chosen whenever interest and life circumstances demand further learning seem to be preferable to him. Another of his points is that certificates are mostly bound to time spent in school rather than one's achievement and effort made (1972, pp. 19-23). At this point one might want to consider the historical and local circumstances: some of his arguments seem to be very specific to the American school model in the 1960s and 1970s and less applicable to other, more contemporary systems. Some of Illich's critique could be misunderstood as in line with a neo-liberal agenda, which was not his intent at all, and Lister (1973) addresses some other dangers as well, which will be discussed in the next section. However, many of Illich's points, and the critique made by his colleagues, are still relevant today, and some of it might already have had an impact in changing education systems since the 1970s.

One further example would be the observation that schools, generally speaking, reproduce society (1972, p. 38). Also still true seems to be the wide belief that making money is the end goal of all education and schooling, and that certificates are just the currency of, or "price tags" (1972, p. 34) on, one's education.

Buckman's (1973) critique of schools is offered in more moderate but, nevertheless, significant terms. He understands education as a "process of understanding the world, of acquiring the confidence to explore its workings" and as "an essential part of maturity" (1973, pp. 1-2). Schooling, however, does not fit this description, and, therefore, is very

different from education in this broader understanding. Buckman voices an argument for more flexibility in people's professional development as well as in schooling and learning. He argues for the need of life-long learning and sees schools as not being able to cater for this necessity. However, although this claim was probably right at the time when this argument was made, and might even be true in many schools and systems around the globe today, it does not mean that schools are per se unable to prepare for a life of ongoing learning and development. It is at least possible to imagine settings and learning processes that support the development of life-long learning in school environments, if not already (at least partly) implemented in progressive schools like Summerhill (Neil, 1992; Cassebaum, 2003), Helene Lange school (H-Lange, 2012) or schools in the tradition of Montessori pedagogy (Raapke, 2006), for example.

Further on, Buckman (1973, p. 5-7) points at the practice to incapacitate children and to subjugate them under a teachers ruling. This critique, again, targets some systems more than others, but overall schools are still some of the least democratic and most repressive places young people have to experience. Buckman argues that no adult, after leaving school, would suffer this kind of treatment and the limitations that come with attending school. As a possible alternative to this kind of practice, he points to adult and community learning centres: these learning environments are, similar to early childhood education centres, mostly interest based, pupil centred and need no grades or exams at all². As Illich points out, the only reason for grades and exams in schools is a distinction for later employment, although one's grades are often unrelated to one's actual ability and performance in a particular job. He suggests that one's qualification for a job should be determined completely distinctly from one's educational and schooling history, for example through specific tests or assessment centres at the time of employment.

Finally, Buckman (1973, p. 7) directs the reader's attention to the relationship between learner and teacher, which is hugely important for learning processes. This is a point taken up in more recent years by Ellsworth (1997), for example, who argues in this context, even though in different historical circumstances, that teaching, as it is commonly understood, is not possible at all, but the relationship between teacher and student, and the way a student is addressed by the teacher, makes a difference for learning.

Possible Ways Out

In her later book *Places of Learning*, Ellsworth (2005) also argues for a different understanding of pedagogy and education. She uses examples of media and architecture to advocate for a pedagogy through "the force of the experience of the learning self" (2005, p. 12). Ellsworth proposes that the learner should be seen as a *learning self*, who shapes one's own self through the process of learning. This learning self, which is quite related to Schmid's view of the individual's self concept – is in constant transition through the experiences that "set us in motion toward an open future" (2005, pp. 17-18), and the question for pedagogy, or teaching, should be, how to create learning spaces and situations that cater for these kinds of experiences. Some of the aspects to take into account to answer this question would be the actual teaching space, the (physical) teaching material that can be bodily experienced by the learner, as well as sensational and emotional experiences in relation to the learning object. Ellsworth, at least in this book, does not critique schooling in particular, but she tries to change people's thinking about teaching, learning and pedagogy/education towards a more holistic and experience based interpretation, which focuses on the development of the learning self, instead of a fixed knowledge based curriculum. Her emphasis on the learning self and her experienced based

approach is quite close, in some aspects, to Schmid's idea of self-shaping individuals and Foucault's care of the self. Ellsworth does not simply critique the existing ways of thinking, but offers possible practical approaches to teaching through movies, poems, memorials and other materials and spaces, designed with the intent to be educational.

Reaching back to the initial de-schooling critique, Lister (1973, p. 23) offers three measures to move forward, away from the present system³, towards a more flexible one that provides alternatives for education – not only for the rich, but for all people:

1. An end to compulsion and the promoting of voluntarism. This would also involve the provision of real choice for learners which, in turn, would mean putting the funds, or the credit, for education in their hands, and an expansion of advisory services which would help people to satisfy their need in the more flexible and varied system of the future.
2. Deformalizing instruction and putting more stress on informal and incidental learning – that is learning related to experience. This would mean an end to the schooling system of sequential curricula and graded exercises – a system which fragments reality for the majority of people. [...]
3. Creating opportunities for life-long learning (permanent education). This would expose the most insidious message of the hidden curriculum of schooling – that education ends when formal schooling ends.

Although the third point is becoming more widely realised – to various extent depending on country – and life-long learning is a term not only used by academics anymore but in public discussion as well, not much has happened to implement the first two measures. Schooling is still compulsory in most modern countries, alternative educational streams, like apprenticeships or home schooling, are badly supported if at all, and formalised instruction and the related process of certification have more significance in today's developed societies than ever before. The later ironically goes hand in hand with so-called *credential inflation*, which is the devaluation of achievements and certificates gained in the education system (Van de Werfhorst & Andersen, 2005).

However, the proposed changes above carry some dangers as well if not accompanied by social and structural changes. Lister (1973, pp. 24 & 27) mentions, for example, that moving towards a voluntary education system could intensify the gulf between schooling and education if common beliefs and values are misguided. As this partly resembles a common market situation, which is close to the line of neo-liberal beliefs, deregulation and increased competition could lead to the opposite of the desired effect; it could lead to decreasing variety and streamlined teaching, which focuses on the best outcome of job relevant subjects. This is especially the case as long as relevant job qualifications are still based on school certificates and one's personal schooling history instead of one's actual qualification for the particular job in question. Therefore, de-formalisation and the abolition of school certificates, as required by Illich (see above), need to go hand in hand with developing alternative education systems.

More recently, the German philosopher Frieder Lauxman (2004) explored the idea of wisdom and came to similar conclusions about how economic and modern beliefs have devalued the idea of wisdom and corrupted modern education systems. His critique, similar to Buckman's, is moderate but significant: his main position (2004, p. 17) is that a thriving modern society needs both, *a flourishing economy and people who are able to think beyond*. He argues that this conflicting situation is needed for a society not only to develop but also to survive at all. A single-minded focus on economy, as is increasingly the case nowadays, will lead to the desolation of society.

Lauxman (2004, p. 24) interprets wisdom as “knowledge without knowledge” (this and following quotes are my translation). According to him, “wisdom manifests in the not provable, not pre-formed and often not comprehensible truth”, which cannot be found in a textbook or the Internet, but which is of a “very different nature” (ibid). Wisdom cannot be taught, but a teacher can be wise and teach in this manner. Lauxman proclaims that one cannot possess wisdom, but wisdom “happens, it shows itself, it takes place” (ibid). His (2004, pp. 25-29) main critique of modern schooling and education systems is the increased focus on scientific and facts knowledge (to use Schmid’s terms here) and a lack of space and time for leisure, contemplation and *falling in love with the world*, which is, according to him, the only way to find wisdom. This is also the reason for wisdom being rarely popular in current school settings: it is not measurable or testable, and it is not easy to come by. However, wisdom has a connection to truth, which is of a very different quality than anything knowledge can provide, and wisdom brings forth the good for the one who is wise and for his or her surroundings. Therefore, striving for wisdom, in school as well as outside of formalised learning, is important and rewarding not only for individuals, but also for a society as a whole.

Differences and Parallels between East and West

Due to the theme of this conference, a brief comparison between Eastern and Western culture in regards to the art of living will be done in this section. It will be shown that there are some considerable overlaps in values and ideas of living a good life. In addition, some of the points that will be made here are strongly related with what has been discussed in terms of education and schooling above. Although the scope of this paper does not allow to compare Eastern with Western schooling systems, as mentioned above, the considerations in this section might encourage academics who are more familiar with Eastern schooling and education systems to review them from the background of the art of living and the de-schooling critique provided above.

Despite the obvious differences in Eastern and Western culture and religion, many parallels can be found: ethical and moral virtues of care for the self, others and the environment; striving for wisdom, personal development and the greater good; compassion, love and fraternity – to name only some examples. Depending on the actual concepts and value systems one compares, the points listed above or other cultural and moral overlaps might come to the fore. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the focus in this section will be placed on two of the major worldviews of East Asia, Buddhism and (Chinese) Confucianism, and, to represent Western culture, European moral values and Christianity. The selection made here is based on the author’s background and the cultural setting of the major concepts and research discussed above; every other contrasting Eastern culture or religion could have been chosen similarly. And even though already limited to these four fields named above, the comparison made here can only be exemplary.

Certain parallels in values and worldview between Eastern and Western tradition are not surprising at all, considering the universality of human nature, as well as cultural and philosophical exchange that has taken place since at least the 16th century when European missionaries visited China and were introduced to Confucian ideas and philosophy (Jianfu, 2009, pp. 11-13). Since then, Confucian ideas started to influence European philosophy and thinking and even inspired Enlightenment thinkers, as his teachings “had something in common with what Enlightenment thinkers proposed” (2009, p. 14). According to Lin Yutang (1976, p. 21), this “something” is *to be reasonable*, in the meaning of having a reasonable view on human beings, the world and everything else. The later evolved

emphasis on the spirit and rationality as a mental faculty, on the other hand, is not in line with Confucian thinking and must be considered as unreasonable neglect of the body (1976, pp. 23-25). However, Jianfu (2009) portrays the Confucian influence on French and German thinkers especially in the areas of rational thinking, democratic developments (French revolution) and educational progress in terms of education for all citizens. He points at the general role Confucian ideas played for European philosophical thinking since the 16th century, which explains some of the cultural parallels that have been indicated above. However, Confucian ideas have been interpreted in Europe through Western lenses and applied to local culture and circumstances, which led to certain selections and interpretations that are different from the readings in the eastern tradition (Tucker, 2003, pp. 13-17). It needs to be pointed out as well that Confucian thinking is not singular, but developed into multiple traditions while spreading through East Asia over the centuries. Similarly, so-called 'Western' culture is actually a quite diverse mix of cultures and different traditions and value systems as well. Therefore, it is even more difficult to compare 'Eastern' with 'Western' thinking, as one would have to clarify which aspects of Western and Eastern culture one refers to in the first place (for which the scope of this article does not allow in too much detail, hence the limitations mentioned above).

Evelyn Tucker (2003, pp. 17-20) also distinguishes between various aspects of Confucianism: religious aspects, philosophical system, visions of governance, social norms and personal cultivation. Historically, Confucianism has been regarded as mostly secular (i.e. not being a religion, and religious aspects have been neglected) in Western reading, and the focus has been on the philosophical and social characteristics of this tradition. However, for this paper, the spiritual side and the aspect of personal cultivation are of more importance. There are, for example, strong parallels between the ideas of German Idealism, which shaped the concept of Bildung, as pointed out above, and the central ideas of Confucian spirituality: "Cultivating the self in order to take one's place in this universal scheme describes the central task of life" (P. J. Ivanhoe cited in Tucker, 2003, p. 5).

Tucker (2003, p. 4) points out that inner cultivation, in the context of Confucian spirituality, requires continuous self-examination, self-reflection, rigorous discipline and the cultivation of virtue to become a "noble person". According to her (ibid, removed italics), "the ultimate goal of such self-cultivation is the realization of sagehood, namely, the attainment of one's cosmological being. Attainment of one's cosmological being means that humans must be attentive to one another, responsive to the needs of society, and attuned to the natural world through rituals that establish patterns of relatedness." Further on, Tucker (2003, p. 9) explains that the process of self-cultivation of the individual would have a so-called "rippling out effect" and would "reach outward from the individual and family to society." As mentioned above, this notion of self-cultivation and the development of humanity through the development of the individual is aligned with the German concept of Bildung, as well as Foucault's concept of the care of the self, and, consequently, with Schmid's concept of the art of living.

Despite the fact, that Confucian thinking places the collective at the centre and argues that each individual has a duty to strive for self-cultivation, whereas Schmid places the individual at the centre and argues that the process of self-cultivation and the desire to live a good and beautiful life will lead the individual to respect the Other and society, both philosophies emphasise the importance of the self-cultivation of the individual. Therefore, the reason why one would engage in the art of living in the first place might be different for eastern and Western people, but the overall direction and consequences for the individual seem to be similar.

To compare Buddhism with Christianity is at least as difficult as comparing Confucian thinking with Western philosophy: both come in many local variations, which differ in detail and emphasis. However, some common ideals and values are existent in most Christian streams, the same as there is strong common ground between the different Buddhist traditions, which makes the two religions somewhat comparable. By doing this, some common ground between the more general values and the ideas of both religions can be found. One of the people who explored these parallels and who tried to bridge the gap between these two religious traditions to some extent was Anthony de Mello (1992), an Indian Jesuit padre. In his book *Awareness*, De Mello conveys narratives of wisdom that draw on both traditions as much as on folk wisdom and psychological insight.

Some of the overlapping points between Buddhism and Christianity are, for example, compassion (in the meaning of empathy), love and the care for others; however, more similarities can be found with Western values in general, which are often based on Christian ideals: self-knowledge; the quality of wisdom; the value of living in peace and happiness; and the need for self-development (Nakagawa, 2009; Lau, 2009). The emphasis in the Buddhist tradition, however, lies in *awareness* (or *mindfulness*) and *compassion* (or *loving-kindness*).

According to Lau (2009, p. 719, italics in original), “Mindfulness is a quality of mind and a meditation skill”; it is connected with “memory and being *conscious or aware of something*”. Nakagawa (2009, p. 593) defines awareness “as a way of noticing what is actually going on at the present moment without distortion or judgment of the mind’s projections,” and Lau (2009, p. 719) states that “by practising mindfulness, a sense of connectedness can be fostered between mind and body, individual and the world. The capacity of wonder and imagination as well as wellbeing can also be reclaimed.” Therefore, awareness of one’s own being, one’s own identity and of the world one experiences can be gained, more and more, by practising mindfulness through meditation. Also, Nakagawa (2009, p. 593) points out that awareness is “the basic way of self-inquiry” and to get to know one self. This aspect of awareness, paying attention to one’s own self and one’s living circumstances, is clearly related with Foucault’s (1984) concept of the care of the self as well as Schmid’s take of it in his concept of the art of living. Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi (2008, pp. 30-33) argues from a psychological perspective that attention (i.e. focusing one’s attention on a certain task in the present moment) is the means to reach control over one’s consciousness, which again is the key to controlling the quality of one’s experiences.

To increase mindfulness, Lau (2009, pp. 721-722) offers some simple examples of how it can be “practised in various aspects of daily activities like breathing, walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, keeping silence, and eating.” He (2009, p. 719) states that “recent scientific research demonstrates that the human brain function can be trained and the structure can be reshaped by meditation.” As example, he refers to Davidson et al. (2003), among others, who discovered that meditation alters the brain waves and activates an area of the brain that is associated with happiness (Lau, 2009, p. 719). Moreover, mindfulness is a common part of psychotherapy practice nowadays, as researchers revealed the positive influence of increasing “awareness and acceptance of the present moment” for a person’s mental and physical well-being (Lau, 2009; Germer et al., 2006).

The second quality in Buddhist tradition, compassion, is “fundamental for all beings to live together with peace and happiness. This spiritual quality involves having an altruistic attitude toward others, that is, warm feelings for them; being actively concerned with relieving pain and suffering of others and with benefiting their welfare” (Nakagawa, 2009,

p. 594). This interpretation of compassion arguably covers, or at least points in the same direction, as what Christians might understand by “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. This is also somewhat related to Schmid’s argument about prudence and practical wisdom in his concept of the art of living; however, the notion here evolves from a spiritual and emotional angle, whereas Schmid’s approach is a purely rational one. Nakagawa (2009, p. 603) also indicates that *true compassion*, in the Buddhist reading, is identical with *pure awareness*, which again is closely related with what is often understood, in Eastern and Western tradition, as *wisdom*. Therefore, the notion of wisdom provides a further overlap between both cultural traditions.

Concluding this section, various parallels between Western and Eastern culture, values and beliefs should have become apparent, the same as some overlap between aspects of the art of living, in Schmid’s reading, based on Western tradition, and attitudes towards life in the Eastern tradition. Although Eastern and Western cultures and beliefs vary in many ways, this section shows overlaps in thinking, potential for common understanding and the possibility that an educational approach to the art of living could be of cross-cultural value.

The Art of Living and Schooling

How does the art of living fit into schooling now? Or does it fit at all? It has been argued elsewhere (Teschers, 2012) that the ideal of the art of living lies at the heart of education, and in the sections above the relationship between the wider concept of education and the institution of schooling has been discussed in reference to the art of living. Also, some of the critique of current school systems has been outlined, mainly targeting the inflexibility, inequality and disruptiveness of schooling for people’s lives. It was also shown that there are possible ways out of the current inadequacy of schools to prepare for people’s life challenges and experiences. These ideas mainly focus on a different understanding of, and thinking about, education and schooling – in terms of content and practice as much as in structure and its place in society.

The art of living can play a role in this context in two regards: it can serve as an underlying, guiding ideal or context in which to orientate school practice, curricula and teaching; and it can become a changing force, not only for schooling and education systems, but also for society in general. In terms of the later, as indicated above, schools are mainly reproducing society, not changing it. However, with the distinction between schooling and education in mind, education can make a difference and should be pursued on all levels and for (and by) all age, social and gender groups. The idea of life-long learning has reached the public sphere – even if still focused on professional development – and herein lies the opportunity for an increasing personal development and level of *Bildung* for people today, which again might lead to further changes in the structure of, and thinking about, education and schooling in society: this could lead to an understanding of education that could be called *education for life*, which focuses on the well-being and good life of, and the development of an individual art of living for future students.

Coming back to the first role the art of living can play for schools, various aspects of education have been identified in the text above that are strongly connected with the concept of the art of living and which can be incorporated in schools in much stronger ways than is done today. Schmid (2000a, pp. 318-322) also identified six areas of learning, which should not only be part of a curriculum, but could be a unifying theme throughout the curriculum: *the human being as individual; the social human being; difficulties and burdens of human life; striving for fulfilment and meaning in life; religions, beliefs and cultures of humanity; and the personal shape of life and global prospects*. Naturally, this

theme should not be limiting the content of the curriculum, but create an interconnected experience of learning for the student.

It can certainly be disputed whether Schmid's list includes all the important aspects of a human life circle, as he claims, but this list is at the very least a good starting point to explore this field. Undoubtedly, every human being has an individual component, an idea of one's own self and one's own identity. This identity stays always in relationship to the external world, including objects, other individuals and also social and cultural norms, beliefs and hierarchies. A human life is marked by a multitude of challenges and everyday choices as well as burdens, beginning with the necessity for food, water and sleep, up to common needs like social acceptance and support, and, finally, external influences like unemployment; financial problems; death of friends or family members; and so on. Striving for happiness and well-being is a strong motivational factor for human beings, and this striving is often accompanied by a search for fulfilment and meaning in life. Traditionally, this search for meaning in life is connected with spirituality, religion and other cultural beliefs, which vary greatly on a global scale. Finally, the life of every human being takes shape over time: if one is shaping one's own life in an active way, or one is passively driven through society and external influences, is again up to the individual.

Schmid discusses these areas of learning in the context of a suggested new school subject: "*Lebensgestaltung*" [shaping-of-life; lifestyle] (2000a, p. 318, italics in original). This subject is based on the idea of the unifying theme, mentioned above; it is about connecting the fragments and splinters of perception and knowledge young people experience inside and outside of school into an integrated, sense-making and life-shaping whole. The mentioned areas of learning are supposed to loosely encircle a human's path from birth till death and help the students to situate themselves, think about their lives and futures, widen their perception in everyday life as well as on a global scale, and help them to artfully shape their lives in ways that they deem fit and judge as good and beautiful.

Beyond these areas of learning, Schmid (2000a, p. 322) also draws attention to the teaching methods and didactics used, which are as significant as the content itself. He underlines the personal experience for the learner in contrast to abstract theoretical knowledge transfer. Similar to Illich and others, he follows the notion that (at least when questions of life and living well are addressed but even beyond that) teaching and learning should not be primarily achievement oriented, but focus on the experience and development of the human being. Grades and assessments about one's progress in terms of self-reflection, wisdom, or one's amount of experiences are counter-productive at least, if not impossible.

Moreover, a structure that does not focus on achievement but on the personal experiences of the students creates the freedom for them to ask questions that are relevant to their own self-concept, and to discuss these questions openly. According to Schmid (2000a, p. 323), a fundamental factor for teaching is to further reflective thinking through, for example, a "self-reflective approach" to teaching that puts the teaching process itself in the focus of reflection. A possible discussion leading beyond the classroom to include the whole school, the ways of dealing with it and social structures around it into the reflection process can open the view for conditions and opportunities of one's own *Lebensgestaltung* [shaping-of-life] and art of living (ibid.).

Schmid (ibid.) also draws attention to the personality of the teacher: "That the personality of the pedagogue and his/her ability for self-reflection is of even higher importance here than in education in general goes without saying." Schmid emphasises the areas of *Bildung*, general knowledge, life-knowledge and philosophy, as well as knowledge about good

teaching methods and didactics as some of the necessary traits for teaching in the area of the art of living. Only someone who engages in the art of living and takes responsibility for one's own life can be a helpful teacher on the way to an individual art of living at all.

Conclusion

It has been argued that education and schooling are not the same, but that schooling is a part of education and, as such, can contribute to the higher aim of education that results in the ability of a student to develop his or her own art of living. Important aspects of education, like *Bildung* and knowledge, can be supported by schools and teachers. However, the structure of suitable classes – or even of schools as a whole – need to be adjusted to cater for an *education of life* that is focused on the well-being and the good life of our children instead of monetary success.

Additionally, parallels between Eastern and Western cultures and thinking have been revealed, and the art of living has been identified as a possible concept for further dialogue and agreement for future prospects in terms of living a good life, shared values and teaching children.

Notes

¹ Schmid is a contemporary German philosopher, whose work has not been translated into English, yet. See Teschers (2010) for an English summary and discussion of his philosophy.

² Compare progressive school concepts, like Summerhill or Rudolf Steiner schools, for example.

³ Although written in 1973, Lister's points are still relevant and instructive for today's schooling systems.

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