

Bildung in German Biographical Studies: New Research Perspectives Focusing on Methodological Development in Educational Studies

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A qualitative research methodology can contribute to the understanding of human development over a lifetime (*Bildung*) as a holistic phenomenon and a lifelong process of self-formation, in contrast to the conventional interest of educational studies in teaching (as distinct from self-development) and/or modern education systems (as distinct from individual *Bildung*). Biography is an effective source and method from and through which to follow the changing process of the notion of *Bildung* in educational studies; however, the exact relations between biography and the character of educational studies remain to be explored. This paper argues that new research perspectives on *Bildung* have emerged as a result of the qualitative examination of biography.

To reverse the lack of discussion in this area and to support the new insights biography provides for educational studies, this paper focuses on German biographical studies (*Biographieforschung*) which not only reconstruct the theoretical framework of educational studies but also establish methodological approaches like the narrative interview at the same time. Since the mid-1970s, when qualitative research experienced its 'renaissance' in sociology, it has also obtained great attention in German educational studies. Educational biographical studies have come to consider new themes, such as one's subjective *Bildung* and learning in contrast to teaching and educating as intentional acts of others. These challenges have clarified the notion of *Bildung* as a subjective process of human development incorporating the overcoming of negative experiences in one's life-course. To approach *Bildung* in this way, unique techniques and methods of interviewing and the interpretation of interview data have been developed.

Since an early stage, biographical studies conducted within the field of German educational studies have suggested that we view biography as research material for the holistic analysis of lifelong human development. This was pointed out in the two earliest essays analysing written autobiographies from the perspective of educational studies: one in 1936 by Kurt Uhlig and one in 1962 by Jürgen Henningsen. These classic essays argued that researchers should interpret each autobiography by paying attention to the retrospective, subjective character of the author or storyteller, out of which the autobiography is constructed. Autobiographical description was understood by these authors as a reconstruction of one's subjective experiences, distinguished from objective report of past events. In Uhlig's essay, autobiography was introduced to German educational studies for the first time, as both research material and method; in Henningsen's essay in 1962, much more interest was paid to one's *Bildung* opposed to teaching. This tendency has led to a strand in today's German biographical studies. In this sense, central issues in educational studies, such as teaching, have tended to be replaced by *Bildung* since the introduction of biographical studies into educational studies in Germany.

This paper concludes by arguing that it is intrinsic to biographical studies to consider core concepts of educational studies and studies on *Bildung* in the German research context. From the methodological

development of this research field in this context, we see that biography contains and reflects the subjective process of human *Bildung*, the subjective character of which requires us to reconsider issues and concepts in educational studies as they have typically been represented.