



Comparison of Self-reflection in *Humboldtian Bildung* and the Kyoto School: Educational implications in light of OECD frameworks

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Abstract

This article focuses on the importance of reflective experiences in education. It firstly reviews and compares the Humboldtian *Bildung* and the Kyoto School, represented by Nishida Kitaro. Both philosophies emphasize the importance of reflective experiences in education, criticising the specific knowledge-skill-based instruction approach. In this sense, the two views are similar. However, this article further explains the significant difference in how *self* is considered in relation to *world* within each thought, and therefore, how each educational approach is different, namely as seen in the idea of *negative education* from the Kyoto School. In the latter section, this article develops the discussion of reflection in the process of learning provided in the OECD Education 2030 framework, which was initiated in 2015 and that is still ongoing. Criticising didactic learning as the sole approach for knowledge and skill acquisition, the OECD Education framework advocates instead for the importance of student self-reflection in relation to society to support a broader development of necessary competencies. By comparing the two schools of thought, the article reveals the underlying assumption of *self* in Western mainstream educational philosophy, and it argues for the importance of open-mindedness toward the other worldview.

Keywords: Self-reflection; Humboldtian (neo-humanistic) *Bildung*; the Kyoto School; negative education, OECD Education 2030

Introduction

The importance of reflective experiences in education has been discussed across human history and has been of central interest to scholars and educators around the world. In this article, the ideas of the Humboldtian *Bildung* and the Kyoto School (represented by Nishida Kitaro) are reviewed comparatively, based on which the article further considers the implication of those ideas to the current discussion of reflection in the process of learning in the OECD Education 2030 framework.

The reason why the two ideas in the West and the East are reviewed and compared is that while both focus on the importance of reflective experiences in education, the position of *self* is different within each idea, and the ultimate goal of the reflective experiences is different as a result of varying cultural contexts. As Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) referring to Michael

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Sadler argue, comparative study helps achieve a better understanding of ourselves (p. 15). Through the comparative lens, the unique characteristics of each school of thought are better understood. Furthermore, looking into the OECD 2030 educational framework in light of these approaches regarding reflection helps to reveal the underlying assumptions of the OECD 2030 educational framework.

The Humboldtian (neo-humanistic) *Bildung*

Background

Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767-1835) is widely regarded as the most representative philosopher of neo-humanistic *Bildung*, having made a crucial contribution to the development and canonization of the German conception of self-formation or self-cultivation (Sorkin, 1983, p. 55).

At the time when the neo-humanist interpretation of *Bildung* emerged, Prussian society was in flux after the defeat in the war against Napoleon in 1806. Before the educational reform of Humboldt, the Prussian educational system was based on the idea of Utilitarianism linked to professional skills and knowledge considered to be useful in society. This was in the movement of the German enlightenment,² as seen in the thought of educational reformers such as J. B. Basedow (1724-1790), who insisted that education should encourage the development of useful abilities (rather than searching for truth), or J. H. Campe (1746-1818), who argued that education should teach students knowledge and skills to prepare for their future professions (Okawa, 2005, p. 40). Campe proposed to close the *Universität*, and instead to establish *Spezialfachschule* (a professional school directly linked to future professions), and the government widely accepted this idea. As a result, not only in Prussia but in all of Germany, schools that specialized in certain professions such as agriculture, mining, medicine, craft, etc. were established, and from 1794, comprehensive universities began to decline and even cease activity (Okawa, 2005, p. 41). However, facing the uncertainty of its very existence after the war, Prussia needed to conduct large reforms to rebuild the country. Humboldt was placed in charge of educational reform in Prussia, which brought a paradigm shift in education.

Core Concepts of Humboldtian *Bildung*

Humboldt's philosophy placed great importance on self-cultivation in human development. For Humboldt, education is not something given by somebody, but something a person participates in of their own volition. According to Humboldt, *Bildung* is understood as harmonic growth and development, the unfolding of all inner forces and potentials of the human being (Danner, 1994, p. 8).

In contrast to earlier educational reformers, Humboldt thought education should provide not only the knowledge and skills targeting specific purposes, but more importantly should provide the individuals the opportunity to cultivate their unique abilities with increasing freedom in moving up the educational ladder (Sorkin, 1983, p. 63). Koller (2011) explains that “for

² Humboldt's childhood tutors introduced him to the *Aufklärung*, and the tutors who prepared him for university studies were eminent representatives of the last wave of the Berlin Enlightenment (see Sorkin 1983, p. 57).

Humboldt, *Bildung* is not *training* in the sense of preparing for certain purposes which are set from the outside, but, rather, the most comprehensive and at the same time most balanced development of human talents” (p. 376). In Humboldt’s opinion, the schools were divided into two units, elementary school where students learned basic skills, and high school where students are taught to be intellectually independent. The curriculum aimed to show students both how to learn as well as to learn specific material. In his opinion, a student was considered mature when “he had learned enough from others to be able to learn by himself” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, referenced in Sorkin, 1983, p. 63). Humboldt explained, “Based on mathematics, classical languages and history, the curriculum’s goal was to provide a general education (*allgemeine Menschenbildung*) which would respect the individual development of each student. Only after such a general education would students proceed to specialized training.”³ In his opinion, all the schools established by the government for the public should aim at universalism in education with self-cultivation as its sole purpose, whereas the knowledge and skills necessary for living or individual professions should be taught after finishing such general education. Those two aims of education, i.e., universal education (*allgemeine bildung*) and skill/professional based education (*spezielle bildung*), in his opinion, should not be mixed, otherwise, both would become incomplete (Okawa, 2005, p. 47). Humboldt argued that universal education strengthens the individual human him/herself, and professional education without universal education would only enable humans to learn skills for simple use without understanding any deeper reasons.⁴

In the process of self-cultivation, two fundamental concepts for Humboldt were *alienation/isolation* and *freedom*. *Alienation* or *isolation* is not meant in the sense that one should be isolated from others during learning. Rather, for Humboldt, “*Bildung* is about linking the self to the world...and the student should not lose himself in the alienation (from the world) but rather should reflect back into his inner being” (Løvlie & Standish, 2002, p. 318). Humboldt explained in *The Limit of State Action* that one develops through the voluntary interchange of one’s individuality with that of others. Self-formation, in other words, requires social bonds. However, as discussed, he regarded *Bildung* as the initiative coming from one’s own inner forces, and he regarded the importance of one’s own reflection and understanding through the interaction with others in society.

One of Humboldt’s essential arguments in *Bildung* is the freedom of the individual⁵. For him, this freedom entails limitations to State intervention in education. Specifically, he argued:

the State must wholly refrain from every attempt to operate directly or indirectly on the morals and character of the nation... Everything calculated to promote such a design, and particularly all special supervision of education, religion, sumptuary laws etc., lies wholly outside the limits of its legitimate activity (Limit of State Action, 1852, p. 65).

³ *Gesammelte Schriften* (referenced in Sorkin, 1983, p. 63)

⁴ “Understanding, acquisition of knowledges...should not be from outside condition, but it should be from inside of the students” according to Humboldt (Okawa, 2005, p. 48).

⁵ Östling, J., Josephson, P., & Karlsohn,(2014) explain the core idea of Humboldt in relation to university education that “knowledge is a collective and joint concern, and one that should take place at a certain distance from society”, referring to Humboldt’s idea of “isolation and freedom (Einsamkeit und Freiheit) “ (p. 2).

Humboldt argued that education should serve the person, not the citizen,⁶ and an egalitarian system should be created which suits the person rather than the citizens, by providing an education in an atmosphere of freedom (Sorkin, 1983, p. 63).

With this brief review of the Humboldtian perspective on *Bildung* as a background, it is now possible to consider how this common European view differs in important ways from the most notable alternative view to emerge from Japan in recent centuries, that of the Kyoto School's educational philosophy.

The Kyoto School of Educational Philosophy

Background

The Kyoto School (*Kyōto-gakuha*) is the Japanese philosophical movement centred at Kyoto University that assimilated Western philosophy and religious ideas and used them to reformulate religious and moral insights unique to East Asian cultural tradition in the twentieth century.⁷

The term “Kyoto School” was first used in the article by Tosaka Jun in 1932.⁸ The Kyoto School had been developed in mutual criticism among the philosophers in the school, therefore, it is difficult to find clear borders to establish the school. According to Fujita (2009), referring to the article by John C. Maraldo (2005), there are six characteristics to confirm the scope of the Kyoto School: (i) connection with Nishida, (ii) relationship with Kyoto University, (iii) relationship with Japanese/East Asian intellectual tradition, (iv) relationship with political thoughts, nation-state, and the problem of war at that time, (v) relationship with Buddhist tradition, (vi) Evaluation of absolute nothingness.

The school's first generation included distinguished philosophers such as Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) and Nishitani Kenji (1900-1990). During the era of this first generation of the Kyoto School philosophers, Japan was in the middle of its efforts to modernize the country. People were trying to import Western thought and find ways to incorporate it into the culture and practices of Japan. In this context, it is not surprising that the Kyoto School philosophers, as represented by Nishida, tried to mix Western thought and Japanese traditions.

Nishida Kitaro started his career as a teacher, and then became a professor of philosophy at Kyoto University.⁹ Since a young age, he had practiced *Zen* Buddhism with his best friend, Suzuki Daisetsu, who later became a renowned *Zen* Buddhist scholar. Naturally, Nishida's thoughts are based on the ideas of *Zen* Buddhism, which he mixed with Western philosophy in his thinking.

⁶ His contrast between citizen and human is influenced by the idea of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), according to Naka (1989, p. 15-16).

⁷ http://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/ja/about/public/issue/research_activities/documents/2013/vol3no3/RA2013-3-4.pdf

⁸ Tosaka did not use this term to positively evaluate Nishida's or Tanabe's philosophy which he thought was rather abstract. Fujita concludes that the Kyoto School is not a philosophical school where the philosophers started to establish a particular thesis, but a group that naturally developed at the time when Japanese philosophy started to become independent in accepting Western philosophy (Fujita, 2009, p. 36).

⁹ The Kyoto School is not solely focusing on philosophy of education, however, as pointed out by Sevilla (2016), looking at their thought is relevant for the discussion of educational philosophy, because they discussed human transformation not only as scholars but also as educators themselves.

Core Concepts of Kyoto School Educational Philosophy

Similar in some ways to the aforementioned *Bildung* concept by Humboldt, central to the Kyoto School educational thought was the concern of how best to cultivate the self. The Kyoto School developed an original perspective that stood between Western philosophy of *being* and the Zen Buddhism conception of *nothingness*.¹⁰ The core educational concept of the Kyoto School, which is *investigation of self*¹¹, is rooted in Zen Buddhism, which explains that essential to the process of the self-becoming manifested is a *denial* of the self. Okamoto (2015) explains this as the process whereby one regards the self as the existence of a deep mystery without bottom (*Jiko no Muteisei*), and seeing this bottomless existence in the self and the other, then considers how self should be in mutual interaction. Here, Okamoto points out that the process is different from that of the Western view, where self-investigation assumes the existence of the self as self-evident (p. 172).

In the Kyoto School educational philosophy, the ultimate status of human development is toward nothingness, i.e., human development is considered to start from ego-self (mind) to non-self (casting-off), and finally to true-self (no-mind, or formless self) (Sevilla, 2016, p. 646). To understand this idea of ultimate non-self or true-self, it is necessary to understand Nishida's idea of *place* (*ba*) and the relationship of *self* and *place* which led him to the idea of *absolute nothingness* (*zettai mu*). Nishida, contrary to Western philosophy, reconsidered realism from the perspective of the predicate. While Western philosophy, as represented by Aristotle, confirms existence based on the subject (i.e., the most basic component is the distinction between the subject and the predicate), Nishida reconsidered this fundamental conceptualisation and reached the view that existence can be confirmed based on the predicate. Abe (1995) explains that, while "Aristotle seeks true Reality and the formation of judgement in the direction of the grammatical subject", "Nishida was convinced that in order for the individual as the grammatical subject (Substance) to be known, there must exist that which encompasses it, the place in which it lies, and that this place must be sought in the plane of the 'transcendent predicate', not in the direction of the logical subject" (p. 168). From this perspective, he placed importance on the concept of *place* (*ba*), as the basic component that reflects oneself infinitely. In his opinion, no-self includes infinite presence (Nishida, 1927). In the status of non-self, Nishida considered that subjectivity reflects everything in the mirror of *place* (*ba*) inside of the self as the shadow. He proposed to *see without the subjectivity to see* and *listen without the subjectivity to listen* (Yokoyama, 1981, p.95, 97). Nishida argued that we should think of the world not from outside of it, but that we, as the thinkers ourselves, are part of the world (Nishida, 1937). Nishida considered that a human being is not a closed unit (or in the Kyoto School terminology, a solid self or ego) and through letting go of the self, of the attachment to the subject, the self is able to open up to reality in its fundamentally paradoxical nature (Sevilla, 2016, p. 643).

¹⁰ http://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/ja/about/public/issue/research_activities/documents/2013/vol3no3/RA2013-3-4.pdf
Also, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeOTbyy7uYE>

¹¹ In Genjokoan by Dogen Zenji, it is explained that "learning self is forgetting self or leave from one's attachments". While self-reflection is often considered to be the conscious activity to investigate one's mind, self-investigation in Zen Buddhism is different in the sense that, through self-investigation (for example, in the practice of Zazen), one tries to let go of oneself and to be unified with its experiences or environment.

In terms of educational aims, Nishida put emphasis on awakening the drive which lies dormant in the depths of the heart of each student (Jainto, 2016, p. 187). According to the Kyoto School, education is not necessarily about training to acquire skills, as the Latin *educationem* might indicate, nor it is merely socialisation of the child, or a maturing of the immature, or the expanding continuity of experience (Sevilla, 2016, p. 642). In this context, the School proposes the way of *negative education*. While education, especially school education, is generally seen in the light of *being*, whereby learning is an addition, a further solidification of the self, and the path of education march towards the fulfilment of the selfhood of the human being, the Kyoto School of thought focuses on a flexible self (toward true selflessness) in relation to the surroundings or outside influences without fixing the aims and goals in human developments (Sevilla, 2016, p. 645). In a recent essay by Takayama, the Kyoto School notion of *negative education* is explained as follows:

affective experiences of discomfort, perplexity and confusion as an important catalysis for generative learning and unlearning....Learning to let go of the familiar language and frame of seeing the world and embracing disruption as a critical moment for new learning (Takayama, 2020, p. 79).

The Kyoto School educational philosophy focuses on individual self-investigation. However, at the same time, the School (at least some of its philosophers, including Nishida) explained that the development of self should be in unification with the environment (including society or nation). This point can be seen from Nishida's speech below, from March 1940:

In short, creation is impossible only by oneself. There must be a thought of predicate, but there is a subject and environment, and their relation is what creates. And this subject and environment correlate, as in the subject makes an environment, and the environment makes a subject, and this is how creation works... So, that is, every human being can create, and because every human being can create, human being has creativity. Furthermore, this unified world, the world which environment correlates and integrates, has a trend, a trend of era. Action toward this trend creates history and the historical world. And to participate in this creation and will to create would explain the morals of human being, in other words, a purpose of culture.¹²

This statement is a good example of how the Kyoto School understands *self* in *environment*. This uniqueness of understanding of *self* and *world* is one of the keys in comparing the goal of reflective experiences in Humboldt's *Bildung* and in the Kyoto School, which is going to be explained in more detail in the following section.

Comparison

Knowledge and Skill-based approach vs Awakening of inner drive

As reviewed in the former section, the Humboldtian (neo-humanist) *Bildung* places importance on reflective experiences in learning for human development, focusing on the inner forces of a human being. It emphasizes the critical role of self-reflection in interaction with others in

¹² Nishida's speech in March 1940, broadcasted in NHK radio on April 30, 2018, in the program called "radio archives". The speeches were recorded in the year before Japan participated in the war. The recording was not published at the time, due to the different interpretations which could be supportive (or not supportive) of participation in the war. In the postwar period, it was often discussed whether Nishida or the Kyoto School supported participation in the war.

society. A rather similar idea is seen in the Kyoto School educational philosophy, as formulated by Nishida.

Both views stemmed from critical reflection on earlier educational approaches that favoured specialised knowledge acquisition. Rather than an educational approach that segregated students along certain pathways of specific knowledge and skill training, Humboldt argued for the importance of general education in order for students to prepare for further developments of themselves, learning how to become intellectually independent as free individuals. He emphasized that education should not be something given by somebody (i.e., coming from outside conditions), but should be initiated from within. Similarly, Nishida emphasised awakening the drive within each student. He was critical of education that only focused on the acquisition of special skills as indicated by *educationem*, stressing instead the importance of initiatives by students themselves. Here, we see the similarity of their thoughts in understanding the aims of education.

I and World in reflective experiences

However, there is a difference between the thought of Humboldt's *Bildung* and the Kyoto School in terms of how they proposed the positioning of self.

Both philosophies focus on the importance of reflective experiences in education. This similarity might be understood from the viewpoint of the influence of German Idealism, particularly seen in the thought of Fichte (1762-1814). Ito (2014) explains the commonality in Humboldt and Fichte's understanding of the two concepts, *I* and *World* (p. 25). As Ito explains, for Humboldt, the purpose of human activity is to improve oneself (ability by nature) and to add value for self-essence, and for that, there is a need for materials (or objects) which Humboldt named *World (Welt)* or *not oneself (NichtMensch)*, in contrast with *I (Ich)*. Both Humboldt and Fichte paid attention to the relationship between *I* and *World*, in the interaction between the internal self and the external world, where one experiences reflection from the World into the internal self and then deeply reflects on oneself. In this process, one confirms who he/she is, since otherwise, absent such reflection, there is a danger of the self-becoming buried in the World.

Nishida also appreciated the ideas of Fichte. He stated, "I think Fichte created the new conceptualization of Realism with substantiation of subjective recognition."¹³ Indeed, if we consider Nishida's idea of the process of self to non-self and then true-self, it is arguable that his thought was highly influenced by Fichte.

However, Nishida took a different position from Fichte in the sense that Fichte argued the concept of absolute self. In further developing his thought, Nishida explained his position as follows:

Philosophy starts with the contradiction of self. Doubting itself is the issue. I think there are two ways to go from here, because of our self-contradictions. One is the direction toward affirmation of self, and the other is the direction toward negation of self. It can be said that Western culture went to the former direction, and Eastern culture has the strong point in the direction toward the latter. ¹⁴

¹³ Section II 13 work of Nishida Kitaro. "About philosophy of Descartes"

¹⁴ Section II 13 work of Nishida Kitaro. "About philosophy of Descartes"

Therefore, in contrast with the absolute self as proposed by Fichte, Nishida reached the concept of *Absolute nothingness*. This is influenced by his familiarity with *Zen* Buddhism. In Buddhism, *non-self* (*Muga*) means the state of being that self is not coerced by one's own desires or judgements, or in other words, is removed from one's fixed ideas and prejudices.^{15 16} In Western culture, as Nishida saw, although the process of reflection on interaction with the World is acknowledged as important by some educational philosophers, the fundamental assumption of the process is that the being *I* exist, and *I* is to be affirmed in such reflective experiences. Komatsu and Rappleye (2020) argue “The western liberal ontology begins with the presumption of selfhood as substance, one grasped on the higher plane of reason.” and “the substantive self remains the primarily educational project of Western modernity, liberal, and otherwise” (p. 22-23)

Nishida challenged the Western view based on his *Zen* Buddhist experiences, arguing that when human beings are born, the only existing thing is *Pure consciousness/Pure experience* (*Junsui Ishiki/Keiken*). Accordingly, it is assumed that at this stage that there is no distinction between subject and object (*Shukyaku Mibunri*), and only afterwards, in the process of growing up, a human being somehow misunderstands that there is subject and object in binary opposition. Moreover, how the subject sees an object is based on a limited awareness (*Gentei teki na Jikaku*), which is not absolute but changes in the relationship to *world*. Nishida's idea is that *world* creates self as a part of *world*, and neither is static. Therefore, for Nishida, what is important is that one becomes not limited, but released from a misconception of self, and the ultimate goal of humans should be a denial of self so the border between self and *world* can disappear.

Based on this idea, the Kyoto School proposed the importance of *negative education*. As opposed to positive education, where knowledge and skills are added for students' development, instead, they valued the moment of negativity in education where students experienced disruptions and uncomfortableness, allowing them to separate from their familiarities (fixed-self) toward non-self, which leads students to open their mind as unified with their environment (world).

The idea of negative education itself is not solely unique to the Kyoto School. For example, Rousseau explained a similar concept in his educational thought (as referred in his book *Emile*). English (2013) in her book ‘Discontinuity in Learning’ also explains the importance of the moment of disruption, unexpectedness, doubt which leads to discontinuity in learning. However, while these Western educational philosophies also value the importance of negativity of education and self-reflection, the fundamental difference between these and that of the Kyoto School seems to be that Western thought orients self-reflection toward the development of learner self-determination. The Kyoto School's proposal of negative education is different from Western thought, with the educational goal being the development of students who are self-determined, independent, and ultimately free and autonomous in the environment, with self-reflection leading to self-enrichment.

¹⁵See, for example, Digital Daijisen (Japanese dictionary) or Encyclopaedia Nipponica by Shougakukan Inc.

¹⁶Nakagawa (2015) in his article of Buddhism and Holistic Education, explains that Buddhist thinkers recognise the mind's ability to create distinctions between things, but at the same time they underline that such an ability is the primary cause of our delusive perceptions, false attachments, and therefore, suffering (p. 47). He explains “when we revisit education, it is important to recognise that Buddhism provides not only moral and religious teachings to be taught at schools but also offers fundamental worldviews or frameworks, upon which a whole edifice of education can be built” (p. 46).

Implications for the current discussion of OECD Education 2030

The roles and influences of supranational organizations on education policies have recently undergone expansion in a global society. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) explain that the values that national systems of education promote through policy are no longer determined wholly by policy actors within the nation-state but are forged through a range of complex processes that occur in transnational and globally networked spaces (p. 22)¹⁷. They further argue that globalization represents both an ideological formation and a social imaginary that now shapes the discourse of education policy (p. 23). Li and Euan (2020) illustrate the development of OECD's educational focuses, explaining the shift of agendas and approaches based on the historical circumstances and processes in which OECD has adopted and expanded its educational activities. They claim that, in contrast with its approach during the 1950s-1990s (i.e., education for economic recovery and growth) or 1990s-2010 (i.e., neo-liberal globalisation and development of international comparisons), OECD's approach in post-2015 can be interpreted as a humanitarian turn (p. 504). While expanding PISA's relevance to establish it as a truly global metric (such as PISA-D), it expands the scope of the assessment into non-cognitive domains (i.e., transformative competencies) (p. 509). OECD explains that meta-cognitive dimensions of learning (such as social skills, creativity, resilience, and responsibility) are needed for current and future generations in an unpredictable and uncertain society.

The OECD Education 2030 project, initiated in 2015, aims to provide a common understanding of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values students need in the 21st century¹⁸. Carefully accepting some criticisms to earlier educational policies, such as PISA and knowledge-skill based competencies that tend to focus on particular aspects of learning outcomes, the 2030 learning framework and compasses issued in 2019 reflect the importance of the relatively *holistic developments* of learners¹⁹, including the transformative competencies which include values and attitudes such as creativity, reconciling tensions and dilemmas and taking responsibility. As for the competencies, the OECD explains that learners need to develop both cognitive and meta-cognitive skills (such as critical thinking, creative thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation), social and emotional skills (such as empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration), and practical skills (such as using new IT devices). Additionally, the OECD notes that each competency is intricately interrelated with the others, and the ability to develop competencies is itself something to be learned using a sequenced process of reflection, anticipation, and action (OCED The Future of Education and Skills, Education 2030, p. 6).

¹⁷ Rinne (2008) also argues that the trends of internationalization and globalization have had unavoidable impacts on steering and guiding the decisions of national policymakers and the direction of national education policies (p.665) As to OECD, he explains that it has become a kind of global bench maker of standards and in this way also a power in educational decision-making and governance (p. 668).

¹⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/>

¹⁹ According to the report by MEXT on the OECD Education 2030 project, it is explained that the Japanese experts have joined the project since the beginning and contributed to the proactive discussion, especially with the proposal in the viewpoint of holistic development of learners which Japanese education has traditionally put importance on.

https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/documents/OECD-Education-2030-Position-Paper_Japanese.pdf

Importance of Reflective experiences in the process of learning

The process of Anticipation, Action and Reflection (AAR) is strongly encouraged in the learning framework and the learning compass 2030 by the OECD. This is the constructive cycle of planning, experience and reflection, and this kind of learning often takes place within a community and in interaction with others (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978, in the OECD learning conceptual learning framework-Concept note: Anticipation-Action-Reflection cycle for 2030, p. 120).

Hatti (2020) states that the AAR approach helps to focus on the phases of learning much deeper than the usual claims about high achievement – as if the latter happens without the former²⁰. He emphasizes that reflection does not mean looking back to where we think we have been, but rather, it is the process of seeing your learning through others' eyes, seeking and using feedback about progress, checking our cognitive biases (especially confirmation bias), and adjusting our learning to more effectively attain the expectations developed in the anticipation phase.

Implications of the two philosophies

The direction of the OECD's recent development of Education 2030 appears to be in line with the educational thought proposed in the Humboldtian *Bildung* and the Kyoto School. Based on the reflection of the limitation of the knowledge-skill based educational approach where students do not deeply understand what they are learning, nor how to use what they learnt in their real lives (and further, how to flexibly adjust and re-create what they learnt), these schools of thought, as well as the recent OECD's discussion, propose the importance of reflection in learning. In this section, the OECD's policy is further reviewed in light of the *Bildung* and the Kyoto School from two important perspectives, i.e., (1) student as agent and co-agency, and (2) consideration of Trends.

(1) Student as agent and co-agency

The OECD Learning compass 2030 emphasises the need for students to learn to navigate by themselves through unfamiliar contexts and find their direction in a meaningful and responsible way, instead of simply receiving fixed instructions or directions from their teachers (OECD Learning Compass 2030, p. 6). The idea is based on the student-centred approach. Agency is defined as the competency to think, initiate and act intentionally and responsibly to shape the world toward individual and collective well-being (OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030, Concept note: Anticipation-Action-Reflection cycle for 2030, p. 123). Students are expected to learn to exercise their sense of purpose and responsibility while learning to influence people, events and circumstances around them for the better (OECD Learning Compass 2030, p. 6). Students are to be equipped to act rather than be acted upon; shape rather than be shaped; make responsible decisions and choices rather than accept those determined by others (OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030, Concept note: Student Agency, p. 4).

²⁰ [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/aar-cycle/Thought leader written statement Hattie.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/aar-cycle/Thought%20leader%20written%20statement%20Hattie.pdf)

It is argued, however, that a student is not acting solely as an agent-based on his/her autonomy or choice, but most importantly needs to grow and exercise their agency in social contexts²¹. OECD conceptualizes student agency which is different from student autonomy or student choice (OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030, Concept note: Student Agency, p. 4). OECD warns of the risk that the concept is misinterpreted as students acting and functioning in social isolation, or solely in their self-interests (p. 4). It emphasizes that, especially for the students with disadvantageous backgrounds (such as lower socioeconomic family backgrounds), carefully designed supports are necessary for the students to safeguard their future well-being in the society, as student agency is not a personality trait; it is something malleable and learnable (p. 4, p. 6). Further, the OECD Learning compass explains the important concept of co-agency. (OECD Learning Compass 2030, p. 6). Since the development of an agent is a relational process, not only the students but also the surrounding agents (such as teachers, families, or a wider community) are expected to work together for the development of the society.

These concepts of student agency and co-agency as a student's position and role are similar to the idea of self in the Humboldtian *Buildung*. As Humboldt emphasized, education is not something given by somebody, but something a person participates in of their own volition for empowerment. And education should provide the individual the opportunity to cultivate their unique abilities with increasing freedom. Moreover, in self-reflection for student development, they should not lose themselves in alienation but should reflect the world into their inner selves.

Nishida's thought, however, as discussed in the previous section, appreciated non-self as the ultimate stage of the development of a person. Although the OECD's concept covers the aspect of the relationship with society (i.e., agency is different than autonomy), Nishida suggested further based on his understanding of self and place. He emphasised the openness of the self to be flexible²² and changeable, unified with the environment.²³ It can be said that Nishida's thought may contribute further to the discussion of how to understand and position self in reflective learning in OECD's policy.

(2) Consideration of Trends

Another aspect to be considered is the argument of the OECD learning compass, which states the importance of having an understanding of the trends shaping our world (OECD Learning Compass 2030, p. 8). This is reminiscent of the statement by Nishida of situating self in the world.

²¹ In the experts meeting held by MEXT in December 2018, the characteristics of OECD's concept of Agency was explained by the ministry as contextual, non-linear, and multi-dimensional. The Japanese ministry, referring to the latest revision of the national course of study, emphasized the position of student agency in a society, reconfirming the importance of working together with others to solve issues and reach to agreements. https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/142/shiryo/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2019/01/28/1412759_2.pdf

²² In terms of being flexible, OECD, as referred above, use the term malleable which could imply a similar concept. However, the term needs to be carefully interpreted, because it may also indicate the meaning of being pressed into shape, training or being controlled/influenced by others, which would not be the intention of OECD.

²³ In the OECD concept framework report, the definition and understanding of 'agency' are explained to be culturally different. It explains that, in Asian cultures, including Japan and China, agency rather means the harmonious actor in a community, while in Western culture, it links more for personal goals. (OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030, Concept note: Student Agency, p. 7).

OECD argues that understanding the *trends* helps us to prepare for the future and identify the kinds of competencies today's students will need to thrive. (p. 8) It is somehow contradictory that, while the compass emphasizes the individual's role as an agent to create the society of the future, the learning should nevertheless be in line with the (current) trends of the society. Especially concerning the nature of OECD (i.e., industry-driven, economy-focus), there is a risk that the trends could be (intentionally or unintentionally) narrowly interpreted. Also, as OECD itself understands, the most challenging nature of current and future education is that the future is *uncertain and rapidly changing*. In that case, how can we foresee such a future based on the trends? Similarly, OECD argues for the importance of well-being²⁴ in the learning compass, noting that economic prosperity accounts for only one part of an individual's or society's well-being (p. 8). However, it may not be denied that the OECD framework for measuring well-being is still focused more on economic aspects, rather than on individual character.

As Humboldt argued, we need to carefully ask how students would not be lost within the (current) society. Instead, they should/can develop themselves in relation to society, creating their own future for their own well-being. It might be worth carefully reviewing what kind of trend(s) we are discussing here, and to make sure that we do not take such trend(s) for granted. Referring to Hattie's (2020) statement, policymakers and educators themselves also should not fall into the trap of confirmation bias in reflection of trends.

Conclusion

This essay initially attempted to compare the educational thought of the Humboldtian *Bildung* and the Kyoto School focussing on Nishida's thought. Both in the Humboldtian *Bildung* and the Kyoto School, reflective experiences during interaction with others in society are considered to be the core of education. Both criticised the systems where knowledge-skill-based education was the sole aim. However, there are significant differences in terms of the ultimate status of the self. The Kyoto School of educational philosophy proposes non-self as the desired outcome, whereas the Humboldtian concept of *Bildung* focuses on an affirmation of self in relationship to others in society.

The latter section of the essay reviewed the current discussion of the OECD Education 2030, focusing on the aspect of self-reflection. In reviewing the policy by OECD, it concluded that, while the thought of Humboldt and Nishida originated in different eras and contexts, the two main themes of *self-development in freedom* and *interaction in society* are keys for education.

Nishida's idea of *non-self* might sound contrary to mainstream Western thought around *being*. However, it can be said that, although the ultimate goals expressed in the two philosophies are different based on their cultures, their concerns are nevertheless similar: *how to develop self in relation to society*. This essay does not intend to conclude which approach is better. However, understanding each of the philosophies, including backgrounds and

²⁴ J. Rappleye et al. (2020) criticises the understanding of well-being by OECD's measure of student well-being, in consideration with the Asian cultures. They analyse the OECD 2017 report that most significant parts of student well-beings is measured based on individual characteristics, and relations with others denoted as proximal (i.e., near to but not actually the centre) (p. 263). They argue that this 'biased' understanding of the well-being shows misperception of students' well-beings in Asian countries including Japan.

underlying concerns, and integrating these approaches may be advantageous especially when considering the current and future education in the 21st century facing increasing globalization and diversity.

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