

BWP 3-2013

EDITORIAL

REINHOLD WEIß

Professor Dr., Deputy President and Head of the Research at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), Bonn

On knowledge about the origins

Dear readers,

The Federal Institute has a legal mandate that focuses first and foremost on the analysis of current developments in vocational education and training. Nevertheless we must not fail to keep track of the way vocational education and training, its system and its structures, have developed in the course of time and what factors have played a role in that development. Historical analyses can be highly fertile in classifying phenomena, identifying causes, and estimating consequences. They are not worth simply transferring, but they are worth reflecting on, replicating and using to advance theory and practice. Understanding origins and historical developments is a genuine part of professionalism.

DEVELOPMENT OF STRUCTURES AND CULTURES

The "dual system of vocational education and training" has evolved over many decades. It was the German Committee for Education (Deutscher Ausschuss für das Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen) that first coined that term in a 1964 expert opinion. The dual system has repeatedly received stimuli from memoranda and position statements. It was not created on the drawing board, however, but is the result of a struggle among enterprises, associations, unions, chambers and government agencies for an up-to-date form. Vocational training is and always has been caught between the demands of the labour market and the requirements of the education system.

Legal provisions have set important milestones in the development of the dual system. They have given structure and a binding character to the system. This is the case, for example, for the inclusion in the Trade Regulation Act of 1897 of the certificate of competency for master

craftsmen who train apprentices. The introduction of mandatory vocational school attendance in 1938, the adoption of the Vocational Training Act in 1969 or the proclamation of the Trainer Aptitude Regulation (AEVO) in 1972 are worth mentioning as well. In each case, the general conditions were enhanced and standards were put through, often against the opposition of important stakeholder groups. Equally important is the embedding of vocational education and training in the culture of the enterprises and of society as a whole. Society's appreciation and the career objectives that can be achieved through vocational education and training are the unique selling points. This is inextricably linked with the way the occupation concept and professional identity are understood.

CONTINUITY OF CENTRAL QUESTIONS

The articles in this issue also show that the fundamental questions at stake in vocational education and training have not changed all that much in the course of time. The goal at all times is to integrate young people into the world of work through initial and continuing education and training and to facilitate skilled employment. The shapes and models have changed over the years and need to be changed further. The occasional teaching model was supplemented by a systematic training in company or inter-company training workshops; course-based training was replaced by project-oriented or self-organised learning. Impetus for necessary changes often came from the world of practice, mainly from pioneering companies, but also from the research community. Initially the positions taken were humanities-oriented, but in the meantime vocational education and training research has evolved into a subject that cannot get by without an empirical foundation.

In the course of history the claim of vocational training to equal status and recognition alongside general and academic education has always been paramount. The educational aspiration of vocational training is inextricably bound up with this. The answers to the question of how to live up to that aspiration have changed over the years.

ARCHIVING AND ACCESSING DOCUMENTS

Universities are the systematic place for historical research. The BIBB can do or support historical work only selectively. Anniversaries are regular occasions for this. Naturally only the broad outlines can be traced on such occasions.

The BIBB is, however, able and willing to help make documents and sources available for research. In the case of research data this takes the form of our Research Data Centre. When it comes to projects, it is necessary to archive and process materials and documents. There is

much information in the project documents that needs to be processed in its historical context. It is surprising that so little use has been made of such information so far.

Translation: Paul David Doherty, Global Sprachteam Berlin