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Founding German vocational education: Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer as key figures in the classical German VET theory

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Abstract

This introduction familiarises the readers of this Special Issue with some important information and arguments that set the life and work of Georg Kerschensteiner, Eduard Spranger and Aloys Fischer in context. In addition, it shows their relevance to current debates and policies in vocational education and training (VET) in both Germany and the Anglophone countries. As a first step, some important concepts in German VET that may cause difficulty in the interpretation for English-speaking readers are introduced and explained. Following from that, an outline of the historical context in which modern German VET was developed is set out and then the place of Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer within that context is described with particular reference to the continuation school, the focus of Kerschensteiner's contribution. Spranger's main contribution was to integrate concern for VET within broader academic issues about education, while Fischer was concerned with young people's transition into the labour force at a time of considerable social and economic change. The introduction concludes with a discussion of the relevance of these thinkers and German VET more generally to the current situation of VET in England, with reference to such topics as 'academic drift' and liberal and civic education.

KEYWORDS
Bildung, career, citizenship, know-how, occupation, vocational education

This Special Issue is an introduction to the philosophical thinking that lies behind German vocational education. It focuses on three key figures in classical German vocational education theory—Georg Kerschensteiner (1854–1932), Eduard Spranger (1882–1963) and Aloys Fischer (1880–1937)—and discusses the relevance of their philosophical thinking not only for German vocational education and training (VET) today but also for current English VET reform initiatives. That such an institution as vocational education should have philosophical underpinnings may come as a surprise to many readers in the Anglophone world, where vocational education is often thought of as a purely instrumental, pragmatic and utilitarian subject, perhaps anchored in 'commonsense'. This, however, would be a misconception even concerning, say, English vocational education. The 'commonsense' that underpins it is commonsense in Gramsci's (1971) sense, namely theoretical considerations embodied in everyday attitudes, actions and discourse, compounded perhaps by an inability to see that what the English (and Americans, Canadians, Australians, etc., to some extent) do with vocational education is the product of a specific, not a universal, cultural stance.

In the English context, for example, the thinking of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* looms particularly large. Ideas about 'the division of labour' and the corresponding narrowness of occupations, a scepticism about any theoretical element in training and a suspicion of the producers of labour as self-interested gatekeepers to the labour market all continue to loom large in current thinking about VET. It is just that there are few if any explicit references to these philosophical underpinnings within the world of Anglophone VET. This does not make those underpinnings any less real, however. The fact that they are so embedded in everyday talk, both among the lay public and vocational education professionals, makes them both difficult to identify and also to challenge. Their status as commonsense not only informs everyday VET practice but also informs innovation. The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), originating in 1986, owe a great debt to the Smithian way of thinking about VET in terms of a suspicion of theory and of educational providers. Their disastrous history and subsequent demise were little remarked upon, and there has been an embarrassed silence since they were *de facto* abolished in 2015. However, an explicit debate about the philosophical and in particular the epistemological underpinnings of the NVQ reform is necessary if similar mistakes are not to be made in the future (cf. Winch, 2021). One key point is that concepts that we take to be familiar and uncontroversial, such as the conceptualisation of know-how as skill do not attract the scrutiny that they should. Wolfgang Streeck (1992) has remarked that we find it difficult to recognise what may be culturally distinctive in our own society precisely because it is so familiar to us. This is as true of England as it is of Germany.

In Germany, the situation is different. There is a rich set of VET and vocational concepts in non-technical as well as technical use. There is also a long and rich tradition of philosophical reflection on vocational education that builds on this already existing conceptual structure. What is perhaps surprising and something that Anglophone readers interested in the philosophy of education may find particularly interesting is that although the Germanophone world has a long shared cultural and linguistic heritage with the Anglophone world, a number of concepts that look as if they are unproblematically inter-translatable in fact have quite distinctive features. Thus, it is difficult to translate the German '*Kompetenz*' into the English 'Competence' or the German '*Beruf*' into the English 'Occupation'. This is even more true of the term '*Bildung*', about which there is a great deal of interpretive literature.[1] Even the German verb '*können*' has complexities that are difficult to recognise in the English 'to know how to', which itself is too often reductively regarded as synonymous with 'skill'. The concept of self-knowledge, although of course familiar in the English context, also assumes a particular importance in the context of choosing and preparing for a *Beruf*. More generally, the idea that there could be something genuinely educational in vocational education will sound strange to many ears in the English-speaking context. For these reasons, we introduce in this issue the aforementioned three German foundational thinkers whose influence can be indirectly seen in the contemporary VET system to provide a different perspective, not only on VET

but also on how VET is intimately connected to broader educational concerns. First, though, a few remarks on a conceptual variation on key concepts used in VET.

GERMAN AND ENGLISH PHILOSOPHY OF VET: SOME KEY GERMAN CONCEPTS AND THEIR CONTRAST WITH BRITISH ONES

Kompetenz

Kompetenz in the German sense is a more complex concept than competence as it is used in England, where it typically refers to a skill performed to a certain standard and hence follows a rather behaviouristic idea (cf. Brockmann et al., 2011, Ch. 10). In German, it refers to an ability to perform fully in an occupational context (that is within a *Beruf*). Competence in this sense is of a more holistic nature, where not only technical knowledge and expertise but also motivation, volition, communication skills, learning skills, social abilities and personal self-mastery come into play. A person uses these different component abilities in an appropriate manner depending on a specific work situation to fulfil a specific complex task or to solve a specific problem in the work context. This is seen today as the central aim of VET in Germany and is described as *berufliche Handlungskompetenz*. This includes project management abilities, by which we mean the abilities required to plan, execute and evaluate a sustained and complex inter-related series of tasks with a goal, for example, building a staircase for a carpenter, rewiring a building for an electrician, validating the accounts of a large firm for an accountant, together with all the component abilities that such a project entails. This means the ability to fulfil a self-contained complete work process (*Fachkompetenz*). Note, however, that these component abilities will include the ability to communicate and coordinate, which in turn will be aspects of self-mastery (*Personalkompetenz*) and social ability (*Sozialkompetenz*—not to be translated as 'social skills' as there is a moral dimension involved here as well).

Know how

Many readers of this issue will be familiar with the long-running debate about the relationship between know-how and know-that, initiated by Ryle (1949), sustained by Carr (1981) and returned to prominence in Stanley and Williamson (2001). We are not going to comment in detail on that debate but wish to make the observation that, in nearly all contributions, know-how is either explicitly or implicitly identified with skill. This identification would be misleading in the Germanophone vocational context, which distinguishes between skills (*Fertigkeiten*) and capacities (*Fähigkeiten*). *Fähigkeiten* include such abilities as planning, communication, coordination, controlling and evaluating, all of which contribute to 'project management' and problem-solving activities, central goals of German vocational education. Broadly speaking, *Fähigkeiten* can be distinguished from skills through (a) multiple realisation—planning can be successfully done through the exercise of different skills—(b) teleological focus—someone who can successfully communicate can get their message across, not just exercise 'communication skills', which may themselves not be sufficient for successful communication. Unlike English, German also explicitly distinguishes between knowing how in the sense of being able to act in a certain way and in the sense of being able to give an account of how something should be done, '*können*' being the verb for the former and '*wissen wie*' for the latter (see also Rumfitt, 2003).

Beruf

Beruf, inadequately translated as 'occupation', is a concept central not only to the understanding of German VET but also to the understanding of German society more generally. It refers not only to a legally defined concept of an occupation but also at least partly determines the idea of one's standing in society. It also has a moral dimension, as a means

of self-realisation and self-fulfilment, through the engagement in fulfilling and socially valuable labour and thus as both the culmination and the possible continuation of a certain kind of education (see Miller, 2020, for more details). This was a particular concern of Eduard Spranger in this volume, and Aloys Fischer was also preoccupied with the question of the choice of *Beruf*. The concept of *Beruf* is thus central to the articles by Spranger and Fischer in this volume, implicit in Kerschensteiner's contribution and is critically discussed by Sloane, Gonon and Gericke in this volume. Finally, the *Beruf* concept is an organising principle of much of German vocational education, particularly that of the Dual System of apprenticeship, which has now, in some form, for a century been the central feature of German VET. The *Beruf* in the context of German VET is the subject of constant review and change and is also the focus of anxieties by different sections of the German public and civil society about whether it, and hence a central pillar of German VET, can be sustained in a rapidly changing economic and social climate. Spranger in 1958 and to an extent Fischer in 1920 were already commenting on this issue.

Self-knowledge

If practising a *Beruf* is so important to individual self-realisation, then the choice of one is of central importance in the exercise of one's autonomy or choice of a course of life. In order to make such a choice, one needs to be informed not only about the objective possibilities but also about oneself, and to be so informed one needs to have desires of the appropriate kind, based on one's knowledge of oneself, not only of what one really needs and wants but also of one's strengths and weaknesses when faced with the demands of adult life. This is much more than self-awareness and involves some kind of appreciation of the kind of person one is and could potentially become. This is a very demanding requirement, particularly as it can only really be arrived at through experience and particularly significant experiences that in various ways put the individual to the test and prompt self-reflection. Although the subject of some of the great figures of German literature such as Goethe and Keller, practitioners of the *Bildungsroman* genre, it also has a more mundane existence in choice of career and the kinds of counselling and experiences that help young people to make an appropriate choice based not only on the needs of the economy but on their own needs as well. This issue is central to the Spranger article but even more so to that of Fischer presented in this volume, which each pick up on different aspects of the struggle for self-knowledge sufficient to make an informed choice of a *Beruf*.

These brief remarks should be enough to show that, even in a culture closely related to that of the English-speaking countries, there are profound institutional and attitudinal differences that are manifested, not just in linguistic but also in conceptual variation. To understand this conceptual variation and the role that it plays in German society in general and in VET in particular, it is necessary to see the use of these terms within their context, both in the academic literature that we are presenting and in the everyday speech of Germans about employment, careers and choices. The language is more specialised in the world of VET and VET policymaking but remains closely related to these everyday concerns as well as to the more specialised language of labour market economists.

We shall now look at the origins of the modern German VET system and where our three classical thinkers fitted into its development, concluding with a brief overview of the idea and structure of this Special Issue, which focuses on the pivotal philosophical ideas of the three thinkers concerning VET and with a brief consideration of the contemporary relevance of these thinkers.

THE GERMAN TRADITION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF VET

To be able to understand the development of the classical vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*) which in certain ways formed the basis for the modern German VET system, it is necessary to take a historical perspective and particularly to examine the social conditions and challenges of the German states in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The defeat suffered against France under Napoleon Bonaparte in the double battle of Jena and Auerstedt in 1806 shocked Prussia, because until then Prussia had viewed itself to be on an equal footing with its European neighbours. Now, however, was apparent that France had gained a clear lead due to the changes triggered by the Enlightenment and the reforms implemented after the French Revolution. In the aftermath of this defeat and in an effort to regain its former greatness, Prussia felt compelled to undertake comprehensive reforms, which were undertaken between 1806 and 1811 by the Prussian ministers Karl Freiherr vom Stein and Karl August von Hardenberg. Although the reforms formally only applied to Prussia, Prussia's prominent position among the German states meant that they triggered similar efforts in many of these other states. (cf. Stratmann, 1990, pp. 23 f.)

At the time, Wilhelm von Humboldt was appointed to reform the Prussian education system. He recommended the enforcement and expansion of compulsory schooling. The theoretical basis for Humboldt's reform of the Prussian education system (see Humboldt, 1956/1809a; 1956/1809b) (as well as Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer's reform of the Bavarian education system (see Niethammer, 1968/1808)) was the neo-humanist ideal of education (cf. Spranger, 1922, p. 29). This ideal was also a reaction to the advancing Enlightenment and the accompanying increasing penetration of the world by science, whose new findings and possibilities caused fear and dismay among large parts of the population, and was a demand for a return to the ideal image of mankind of antiquity and a recognition of the essential educational value of its languages, art and culture (cf. Bruchhäuser, 2000, pp. 496 f.; Stratmann, 1990, pp. 23–25; Spranger, 1922, p. 33). This fear of 'new' science and its perceived uncompromising search for truth and knowledge is illustrated by Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, published in 1818. It depicts the 'enlightened' scientist Victor Frankenstein, who, in his quest to equal God and create life from death, recklessly disregards moral and ethical conventions and concerns. This leads to disastrous consequences in the novel.

In contrast to the pedagogy of the Enlightenment, the neo-humanistic educational theory of Humboldt (1956) and Niethammer (1968) emphasised the development of the individual above the needs of society. Vocational training, which would only serve to cope with life and therefore have no higher educational value, is referred to a later phase of life. Humboldt (1956, p. 77) argued: 'If both are mixed, education becomes impure, and you get neither complete human beings nor complete citizens'. For Prussia and the German states, the entrenchment of the 'overpowering' (Münk, 2019, p. 266) neo-humanist theory of education led to the separation and segregation of general/academic and vocational education, which continues to this day (cf. Bruchhäuser, 2000, pp. 496 f.). It also led to the entrenchment of the then existing social conditions. However, with the inexorable advance of industrialisation, the associated hopes of increasing the state's trade and tax revenues, as well as improving the living and working conditions of citizens, the downgrading and exclusion of vocational education from the canon of education increasingly proved to be an obstacle to Germany's economic and social development at the time (cf. Büchter & Kipp, 2009, p. 2).

The considerations of Georg Kerschensteiner, Eduard Spranger and Aloys Fischer were, among others, pivotal in the abolition of this separation. They brought vocational education back into the field of education via a cultural–pedagogical rationale (cf. Harney, 2019, pp. 519 f.; Münk, 2019, p. 268; Schütte, 2019, pp. 147–149). Kerschensteiner created 'the educational-philosophical basis' (Reinisch, 2003, p. 41), Spranger and Fischer created the educational–theoretical foundation for this body of thought, which was conceived at the time as a reaction to social problems and which is today referred to as the classical German vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*).

In the aftermath of the failed March Revolution of 1848, the (industrial) working class, which had been growing steadily as a result of increasing industrialisation, had organised itself since the mid-1860s into an emancipation movement against a society that still thought in terms of estates. This emancipation movement not only led to the formation of social democratic parties but followed in the 'awareness of their needy dependence' (Stratmann, 1982, p. 188) the intention to force an improvement in the inadequate working and living conditions of the (industrial) working class (cf. Greinert & Wolf, 2010, pp. 30–35; Stratmann, 1982, pp. 187 f.; 1969, pp. xx–xxv; 1966b, pp. 903–905). As a result, the 'social question' in the German Empire, which became ever more acute with the ever-increasing dissatisfaction of the workforce, led to immense internal political and social tensions (cf. Greinert & Wolf, 2010, pp. 25 f; Bruchhäuser, 2000, pp. 499–501.). Fearing that the organised, dissatisfied workforce could become further radicalised and

ultimately force social upheaval, the first German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), who was popularly known as 'Iron Chancellor' due to his assertiveness, took numerous measures. These ranged from the passing of restrictive prohibition laws to the introduction of social insurance (cf. Stratmann, 1995, pp. 81–83; 1969, pp. xix–xxii). However, neither the bans nor the privileges could alleviate or resolve the increasing social tensions between the propertied class and the working class. A slowdown of the industrialisation process was not up for debate since the state was interested in increasing industrialisation, as it ensured higher production output and greater tax and trade profits that appeared necessary to achieve the 'place in the sun' dreamed of and promised by the fourth German Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow (1849—1929) and the German Emperor Wilhelm II (1859—1941) at the time (cf. Stratmann, 1992, pp. 148 f.).

A particular concern was for the young people of the emerging industrial working class, as well as for those still in the longstanding craft apprenticeships of the craft production sector (*Handwerk*), which were vulnerable to abuse by some employers. At the age at which they left school, the pathway of these young people, whether loyal to the state and the emperor or of a rebellious bent, had not yet been defined. It was agreed in bourgeois and aristocratic circles that they must not fall into the clutches of social democracy. Moreover, it was thought that the industrial apprentices were much more threatened by this indoctrination than the commercial apprentices (cf. Bruchhäuser, 2000, pp. 499–501; Horlebein, 1994, p. 116). While the master craftsman was still responsible for the working and living conditions, as well as the education of his journeymen and apprentices, the capitalist factory owner had less formal obligations to his workers, which were regulated by supply and demand on the labour market (cf. Stratmann, 1992, pp. 149–152; 1969, pp. xx–xxv). Thus, the private interests and living conditions of the workers were more or less irrelevant to him (cf. Scharf, 1899, p. 331).

At the German Continuation School Conference (*Deutscher Fortbildungsschultag*) held for the first time in 1896, Oskar Pache—the continuation school director *(Fortbildungsschuldirektor)* of Leipzig and first chairman of the Association of Friends and Teachers of German Continuation Schools (*Verband der Freunde und Lehrer deutscher Fortbildungsschulen*)—argued that there was a 'large gap' (Pache, 1893, p. 300) of about four years in the education of working-class youth. This was the time between people's school (*Volksschule*), which young people left at the age of 14 after eight years of schooling, and military service or married life. At that time, the young people were not under the supervision of the state and were thus at the mercy of the temptations of modern society and of indoctrination by the 'anti-social social democracy' (Pache, 1896, p. 184) (cf. Scharf, 1899, p. 331; 1898, pp. 271 f.; Polack, 1897, pp. 34 f.; Schenkendorff, 1896, pp. 249 f.; Pache, 1892, pp. 154 f.). During this period, working-class youths would no longer live in a family, neither with their family of origin nor with the family of a master, and would thus be defenceless against 'street and pub socialisation' (Stratmann, 1992, p. 150) by social democracy (cf. Stratmann, 1992, pp. 149–152). Therefore, the proposed continuation schools *(Fortbildungsschulen*) were seen as institutions to fill this gap and should thus fulfil a double function, namely that of providing a professional qualification and of providing civic education for these young people (cf. Pätzold, 1995, pp. 27 f.; Stratmann, 1982, pp. 183–185).

Taking this debate into account, the Royal Academy of Research for Public Service *(Königliche Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt*) formulated the following question for its fourth prize competition: 'How is our male youth to be educated most expediently for bourgeois society from the time they are dismissed from people's schools until they enter military service?' It was argued that the male youth should neither be 'left to themselves' nor 'fall victim to subversive parties' (Königliche Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften zu Erfurt, 1900, p. 212). Kerschensteiner won the competition with his contribution '*Staatsbürgerliche Erziehung der deutschen Jugend*' (Civic Education of German Youth) (see Kerschensteiner, 1901).

According to Kerschensteiner, the enlightened and industrialised German Empire had given citizens new rights (especially universal suffrage) and liberties (e.g., from 1891, the daily working time for young people was limited to ten hours), but many were unable to cope with these new civil liberties (cf. Kerschensteiner, 1906, p. 3; 1901, pp. 3, 8 f., 14–16; Schenkendorff, 1896, pp. 249 f.). Moreover, the educational supervision of young people ceased too early when they left school at the age of 14 (cf. Kerschensteiner, 1901, pp. 7–9, 14–16, 29; Schenkendorff, 1896, p. 250). Although so-called general continuation schools (*allgemeine Fortbildungsschulen)* had been established for these young people,

the development of these educational institutions lagged behind the development of the state, the demands of society and even more so of the needs of people for (civic) education. According to Kerschensteiner (1906, p. 3), in order to be able to fulfil their social function, these institutions had to provide civic education in addition to vocational education.

Continuation schools *(Fortbildungsschulen*) had already been set up in the German states in the 1870s. At that time, they were designed as general continuation schools (*allgemeine Fortbildungsschulen)* and were supposed to accept young people from the working class who had completed people's schools (*Volksschulen)*, initially exclusively young men and later young women (cf. Greinert & Wolf, 2010, pp. 26, 30 f., 35 f.; Reinisch, 2003, p. 53; Seefeld, 1914, pp. 5 f., 9 f.). These institutions had developed from the so-called Sunday schools (*Sonntagsschulen*) installed by the princely decrees of the 18th century (especially the school regulations of King Friedrich II from 1763 and 1765) and of the early 19th century aiming to preserve the knowledge acquired by the children in the people's schools *(Volksschulen*) (cf. Seefeld, 1914, p. 5). Both the Sunday schools *(Sonntagsschulen*) and the general continuation schools *(allgemeine Fortbildungsschulen)* exclusively repeated the general educational content of the people's schools *(Volksschulen*) (cf. Pätzold, 1995, pp. 26 f.; Seefeld, 1914, pp. 11, 23).

As a rule, the general continuation school *(allgemeine Fortbildungsschule*) was attended by young people on weekdays before and/or after work (cf. Reinisch, 2003, p. 53). However, in this form, it was not well accepted neither by masters, factory owners and teachers nor by the young people, who regarded it as wasted time (cf. Seefeld, 1914, p. 14; Wilden, 1910a, pp. 471 f.; 1910b, pp. 493). As Reinisch (2003, p. 53) notes, the general continuation school (*allgemeine Fortbildungsschule*) was thus not primarily interested in the qualification of young people. It was installed to fulfil the sociopolitical task of countering the newly emerging social democratic movement of the working class, but could not fulfil this task.

KERSCHENSTEINER, SPRANGER, FISCHER AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY IMPORTANCE

Kerschensteiner (1968a/1911, pp. 43–45) emphasised that it was necessary for the educational process to focus upon young people and their requirements and needs. Thus, it was the task of higher secondary schools to educate young people from the upper classes to become noble and loyal citizens by means of ethical and political theory (cf. Reinisch, 2003, p. 55). In contrast, according to Kerschensteiner (1901, pp. 3, 8 f., 14–16, 25 f.), working-class youth did not know how to make proper use of their new liberties as citizens and also had a low level of personal maturity and primarily practical aptitudes, which meant that civic education was particularly important for these young people (cf. Reinisch, 2003, pp. 55 f.; Stratmann, 1992, pp. 149–152, 157–159). In order for civic education to reach the young people of the working class, the continuation school *(Fortbildungsschule*) was to serve the individual interests of these young people, namely their gainful employment as the basis for securing their livelihood and the possibility of their social advancement (cf. Kerschensteiner, 1906, pp. 35, 42; Reinisch, 2003, p. 56). For Kerschensteiner, this meant that 'almost everyone could be won over' (Kerschensteiner, 1901, p. 38). Taking this into account, the occupation (*Beruf*) had to form the didactical centre of the then 'vocational' continuation school (*berufliche Fortbildungsschule*) (cf. Reinisch, 2003, pp. 54, 56 f.; Seefeld, 1914, p.14; Kerschensteiner, 1906, p. 3; 1901, pp. 29, 35, 38, 41).

In this sense, for Kerschensteiner (1901, pp. 12, 16, 21, 35), 'education for professional efficiency (…) is the basis of all civic education, [because] in the education for zeal and enthusiasm for work, those civic virtues develop which we must regard as the basis of all higher moral education: conscientiousness, diligence, perseverance, self-conquest and dedication to an active life [in the service of society]' (Kerschensteiner, 1901, p. 16). From these, 'those supreme civic virtues which we call self-control, devotion to the common good and justice' (ibid.) can develop 1901. For this reason, technical education was established in the so-called industrial continuation schools *(gewerbliche berufliche Fortbildungsschulen*) and commercial education in the so-called commercial continuation schools *(kaufmännische berufliche Fortbildungsschulen*) (cf. Spranger, 1920, pp. 321 f.; Seefeld, 1914, p. 22).

This reorientation of the former general continuation school *(allgemeine Fortbildungsschule*) into a vocational continuation school (*berufliche Fortbildungsschule*) led to an even stronger argument for ensuring a specific professional

education of teachers for these schools. They would be trained at the university level to not only teach the theoretical underpinning of the different vocational subjects but also to provide the required civic education. Practical vocational instruction, however, could continue to be in the hands of practitioners (master craftsmen and technicians) (cf. Pätzold, 1995, pp. 28 f.; Seefeld, 1914, p. 23; Wilden, 1910a, p. 471; 1910b, pp. 495–497). Although the training of commercial continuation school teachers *(Handelslehrer*innen)* had been carried out at commercial colleges *(Handelshochschulen)* since 1898, for example, in Leipzig and Aachen, the planned and systematic training of industrial continuation school teachers *(Gewerbelehrer*innen)* (cf. Pätzold, 1995, p. 25) was not to follow until 1913. It was only in the 1960s that the training of industrial continuation school teachers (*Gewerberlehrer*innen*) was eventually implemented at the university level as well (cf. Pätzold, 1995, pp. 27, 32; see Jahn & Steib, 2020). The efforts concerning a university-based training for these teachers can be understood as the professionalisation efforts of a new caste of teachers to distinguish them from the class of ordinary people's school teachers (*Volksschullehrer*innen*) (cf. Rebmann, 2021, pp. 156–158).

Between 1895 and 1919, Kerschensteiner (see, for example, 1968b/1908; 1968c/1906) had the opportunity to realise his ideas in his work as Director of Education of the city of Munich; here he was responsible for the Munich people's and continuation school system *(Volksschul- und Fortbildungsschulwesen)* (cf. Büchter & Kipp, 2009, p. 20; Reinisch, 2003, p. 50). He revised, for example, the curriculum at people's schools *(Volksschulen)* concerning physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, mineralogy, geography and so on and set up workshops and laboratories, school gardens and school kitchens in the continuation schools *(Fortbildungsschulen)* to motivate the pupils to take an interest in theory through practice (cf. Büchter & Kipp, 2009, p. 20; Reinisch, 2003, p. 50). Kerschensteiner (1906, pp. 1 f.) argued at the Ninth German Continuation School Conference *(Deutscher Fortbildungsschultag)* in Munich: 'Where a trade or industry is to prosper or develop, theory and practice must interpenetrate'. This is the central thought that underpins his reform initiatives in Munich and hence the development of general continuation schools (*allgemeine Fortbildungsschulen*) into vocational continuation schools (*berufliche Fortbildungsschulen*).

In Munich, instruction at continuation schools *(Fortbildungsschulen)* was obligatory for all apprentices during their apprenticeship, and for at least three years for those young people who had not been involved in a traditional craft apprenticeship (cf. Kerschensteiner, 1906, p. 7). Since the vocational continuation school (*berufliche Fortbildungsschule*) was not intended to displace or replace practice and, in the opinion of practitioners could not replace it anyway, the school, however, was supposed to supplement practice (cf. Wilden, 1910a, pp. 471–473; 1910b, pp. 499–501). In this way, instruction at the vocational continuation school *(berufliche Fortbildungsschule)* was regularly limited to six hours and was rarely eight or more hours per week (cf. Seefeld, 1914, p. 17; Kerschensteiner, 1906, p. 7; 1914). For particularly interested and committed young people, voluntary additional lessons were possible in the evenings (cf. Kerschensteiner, 1906, p. 7). The trade associations were already involved in the organisation of these schools at the time (cf. Kerschensteiner, 1906, p. 7).

In 1905, the Royal Prussian State Trade Office *(Königlich Preußisches Landesgewerbeamt)* was founded, which advised the Ministry of Trade and Commerce which had been responsible for the industrial and commercial schools since 1884 on questions of the vocational continuation school system *(berufliches Fortbildungsschulwesen)* (cf. Pätzold, 1995, p. 30). At that time, all large cities, most medium-sized cities and many municipalities had introduced compulsory vocational continuation schools (*berufliche Pflichtfortbildungsschulen*) based on the local statutes of the Trade Regulation *(Gewerbeordnung)* (cf. Pätzold, 1995, p. 30). Article 145 of the Weimar Imperial Constitution *(Weimarer Reichsverfassung)* of 1919 specifies: 'Schooling is compulsory. The people's school *(Volksschule)* with at least eight years of schooling and the subsequent vocational continuation school *(berufliche Pflichtfortbildungsschule)* up to the age of eighteen shall serve to fulfil this obligation'. Tuition and learning materials in the people's schools (*Volksschulen*) and vocational continuation schools (*berufliche Fortbildungsschulen*) were free of charge. With the poor economic situation and rising (youth) unemployment in the Weimar Republic, the number of unemployed and/or unskilled young people increased, leading to profound dissatisfaction among the population (cf. Büchter & Kipp, 2009, pp. 11, 15; Röhrs, 1975, pp. 197, 204–206). This led to a stronger awareness of and the enforcement of the obligation to attend vocational continuation school *(berufliche Fortbildungsschulpflicht)* for these young people. This, in turn, led to an expansion of the

educational mandate of the vocational continuation schools (*berufliche Fortbildungsschulen*) in terms of content, and a stronger social anchoring of the continuation school system (*Fortbildungsschulwesen*) (cf. Büchter & Kipp, 2009, p. 11). Eventually, the vocational continuation school (*berufliche Fortbildungsschule*) was renamed '*Berufsschule*' (vocational school). At the School Conference of the German Reich (*Reichsschulkonferenz*) held in Berlin in 1920, the vocational school (*Berufsschule*) was defined as an education and training place of equal rank to the in-company training in enterprises (cf. Büchter & Kipp, 2009, p. 13). This can be seen as the final official state recognition of the vocational school (*Berufsschule*) as it is known today.

In certain ways, however, Kerschensteiner's approach to educational philosophy seems to confirm the fears of contemporary educationalists who, in the new humanist tradition, denied the educational value of the '*Beruf*' (occupation) and the educational character of '*Berufsbildung*' (vocational education) (cf. Reinisch, 2003, p. 54). Here, Spranger, who had completed his habilitation at the University of Berlin in 1909 with a thesis on Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of humanity, comes into play. He elaborated a cultural–pedagogical justification for classical vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*) and thus (re)integrated vocational education into education (cf. Harney, 2019, pp. 518–520; Büchter & Kipp, 2009, p. 2). Spranger (1923, p. 167, emphasis in the original) argued:

> It is the task of our time to understand the word '*Berufsbildung*' [vocational education] again in its entire content. According to the older view [of the Neo-Humanists, namely Humboldt and Niethammer] it could almost seem as if *Beruf* [occupation] and *Bildung* [education] were mutually exclusive, like narrowness and breadth. … But '*Bildung*' [education] always carries a generality within itself. Whoever is '*gebildet*' [educated] for his profession is at the same time educated for freedom in relation to all the individual achievements in it, learns to understand it in a larger cultural context and to stand spiritually above it instead of being swallowed up by it.

Spranger (1922, p. 31) further argued: 'The developmental rhythm of education thus leads … from *Grundbildung* [people's education] via *Berufsbildung* [vocational education] to higher *Allgemeinbildung* [general education] ….' (1922). In this so-called three-step theory (*Drei-Stufen-Theorie*), '*The path to some form of higher Allgemeinbildung* [general education] *leads through the Beruf* [occupation]; *and only through the Beruf* [occupation]' (Spranger, 1923, p. 162, emphasis in the original). As such, VET and also the vocational school *(Berufsschule*) have to fulfil an educational mandate that must not be limited to producing professional competence (*berufliche Tüchtigkeit)*, but must also strive to develop professional maturity (*berufliche Mündigkeit*), which is based on and strongly interconnected to personal maturity (cf. Kipp, 2004, p. 53; Spranger, 1920, pp. 313–317, 321–324).

The modern world of work in an industrialised society brought with it a new challenge through the strong differentiation and great diversity of occupations, and the radical dismantling of birth-related ties to the assignment to an occupation (cf. Bruchhäuser, 2000, p. 502; Stratmann, 1966b, p. 902). Whereas previously birth had defined the future occupation and status of young people, this decision was now incumbent on young people (cf. Stratmann, 1969, pp. xxvi f.; 1966a, pp. 570–577, 579). The 'inheritance of occupations' (Mitgau, 1952, p. 7) was replaced by the '*choice of occupation*' (Spranger, 1923, p. 163, emphasis in the original) (cf. Stratmann, 1969, pp. xxvi f.; Mitgau, 1952, pp. 8 f., 14 f.; Fischer, 1925, pp. 68 f.). However, in contrast to the traditional trades and professions, most occupations were no longer familiar to young people from direct experience, as they were practised behind the closed doors of industrial companies. Parents were also no longer able to adequately advise their children, which meant that there was a demand for public vocational advice and guidance (Berufsorientierung and Berufsberatung), and public preparation for choosing a profession in state schools (cf. Stratmann, 1969, pp. xxvii–x; 1966a, pp. 576–582; 1966b, pp. 907–909). This was a demand that was in line with the interests of the state due to its commitment to supporting industrial development even further. At the same time, however, the craft sector wanted to retain the status quo in the matter (cf. Stratmann, 1982, pp. 174–176, 179 f.; 1966b, pp. 905 f.).

Aloys Fischer (1967/1932, pp. 451–453; 1925, pp. 70 f., 78 f., 85) points out that vocational advice and guidance (*Berufsorientierung* and *Berufsberatung*) and preparation for choosing an occupation are the responsibility of all education sectors, including the general and the vocational education sector. The new occupation of vocational guidance counsellor (*Berufsberater*in*) emerged from these VET considerations, but the task to ensure the vocational guidance of the training supervisor was also strongly emphasised. The issue led, for example, to the introduction of a probationary period (*Probezeit*) at the start of an apprenticeship (cf. Stratmann, 1966b, pp. 902, 907–909, 911–915). The debate on the usefulness of vocational guidance was not, however, a completely new issue. In 1787, the diocese of Fulda was the first German state to decree compulsory vocational guidance (*Berufsberatungspflicht*) for all young people (cf. Stratmann, 1966b, pp. 914, 916). In Prussia, this was rejected as late as 1803 as an unlawful encroachment on liberal rights (cf. Stratmann, 1966b, p. 916).

The perspective of the independent craftsman and the independent or self-employed businessman have been the guiding principles of the representatives of the classical vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*) to put the occupation (*Beruf*) at the centre of the curricular design of the vocational continuation school (*berufliche Fortbildungsschule*). In this way, the representatives of this theory designed a curricular counterweight to the new humanist understanding of education (cf. Seefeld, 1914, p. 17). Classical vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*), nevertheless, did not provide for sufficient reference to the specifics of the industry, although the industry steadily increased in importance at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (cf. Lipsmeier, 2019b, pp. 452 f.). In this sense, the so-called Association of Decisive School Reformers (*Bund Entschiedener Schulreformer*), founded in 1919, criticised what they saw as the ideological overemphasis on the occupation (*Beruf*), a certain partisanship of the crafts over industry, and a romanticisation of craft vocational education and the neglect of industrial vocational education found in the classical vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*) (see, e.g., Kerschensteiner, 1968c/1906). In this way, the theory and its concepts were seen as not sufficiently in line with the vocational reality of most young people (cf. Stratmann, 1995, pp. 84–86; 1982, pp. 183–185). Kerschensteiner's concept of combining vocational and civic education, they remarked, is also one of maintaining the existing class order and preserving the power of the upper classes; despite all its pedagogical intentions, it is based, at least in part, on an archaic view of man and a premodern view of society (see, e.g., Spranger, 1920, pp. 317—319; Kerschensteiner, 1901, p. 40), which also seemed—at least partially—outdated at the time (cf. Reinisch, 2003, p. 58; Bruchhäuser, 2000, pp. 502–507; Stratmann, 1982, pp. 183–185).

Despite these concerns and the 'Taylorist' orientation of some large companies such as Siemens, the German skilled worker retained and continues to retain important craft-based abilities (cf. Hanf, 2007) essential for the 'diversified quality production' characteristic of much of the contemporary German economy (cf. Streeck, 1992, Ch. 1). At the time, the industry started to acknowledge their need for skilled workers not only to exercise simple structured tasks but also to be able to guide other workers, to plan and control and even to innovate more complex working processes. This led to the development of an industrially specific form of apprenticeship, which followed the structure of in-company training and the integration of vocational education (*Berufsbildung*) into vocational schools (*Berufsschulen*) as part of this apprenticeship with the underpinning idea of vocational education (*Berufsbildung*) as education (*Bildung*).

The Dual System method of VET in Germany is regarded as an important achievement (cf. Seefeld, 1914, pp. 3 f.) because VET should neither be left solely to the training company (*Ausbildungsbetrieb*) nor solely to the vocational school (*Berufsschule*), because each of them alone cannot provide the apprentice with the 'thorough and varied training (…), which the beginner needs in order to fill his position and find his advancement under today's conditions of increasingly fierce competition' (Seefeld, 1914, p. 4). However, the development of this dual structure was strongly linked to the rather problematic and critical perception that VET in the German Empire was seen as a Trojan horse of the ruling class for the civic education of young people from the working class so that they could be made more malleable and less susceptible to radical agitation. This is why the efforts mentioned received the necessary state support (cf. Münk, 2019, pp. 265—268; Greinert & Wolf, 2010,

pp. 43 f., 62; Bruchhäuser, 2000, pp. 499–501, 503–505). This holds true despite the pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings and argumentation concerning the development of the vocational continuation school (*berufliche Fortbildungsschule*).

The implementation of appropriate legislation was central to the development of the dual structure. For example, the Craft Protection Act (*Handwerkerschutzgesetz*) came into effect as early as 1897. This made it possible, for example, to set up chambers of crafts and later on chambers of industry (*Industrie- und Handwerkskammern*) as a negotiating forum for representing diverse interests in vocational education (*Berufsbildung*) by craft and industry (cf. Greinert & Wolf, 2010, pp. 43 f.; Lempert, 1971, p. 114), but even more so as institutions of the enterprises that held the responsibility to support and control in-company training. The responsibility for the vocational schools (*Berufsschulen*) lies with the state, and in today's federal structure, with each of the regional states (*Länder*). Therefore, up until today the dual structure implies not only the specific combination of in-company training and school-based vocational education but also a dual responsibility for apprenticeships (cf. Kuhlee, 2022, pp. 226 f., 229 f.; 2015).

Notwithstanding well-reasoned reservations concerning classical German vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*), it can be seen as a central movement underlying further developments in German vocational education. It put the holistic concept of '*Beruf*' (occupation) into the didactical centre of '*Berufsbildung*' (vocational education) in Germany and constitutes vocational education, not only as a form of qualification, but as a form of education, which also supports the personal development of young people. The theory also laid the foundation for the discussion that is still current in Germany today regarding the equivalence of vocational and general education (cf. Münk, 2019, p. 268).

THE RELEVANCE OF KERSCHENSTEINER, SPRANGER AND FISCHER TO CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS IN VET IN THE ANGLOPHONE COUNTRIES

Taking these historical developments into account, this Special Issue focuses on the three prominent German VET philosophers representing classical vocational education theory (*klassische Berufsbildungstheorie*): Georg Kerschensteiner, Eduard Spranger and Aloys Fischer. The issue introduces one influential paper by each of the authors translated into English. Each selected paper represents one central issue discussed in classical German vocational education theory: The text by Kerschensteiner (1908) reflects the idea of *Beruf* (occupation) and the idea that in order to prepare the ability to act in an occupation properly, students need to experience action in a similar way in their training as well. Spranger (1958) discusses the idea of *Bildung* (education) as it is integrated into and developed through VET. The text by Fischer (1920) focuses on the idea of self-knowledge and the relevance of informed choice in the context of choosing a vocation or profession (*Berufswahl*). Each of the papers is then reflected upon by a current researcher in German VET with regard to the relevance of these three concepts for German VET today; they examine current debates and concepts and discuss possible similarities to the discourse of the classical vocational education theory (see the papers by Peter Sloane, Philipp Gonon and Erika Gericke). Finally, an analysis by Geoff Hinchliffe takes the current English reform initiatives into account and asks in which ways these concepts might be informative for the current search for a readjustment of English VET.

It is, of course, always dangerous to suppose that institutions and practices that work well in one society can be successfully transferred to another, even one that superficially appears to be similar. As we have already seen, there are problems with the translation of specific terms that indicate deeper conceptual differences, for example, in the case of *Kompetenz*/competence, *Fertigkeiten* and *Fähigkeiten*/skills, and *Beruf*/occupation, not to mention *Bildung*/education. Indeed, although German VET 'works well' in the sense that it is regarded as a key national economic asset and is highly regarded both within and outside Germany, this should not be taken to imply that it does not have serious problems. These problems can be illuminating for the English experience. Among them are the following.

A perception of 'academic drift'

This was already a concern of Fischer's over a hundred years ago, and this concern is still present today. There is a debate in both the UK and Germany about how many young people should enter higher education and, associated with that debate, what kinds of higher education there should be. This is very much a matter of debate in contemporary English policymaking. In the German context, it has a particular resonance in relation to the threats, supposed or actual, to the nature of the *Beruf* (occupation), particularly as some commentators see the continued existence of the *Beruf* (occupation) as intimately bound up with the Dual System of apprenticeship. In England, the associated concept of occupation is much less salient, although concerns with the narrowness of some apprenticeships have led the government to specify that all new standards-based apprenticeships must loosely correlate with the socio-economic classification of occupations, currently standing at 742, contrasting with 348 recognised apprenticeships (*Ausbildungsberufe*) for the Dual System. The breadth of the current apprenticeships (*Ausbildungsberufe*) echoes some of Spranger's recommendations concerning the value of the *Beruf* (occupation) for personal development, as well as being a response to a rapidly changing economy. By contrast, although moving in the German direction, England remains wedded to fairly narrowly conceived occupational categories. The ways in which the Dual System and German VET respond more broadly to the desire across the world among young people and their parents for access to higher education will provide important clues to the UK in its desire to expand apprenticeship and make it a significant alternative transition to adulthood from the university route.

Transitions from school to VET

Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer were less worried than they perhaps should have been about the preparedness and ability of young people to benefit from initial VET. However, it is a major problem in Germany where many young people on leaving school are allegedly unprepared for the demands (particularly the academic/technical demands) of a Dual System apprenticeship. Germany operates what is primarily a 'level 3 economy' where the majority of occupations require education up to roughly 'A' level standard.[2] However, some commentators have argued that the school–VET transition system to some extent works as a form of 'warehousing' of young people to maintain favourable youth unemployment figures. Currently, more than 250,000 young people per year do not enter some kind of fully qualifying VET programme after general education, but rather enter the transition system (*Übergangssystem*). These amount to approximately 26% of those young people who eventually enter the VET track after general schooling (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020, p. 152). The UK, by contrast, operates more as a 'low skill equilibrium' with level 2 qualifications forming its backbone (cf. Sissons, 2020; Finegold & Soskice, 1988). The access of such a level 3 apprenticeship is beyond the educational achievements of many school leavers in Germany who would like to take that route. They thus have to spend time 'preparing' to successfully access the apprenticeship system (*Ausbildungssystem*) in the transition system (*Übergangssystem*), where they stay on average for a period of 16 months (cf. Beicht & Walden, 2013). The introduction of T levels in England with their high academic demands also necessitates a transition system for those with modest educational achievements, particularly in Mathematics and English. England would have much to learn from Germany about the running of a mass transitions system that is itself far from universally successful.

Liberal and civic education

Another feature of English (and also British) VET that is not so pronounced in Germany is its strongly utilitarian character with an almost exclusive focus on employability, to the exclusion of a meaningful civic and liberal

dimension. These dimensions did exist, albeit in an attenuated form, for some forty years after the 1944 Education Act but have now been largely forgotten. The civic dimension of vocational education (*Berufsbildung*) was a central concern of Kerschensteiner and also of Spranger, who were also very much concerned with VET as a vehicle for personal growth and development. They are also a central feature of contemporary German VET, and there is much that could be learned from a study of how they work and what the problems are of incorporating continuing civic and personal development into initial VET programmes.

Careers education and counselling

As we have noted above, concerns about an appropriate choice of occupation emerged in Germany at the same time as the embryonic Dual System was being developed and coincided in part with the concerns about 'academic drift' described above. But, as the article by Fischer demonstrates, concerns in Germany about occupational choice (*Berufswahl*) were, to some extent, concerns about what was suitable for the individual as it was about the needs of the economy. Liberal reformers such as Kerschensteiner emphasised the ways in which the practice of a *Beruf* (occupation) could be a path to personal development. Here, they were responding to a tradition of thinking about occupation (*Beruf*) as a vehicle of personal development that can be traced back to writers such as Goethe and Keller, and which is echoed in the complaint of Hölderlin's 'Hyperion' that, on returning to Germany, he found not human beings but occupations. Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) has continued to occupy a prominent place in the transition from school to work, even if Fischer's vision for the career counsellor (*Berufsberater*in*) was only ever partially realised. In England, however, as we gaze at the ruins of what was already a much-diminished CEIAG operation before its dismantling in 2011 (cf. Watts, 2013), and wonder how young people can ever be given the help that they deserve in choosing an occupation (*Beruf*) that satisfies them, we might with profit look at the German system and the thinking of Fischer as part of an effort to reconstruct what we have lost.

The work of Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer is relevant to current educational debates and is of philosophical as well as policy interest, drawing as it does on a rich philosophical tradition of thinking about education. Therefore, we thank our translators Stephanie Wilde and Erika Gericke very much for their support and the excellence of their translations.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Particularly relevant and helpful for our purpose is Miller (2020).

[2] Strictly speaking, apprenticeships (*Ausbildungsberufe*) are mostly placed at EQF level 4, although this may be the result of an inadequate comparison process for European VET qualifications.

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