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## **A Friendship Across the Globe – Bernd Meier and his Influence in the Developing World**

On the retirement of Professor Dr. habil. Bernd Meier, MLS, from the University Potsdam, I would like to acknowledge with this contribution his legacy as an outstanding scholar, researcher, and teacher in the field of education. No doubt, many of Bernd's colleagues and students (current and past) will present and acknowledge the impact of his wide-reaching academic work. On my part, I will be focussing to a large extent, but not exclusively, on Bernd's academic activities within the parameters of knowledge transfer to developing countries. However, let me sound a cautionary note and write a disclaimer. Since it is impossible to provide a detailed account of Bernd's achievements, for these are too numerous. I will paint a picture with broad brush strokes.

Let me begin with expressing some introductory remarks concerning my response to Bernd's retirement. First and foremost, I sincerely hope and expect that Bernd Meier's stepping down from his formal functions at the university will not be a retreat from the academe. However, since it will be for Bernd a departure as the chair and professor of Technology and Vocational Orientation at the *Lehreinheit für Wirtschaft – Arbeit – Technik*, Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Potsdam, I would like to comment on Bernd's personality as a friend, an inspiring scholar and an academic colleague. In doing this I also contend that Bernd Meier has been one of the most prolific and recognised scholars in the field of *Arbeitslehre* (cf. Meier 1993, 2012; Meier/Banse 2015). He contributed to the national and international discourse of teacher education (cf. Meier/Jakupec 2012) and was instrumental in the international proliferation of the Potsdam Model of Teacher Education (cf. Meier et al. 2004). Amongst his major achievements in teacher education was the introduction of international 'best practices' in curriculum development (cf. Meier et al. 2006) and teaching-learning methods in developing countries.

Bernd Meier has occupied and fulfilled many academic and administrative positions in his career: teacher, scholar, mentor, administrator, researcher and a colleague. While many prominent colleagues and former and current students honour his achievements, I would also like to add to one other important role that Bernd Meier has played, namely that of a good friend. With this in mind, I recognise Bernd's many facets bringing to the fore his ideas and influences as an exceptional scholar and as a good friend. His retirement from the University of Potsdam is a milestone and more importantly a new beginning. And it is with this beginning that I wish to reflect on Bernd Meier's achievements and his personal traits. Most importantly, Bernd is enthusiastic about everything scholarly: research, teaching, and services to the developing countries. His academic and advisory work is recognised beyond the walls of the academe.

Let me start with personal notes. I met Bernd by chance in Hanoi in 2002. He was working on an a lower secondary education project, while I was engaged on an upper secondary education project. Both were financed by the Asian Development Bank and implemented by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training. Despite these commonalities, our paths would never have crossed, would it not been for a colleague from the USA who mentioned, independently of each our mutual interests and our work in Hanoi. We met, and the rest, as the saying goes, is history.

Over the years we met many times in Potsdam, Hanoi and most recently in Vienna. I had the great pleasure to meet his close family on many occasions. More importantly, I had the privilege to stay with Bernd and Annette Meier many times in Beelitz, where they live. My thanks go to both, Bernd and Annette and their family for their hospitality. Throughout this time, I had the opportunity to get to know Bernd as a person. If anything stands out in Bernd's character, more than anything else, is his honesty and his support and empathy for others, his colleagues, his students, and his friends.

Following our first meeting in Hanoi, we worked, and are still working on many development aid projects together. To this, I shall return later in this contribution. Thus, let me follow the friendship and collegiality path first. Subsequently to our first meeting and my first visit to Bernd and family, and the University of Potsdam, we worked together on another project in upper secondary education, again in Vietnam, and so the friendship deepened. In 2006 I became, on Bernd's recommendation and nomination an honorary professor at the University of Potsdam. And with this began my annual 'pilgrimage' to Potsdam to conduct the allocated teaching activities. This included joint lectures with Bernd, and participation at conferences and workshops. This collaboration with Bernd provided opportunities for me to

gain a better knowledge about *Arbeitslehre*, teacher education, didactics and vocational orientations as it is understood in Germany and some neighbouring countries. Furthermore, Bernd introduced me to other colleagues from within and without the University of Potsdam and nominated me with support from Professor Dr. Gerhard Banse for a membership of the Leibnitz Society in Berlin. All this contributed to deepening of personal and professional friendship and opportunities to work together, for which I am very grateful.

## **1 The Professionalism of Bernd Meier**

For over thirty years, Bernd Meier has been an eminent scholar, academic teacher and doctoral supervisor in the fields of *Arbeitslehre*, technology didactics and vocational orientation at the University of Potsdam and its predecessor institution, the *Pädagogische Hochschule Potsdam*. His publications alone would put him along the most outstanding scholars in these fields. Bernd played a significant role in the establishment of *Arbeitslehre* as an academic discipline in the German post-reunification era. However, his contributions to the academic world include much more. First of all, there are the manuscripts, textbooks, pedagogical materials and the wide range of publications in German and in English. Some were translated into other languages thus extending Bernd's influence further afield. Over the years Bernd's research in *Arbeitslehre*, as it was understood in the German Democratic Republic and, as already mentioned, successfully transferred to Germany after reunification, spans almost the full breath of the *Arbeitslehre* discipline.

Amongst his colleagues, Bernd is known for his precision, clarity, and innovation and a succinct narrative concerning the theory and practice of *Arbeitslehre* and technology didactics. This serves as an example to his students and his colleagues. There are few, if any at all, contemporary scholars and researchers, who have made as a significant impact in the field of *Arbeitslehre* and occupational orientations, compared to Bernd Meier. His scholarly creativity and productivity are difficult to equal. This is evident through his continuous contribution to *Arbeitslehre*, vocational orientation, and technology didactics. These are as influential as much his deeply rooted formal and informal long-term collegial academic relations. In addition, his work in Vietnam and other developing countries attest to another layer of Bernd Meier's many scholarly and professional credentials.

However, it would be remiss to see Bernd's work in one-dimensional term of the above cited professional and academic activities, for there is a much deeper level that he brings to the scholarly debate. There is sentient "red thread" binding these at times diverse topics, namely the 'economic transitions in societies, social differentiation, and knowledge society' narrative. Since 2002 Bernd Meier and I co-authored 20 publications in German and English covering these topics.

## 2 The Academic Work of Bernd Meier

Bernd Meier's place in the *Arbeitslehre*-vocational orientation-technology didactics firmament would have been secured long ago by his findings and ideas alone. However, the significance of his overall contribution is not limited to his outstanding record of transformative and creative research. Bernd is also one of the discipline's greatest teacher. He elucidates his ideas in a transformative way, employing clarity of his thinking and the explication of content, which is to be found in his publication as well as in his lectures and seminars.

One of the privileges, I enjoyed were the seminars and lectures given by Bernd Meier to his students in Potsdam and at the National University of Education in Hanoi. He encouraged learning by building on critical analyses of the authenticities of teaching in a context of societal realities. Through his structured frameworks and explication of understanding, or to use the German concept called *Verstehen*, he pursued ideas of education and teaching-learning through provocative questioning and rejection of 'taken for granted' ideas and claims. Importantly, he promoted a critical inquiry and combined it with authentic personal experiences of the students. By continuously challenging the students to dig ever deeper and deeper into the theory and practices underpinning educational sciences, he enabled them to develop new paradigms for *Verstehen*. These critical analyses undertaken by students about their own perceptions as educators enabled them to developed tools to construct personal and ideological commitments as teachers and educators. Finally, Bernd Meier's vision of education, indeed, of a university, is predicated on a commitment to dismantling 'taken for granted' intellectual boundaries in education.

Pedagogy, teaching, and research, for Bernd, are inseparable. He strongly believes that one cannot progress on a problem until one comprehends it painstakingly. And one cannot say to understand a pedagogical or didactics problem if one cannot explain it to others. This includes the epistemological

construction of a larger picture of how meaning is formed. At the same time, Bernd Meier has a healthy critical scholarly focus as it is demonstrated in his recent and internationally widely read work concerning PISA (cf. Jakupcic/Meier 2015). It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Bernd's classroom teaching and mentoring are respected by several generations of students. Furthermore, it is fair to say that the University of Potsdam had a very limited international footprint in *Arbeitslehre* before Bernd Meier took on the leadership.

Let me turn now to notions of economic transitions in societies, social differentiation and knowledge society in Bernd Meier's work. This is an important topic in development studies and foreign aid. Here I will focus on the joint research, for it gave me an in-depth understanding of Bernd's scholarly *Weltanschauung*. My notes here are based on discussions with Bernd Meier and the various drafts of our published research findings.

Regarding research on economic transitions in societies, Bernd brought into the discussion a nexus between economic edifice, urbanisation, and education as an understudied area in the academic literature. This applied especially to the urban-rural nexus and its impact on transition in economic structures in developing countries. Having worked in Vietnam, Bernd had authentic experiences by studying and advising the government and the education sector as an international advisor. The research addressed some of the many consequences of urbanisation on education with a view of economic edifice transition (cf. Becker, 2007). Bernd brought into the discussion the argument that the transition of economic structures impact on social, economic and personal interests of individuals in a cultural sense. This affects not only the school-aged but also of the working and retired population. In turn this is built on his deep understanding of employment, employability and vocational orientations in education (cf. Meier 2002, 2012).

Throughout the work concerning development studies, Bernd Meier pursued the notions of megatrends, human resources, and social change. He focussed here on the future of the "world of work" and the "economic world" and went further. He advanced the discussion beyond the traditional thinking and articulated the intrinsic interconnectivity of these two worlds. So, the question for Bernd Meier arose, how to formulate mega-trends and scenarios? He used mega-trends as the statements and explanations that define the present and the future worlds of work and economy in developing countries. This, he took further by advancing a discussion relating to effects of urbanization within an urbanisation theories, including transition in the economic edifice, globalization, employment, employability, and vocationalisation.

tion of education. These discussions provided opportunities and challenges for education in the context of transforming economic structures in rural areas.

In addition, there was a research focus also on socialisation in a contemporary context of the knowledge society. While collaborating with Bernd Meier on this research topic, he connected these two concepts showing the need for perceiving socialisation within a context of the contemporary knowledge society. The vantage point was the assertion that because of the changes in the “world of work”, occupational choices as forms of socialisation are as transitional as the ‘world of work’ in a knowledge society itself. This relationship between the social world and the occupational choices formed a basis for much of the thinking in my own thinking relating to developing countries, where the notions of the knowledge society and occupational choices are epistemologically in a fledgling state.

Drawing on Bernd Meier’s ideas and the transitional character of the world of work, the very concept of socialisation in developing countries, remained an “unfinished project”. Here we need to take a step back. Often, in the culture of developing countries, the basic notion of biographies is firmly rooted in family and society. This is in stark contrast to developed world’s situation, where the occupational biographies are culturally embedded in individualism. Bernd brought to the fore the nexus between the world of work and the occupational world vis-à-vis the individual learners in developing countries. There is a need to recognise that individuals had to cope with changing life plans based on non-traditional social, occupational biographies.

### **3 Assisting Developing Countries through Knowledge Transfer**

In addition to the academic work, Bernd Meier has been active for years in supporting human resource development of various Asian developing countries. He recognised that the needs and demands for education and training have increased over the years. That is, aid in form of Official Development Assistance is increasingly refocussing from infrastructure funding on education and training. Bernd, as the Chairperson of the *Institut zur Weiterqualifizierung im Bildungsbereich an der Universität Potsdam (WiB)*, has developed and implemented numerous training programmes for teachers, teacher trainers, educational administrators and managers from mainly Asian countries. These training programmes and study visits benefit the partici-

pants to gain up-to-date knowledge and skills and transfer these to their respective countries.

Under Bernd Meier's chairmanship and his direct participation as a training provider, the WiB training programmes funded by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and foreign governments certainly meet the objective to improve the developing nation's education system.

#### **4 Concluding Thoughts**

Although, as I mentioned before, there are many facets to Bernd Meier's scholarly work I have deliberately focussed on aspects of development studies. The contributions made by Bernd, has, in addition to his work within the German speaking countries, an international appeal to this area of education for developing countries, and is acknowledged as such by academics and academic institutions internationally.

To restate, Bernd Meier, has played a leading role in raising the level of scholarship in the *Arbeitslehre*-vocational orientation-technology didactics for the developing countries. His contributions to the knowledge base of these intertwined topics together with economic transitions in societies, social differentiation and knowledge society are well acknowledged. This trilogy has not only bridged the societal concerns in the world of work but also has addressed the contemporary human concerns in both the developed and developing countries.

While Bernd Meier's research achievements are quite outstanding, those of us who know and worked with him are likewise humbled by his personality and professionalism. Notwithstanding, all the results and ideas which he developed as a scholar, there are many more embedded in the literature which have been influenced by Bernd, for he is remarkably liberal in sharing ideas and viewpoints in discussions with students and colleagues.

If I were to be asked to give a synthesis of Bernd Meier's character, it would be something like this: Bernd Meier is always firm, fair and consistent. One always knows where one stands with him. And as a friend, he is staunchly loyal.

We can only wish and hope that Bernd Meier will continue to contribute to the University of Potsdam, looking for opportunities to play a significant role and be engaged in the University life and activities. This is, of course, being a selfish thought and wish, for it will be good for us as his colleagues and students – and hopefully good for Bernd Meier. So, the best is yet to come.

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