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Pestalozzi's pedagogy:

inspirational ideas for participatory approaches in (early) childhood education and care

Translated from the German by Pamela Oberhuemer.

Starting point

*"My tears flowed with theirs, and my smile accompanied theirs. They were out of this world, they were out of step, they were with me and I was with them."*¹

*"Every child has the right to reasonable participation and to have his or her view heard on all matters concerning him or her in a way which is appropriate to his or her age and development."*²

Inspirational contributions for participatory approaches in the system of (early) childhood education and care can be found in the works of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and other classical scholars of pedagogy. In his time, however, Pestalozzi saw himself as being in a kind of 'zero-point situation'³ – to be *"with them"* –, whereas today we find ourselves in a situation of being able to choose between a diversity of settings and providers. His pedagogical aspirations had to assert themselves in a context of rigid courtly and social conventions. Currently, his ideas can be promoted in a democratic system for the benefit of the child, drawing on his or her own concrete experiences. Pestalozzi's inspirational contributions are presented here as *regulative ideas* which allow a concept of a 'perfect practice' to emerge. Although this practice is nowhere present in an ideal way, it can be aspired to in order to come as close as possible to it.

In the Federal Republic of Germany as a democratic and social constitutional state, public and private agencies guarantee the provision of (early) childhood education and care. In Germany and Switzerland and wider parts of Europe, children's rights and participatory rights are institutionally codified. Not only in (early) childhood education and care,⁴ but also in public education and likewise in the social services in general, 'participation' is a key topic as part of promoting the idea of a lived democracy.⁵ In this sense, this article argues that, through Pestalozzi, 'participation' as a democratisation of generational relations has a highly relevant figure of justification that helps us to understand better the situation⁶ or the situatedness of early education as the foundation for the individuation of the child, who as a 'truly educated subject' has to prove himself or herself as a person.⁷

¹ Pestalozzi, The complete works 13, p. 9.

² See the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law on the Rights of Children, Article 5.

³ Klafki (1980), cf. Bittner (1997), p. 128.

⁴ See Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Verband (ed.) (2019).

⁵ See, e.g., Liebel (2006), Olk & Roth (2007), Pluto (2007), Moser (2010), Scheu & Auer (2013), Scheu (2013), Knauer & Sturzenhecker (2016), Mangold et al. (2017).

⁶ For the meaning of 'periphery participation', see Lave & Wenger (1991).

⁷ cf. Oevermann's theory of education, biography and socialisation (e.g. 2009).

Problem statement

Today's professionals in all fields are faced with new tasks which are often derived solely from legislation on participation or from the codified children's rights. In the field of (social) pedagogy, participation is considered by many to be the most important of the aspirations enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – as quoted above.⁸ It is hardly disputed that the system of early education is a means to empower children for democracy. When it comes to participation in democracy, the relevant literature refers to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

The basic right of freedom of speech and of the child's view being taken into account is linked to cognitive and moral competences or, more specifically, to the child's age and 'maturity'. This must therefore be seen in the context of a weighting of educational influence on the child, related to cognitive and socio-moral development theories.⁹ According to a review of these theoretical reflections, what we have is basically a "participation among unequals"¹⁰ although children, regardless of this, have the right

„...to participate in decisions affecting their own lives, but also in co-determining the organisation of the educational setting, the local community, society, Germany, Europe and the whole world“.¹¹

Participatory approaches in education, upbringing and care call for collaborative procedures which, beyond their legal framework, require a pedagogical justification for the work in the specific institution which is based on (educational) science. Even Froebel¹² has shown in an impressive way that aspects of Pestalozzi's pedagogy can be more than inspiring for early childhood education.

In 1808, Friedrich Froebel worked for a while as a trainee in Pestalozzi's institute in Iferten. Together with other observers, he learned about his way of thinking and his pedagogical ideas. These promote a high degree of autonomy for later independent practice and the publication of pedagogical activities and prevent both a rigid form of application of Pestalozzi's 'Method' as well as dogmatism or personality cult.

'Participation'¹³ has essentially political motives: in the context of the democracy debate, in recent decades the concept has emerged more frequently in terms of the participation of citizens.¹⁴

⁸ cf. Oswald/Grillitsch (2015)

⁹ For the developmental stages of the self, or rather the socio-moral development, see, z.B., Kegan (1986) as well as the discussion on models of democratic or progressive education in Weyers (2014). See also Moran-Ellis (2013).

¹⁰ Reichenbach (2006), p. 52.

¹¹ See UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, cited in Knauer & Sturzenhecker (2016), p. 8.

¹² cf. Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Verband (2019).

¹³ 'Participation' (lat. 'pars': 'part/share' und 'carpere': 'take') is often used synonymously with 'involvement'. 'Taking part' or 'sharing' are further meanings in this context. "Participation is a constitutive characteristic of democratic forms of society, state and rule. In its predominant application in current linguistic usage, the term refers to the participation of citizens in political consultations and decision-making, less frequently to

Initially this means "solely procedures, strategies and actions ... by which citizens influence political decisions and power".¹⁵ However, in the course of societal modernisation, which is also expressed in the administration of justice, this understanding is increasingly changing. In this way, a concept of 'participation' is emerging in the education and social systems of modern democracies, giving the associated issues a firm anchor in children's rights. This is the case, for example, in the Federal Republic of Germany, particularly since the Child and Youth Services Act came into force in 1990/1991. Through the influence of the pedagogue Hans Thiersch on this legislation, 'participation' as a principle gains special significance, as in his conceptual approach of life-world orientation.¹⁶

The significance of Pestalozzi's pedagogy for participatory approaches

In general, the meaning of Pestalozzi's pedagogy for participatory approaches lies in his ideas about a child-oriented education and appropriate forms of addressing this. These ideas are still relevant even in contemporary times. The predominant topic in his comprehensive works is the education of human beings, together with questions about its purpose, necessity and possibilities.¹⁷

First of all, there is a significant *similarity of concerns* between yesterday (Pestalozzi) and today (participation), between the tradition and the present. This similarity expresses itself in the clear intent to strive for an improvement of the 'condition' of children - in Pestalozzi's view a 'trinity' which affects the natural, the societal and the moral condition of the child in order to account for 'true humanity'.

Pestalozzi's comprehensive works – presented amongst others in 14 letters with the title "How Gertrude teaches her children" (1801) – are inspired by his idea of the development of the intellect through "heart, mind and hand"¹⁸ (the heart symbolising emotional strength, the mind cognitive strength and the hand physical strength). This is the focus of Pestalozzi's Method of learning basic skills, which are, so to speak, taught and acquired in a participatory way.¹⁹

participation in social power, wealth, prosperity, freedom and security" (Schnurr 2001, p. 1330). Participation is generally defined in a comprehensive sense "based on the Latin origin of the word as (active) participation and (passive as well as active) involvement on the one hand in the sphere of politics and on the other hand with reference mostly to the socio-economic parameters of living conditions. If this definition is related to the social status of the child, it is necessary to take into account some of the defining features associated with this status" Oswald & Grillitsch (2015).

¹⁴ cf. Moser (2010), p. 71.

¹⁵ cf. Betz, Gaiser & Pluto (2011), p. 11.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Thiersch (1992). A condition for participation in the sense of self-determination and involvement is a transparent and equal share in different life situations. The societal participation of children and young people is heterogeneous and can be realised in different forms, see Thiersch & Grunwald (2015).

¹⁷ The critical edition of his comprehensive published works (Berlin und Zürich 1927 ff.) includes 28 volumes of works and 13 volumes of letters. See Liedtke (1991), Spranger (1959).

¹⁸ Pestalozzi, The complete works 25, p. 313.

¹⁹ In letter form, this includes guidance for mothers. According to Blankertz (1982), with the 'Method', "pedagogy discovered the development of the subjective forces which at the same time are of objective importance as the key to understanding the world" (p. 109). See also Osterwalder (1996).

The child can thus sense a link to the possibilities of the emotional world and the mind when in contact with the hand of an adult. However, a democratic understanding as well as a concept of freedom is needed for the person who holds out a hand to the child. Ways of acting which are not yet accessible to the child must also be at hand. Understood like this, the child begins to participate long before reaching maturity and at a later time can put into practice the possibilities that lie in this pedagogical interaction - ideally or in the successful case.

This is when maturity has been reached, for which early childhood education settings can provide the foundations. Being located in the community, there are many relevant possibilities. The German Dictionary of the Grimm Brothers, for example, traces the concept of community back to the Latin term *res publica*. This includes a broad spectrum of meanings, from the public sphere to the republican state system, which from the perspective of modern societies always includes opportunities for participation²⁰ and it is also possible to work *with* the child in the sense of Pestalozzi's regulatory ideas. According to Kant, such ideas are nothing else but a vision of perfection which has not yet been experienced.

At the core of Pestalozzi's pedagogy is a mother-like, personal form of upbringing. References to Comenius or Rousseau – to name just two prominent classical writers – place his complete works as a significant contribution towards *an education for all*, and are at the same time effective for shaping the German 'people's school' (*Volksschule*) and for social pedagogy in Europe and worldwide²¹ – particularly in the transfer of his ideas to forms of upbringing, education and care outside the regular school. Of significance here is the idea of a *child-appropriate form of learning* which Pestalozzi himself could hardly have experienced in his own biography, but which he elaborated both theoretically and methodically.

Similar to the contemporary debate on 'participation', there are further parallels to Pestalozzi which, among others, can be linked to the *pedagogy of hope*²² inspired by Rousseau: in those times as today there was a lack of financial and professional resources as well as pedagogically inspired approaches. Above all, however, a pedagogical approach which follows Pestalozzi's *principle of learning through experience* in order to do justice to *all* the child's needs, is still not sufficiently established today.

Even if many of the ideas which build the way for today's democratisation are already present towards the end of the 18th century, it is Pestalozzi who, with his 'sense of a dream' awakens new ideas to life. The fact that he practises this in his educational establishments against the ossified democracy of his times, and also publishes, has made him a classic. His ideas develop into didactical approaches which are evident in his own and in today's (institutional) pedagogical practices. He developed his elementary Method in his *Letter from Stans* (1799). The institute in Yverdon is regarded as a model for the public primary school, illustrated in his *Swan Song* (1826): 'Moral elementary education' is another example of his pedagogical approach in the nurturing of a moral state of mind through "pure feelings", "moral practices through self-discipline" and "effort and the effect of a moral insight through reflection and comparison".²³

²⁰ cf. Oswald & Grillitsch (2015).

²¹ cf. Liedtke (1991).

²² cf. Böhm (2004), p. 771.

²³ Pestalozzi, The complete works 13, p. 19; see Bittner (1997), p.128 f., who focuses on pedagogy in the late phase of Pestalozzi's life with particular reference to his stay in Stans.

These ideas of Pestalozzi's, which we can draw on today when developing the relationship between democracy and education and thus enable participation, can be traced back to the ancient philosophical traditions which influenced Pestalozzi. These (but not only these) have become pivotal for the development of progressive education. However, democratic educational models in this tradition²⁴ relentlessly encounter a basic paradox which Pestalozzi himself had to endure during the painful experience of practising his pedagogy.²⁵ This is still encountered today by every participatory model that aims at voluntary and active participation, involvement, active contribution and co-determination of children in decision-making, planning or joint activities. Like Pestalozzi himself, these models are inevitably confronted with the paradox that Kant summarised in this way: "How do I cultivate freedom in the face of compulsion?"²⁶

Both yesterday and today, this paradox of freedom and compulsion in practising pedagogy gives rise to a need for orientation – as was the case for Pestalozzi himself.²⁷ For a very long time this was a source of personal anguish for him, but it also generated the dynamics of his argumentation, from which a fascinating tension arose between freedom and compulsion, autonomy and heteronomy, aspiration and reality. Pestalozzi succeeds – in contrast to Rousseau – in creatively shaping discrepancies like those between aspiration and reality, although in principle the paradox itself cannot be resolved. On the contrary, what is needed is a reflective attitude towards this dilemma and further paradoxes in order to deal with them professionally and to develop creative models for experienced and lived practices.

Pestalozzi demonstrates how this can be done in his *Inquiries into the Course of Nature in the Development of Humankind* (1797), his main theoretical treatise on pedagogy. By way of an introduction he writes that his inquiries are based on "simple conclusions drawn from my own experiences in life." This reflecting on one's own life²⁸ which Pestalozzi refers to, provides a framework for developing participatory approaches in early childhood education. Children need to take part in experiences that they have not yet made themselves and whose meaning they cannot yet explore. At the same time, these need to be exemplified 'in advance' in order to be able to take effect later on.

The child then fills in meanings, as it were, in retrospect, by linking his or her own experiences to what was transmitted early on. Telling stories that tie up with the stories 'told' by children (in their early forms of expression such as drawings, symbols, signs, words) and allowing them to tell and 'retell' – this is a methodological option. Even if the child's forms of expression, as mentioned above, are sad or fragile in their biographical contexts - like those of Pestalozzi himself –, 'participation' can be created in the sense of his 'moral early

²⁴ cf. Weyers (2014).

²⁵ cf. Böhm (2004), p. 771 ff.

²⁶ "One of the greatest problems in education is how to combine submission to legal compulsion with the ability to use one's freedom. For compulsion is a necessity. How do I cultivate freedom in the face of compulsion?" Kant (1803/1963), p. 20.

²⁷ cf. Soëtar (1981).

²⁸ cf. Bittner (1997), who structures Pestalozzi's life into three parts, as in the *Swan Song*:

1. "The childhood and adolescent years with their high ideals and their 'sense of a dream';
2. The male adult years with their melancholy and feeling of failure. It was precisely during this phase of resignation that Pestalozzi's most important work was written, the *Inquiries*;
3. Finally, beginning around the time of the *Letter from Stans*, the late phase in terms of his pedagogical thinking, linked with overcoming his melancholy." Bittner (1997), p. 117.

childhood education' "through pure feelings, moral exercises through overcoming oneself and effort ... and finally ... bringing about a moral insight through thinking about and comparing"²⁹ the child's forms of expression and their place in the early childhood education community. In this way, the child can gradually develop his or her own history of social appropriation.

Narratives in which we are involved are retold from generation to generation and can be found in almost every biography. In this sense, Pestalozzi's basic pedagogical approaches can also be understood in the light of his biography.

"My father died when I was very young, and from the age of six I was missing everything in my surroundings that a young male of that age so desperately needs for his development.. On the other hand, I lived from morning to night in surroundings that somehow stimulated and appealed to my heart. My mother sacrificed herself with complete devotion."³⁰

As in every biography, that of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in particular is about identity problems – but also about opportunities to develop new perspectives. Reflecting on education for democracy through participation therefore always involves the biography of the educator and the biography of the person to be educated – participatory in the intergenerational relationship, and depending on the adults' own concepts of freedom and democracy and how they are able to present these to the children.

Pestalozzi addresses the problem through the idea of the 'naturally good child' – which in turn can be seen as a model for today's participatory approaches. Linked to this is the opening up of promising methodological possibilities, and today we are faced with developing these further. The underpinning construct or regulative idea is certainly significant in working *with* the child in order to approach the goal of supporting the child's autonomy step by step.

The way in which Pestalozzi develops his pedagogical ideas, namely from an *autobiographical* and *narrative* perspective, can also be illustrated in the enactment of participatory models in contemporary early childhood education. In other words, their possibilities – particularly in the specific enactment of participation in early education in Germany, Switzerland and Europe – can be used creatively to update Pestalozzi's Method.

Thus, both of Pestalozzi's perspectives, the *autobiographical* and the *narrative*, can enhance pedagogical approaches in early education: the *autobiographical* as the authentic storytelling of historical connections with a firm place in the pedagogy of early education institutions, and the *narration* of (social) experiences with democracy through the staff and other contemporary witnesses as well as through literary and aesthetic forms of expression such as music, dance and theatre. This allows children to participate in (narrated) history - in a latent way that they still do not fully understand. The child is accepted as a potentially autonomous subject, and not as an immature object to be cared for in the institutions of modern childhood. In this way the child learns without tricks or the "shadow of an intrusive order"³¹, as the young Pestalozzi originally formulated it when developing his Method.

²⁹ Pestalozzi, The complete works 13, p. 19.

³⁰ Pestalozzi, The complete works 28, p. 212.

³¹ Pestalozzi, The complete works 1, (1927 f.), p. 267.

The goal here is to gain introductory insights into democratic ways of living through participation. This is similar to Pestalozzi's idea of practising what nature teaches "in the free auditorium of nature in its wholeness."³² Pestalozzi later revises this originally natural Method – in the context of the children's changing living conditions and through his insight into the necessity of making nature comprehensible for the child – into a constantly improved process, including nature-related school lessons.³³

Finally, systematising and developing Pestalozzi's Method challenges us to proceed in an innovative way. He explains that the Method has been developed between his "I explore" and "I understand". Thus, tendencies to practise schematic and prescribed models of participation, which would only describe what is expected, can be avoided.

The regulative ideas or principles outlined here which characterise Pestalozzi's pedagogy enable us to reconcile contradictions³⁴ and to tolerate paradoxes more easily.³⁵ Thus it becomes clear that, above all, education creates the foundations for making possible what is politically desirable. This does not mean simply adapting to the given circumstances, but rather empowering children to participate in shaping the reform of democratic structures.

Inspirational contribution towards participatory approaches in the system of (early) childhood education and care – an appraisal

"From 1800 onwards, the story of Pestalozzi's life is the story of his educational establishments"
(Lietke 1983, p. 137)

Pestalozzi's pedagogy provides inspirational ideas for participatory approaches in the system of (early) childhood education and care – in particular through reflecting on his experiences in his educational establishments (Burgdorf, Münchenbuchsee, Yverdon, Stans).³⁶ Both then and now, there is a struggle to find a basic methodological approach towards education through which the child comes to her or his 'moralisation' and personal maturity as a unity (naturally, socially, morally). The communication of nature, society and personal decision-making necessary for moral education requires reflecting on the possibilities of participation in contemporary democracies. A democratic culture - as already clearly expressed in the

³² Pestalozzi, The complete works 1, (1927 f.), p. 124.

³³ Pestalozzi, The complete works 12, p. 8; cf. Lietke (1991). In contrast to the situation described by the authors as the 'educational madness' of early education, when educators in early childhood institutions become the compliant implementers of school and parental demands, Nuremberg/Schmidt highlight the concept of 'legitimate peripheral learning' (cf. Lave/Wenger 1991) together with the dimensions of a holistic upbringing and education for *all* children, through which children are prepared for legitimate new spaces of learning and experience, not just in school (2018, p. 674 ff.)

³⁴ In his theory of education, U. Oevermann develops the additional concept of 'contradictory unity'. A good illustration of this is to imagine cats as models, as U. Oevermann shows: "Cats are by nature creatures incorporating polar opposites, contradictory unities. They can change from one extreme to the other." (1997), p. 12.

³⁵ Paradoxes are irresolvable contradictions which professionals encounter in institutions. F. Schütze in particular pointed this out in his theory of profession (see e.g. 1996). Anyone who claims to act professionally needs to be clear about the structure and effects of paradoxes of action and to reflect on them critically (e.g. in the form of supervision or collegial counselling).

³⁶ cf. Pestalozzi (1799): On the time in Stans. Pestalozzi's letter to a friend, in Collected Works 13, p. 1-32; cf. Bittner 1997, p. 130.

rights of children - can thus be lived in the institutions of early education and developed further from this wealth of ideas.

However, an appraisal of contemporary forms of education for democracy firmly including participation suggests a need for *clarification about participation* in its pedagogical enactment. It is necessary to support the demand for increased efforts to promote the societal participation of children and young people through educational opportunities, approaches and consequences: stakeholders in early childhood settings need to be aware that 'education for democracy' incorporates a paradox. "According to the generally accepted view, democracy is a form of government that presupposes political equality and autonomy; education as pedagogical interaction, on the other hand, presupposes inequality and the absence of autonomy" – this is how the educationalist Stefan Weyers puts it.³⁷

Thus, in principle, upbringing, education and care cannot be democratic and participatory, but rather has the task of producing, exemplifying and practising democracy through participation as well as simulating and living through the crises that accompany democracy. Only *with* the child can her or his limited form of participation within the pedagogical relationship be overcome in the long term. An appropriate broadening of development, by supporting both the gradual development of moral judgment³⁸ and the shaping of morality, ensures participation as a competency for maturity. To this end, Pestalozzi has provided us with regulative ideas, methods and experiences.

Based on the findings of a project and on similar, contemporary experiences in educational settings,³⁹ the following key points can be summarised for the planning of participatory models:

- Time resources and varying institutional frameworks pose a challenge for participation; both in the rationale and in the institutional practice of early education, there are few pedagogical models that can be shaped in Pestalozzi's sense.
- Being involved in content and cooperating in a partnership-based way are success factors. These can only be achieved if the idea of participation can be promoted with the help of pedagogical materials and approaches.
- Raising awareness for children's rights is a key task. Here it is important to sensitise and train the group educators and entire staff in early education settings.
- Professional development courses on the ideas of classical scholars such as Pestalozzi or Froebel are needed in order to constantly revive the approaches and to recall and cultivate them in the form of the *regulative ideas* mentioned above.
- Research-based qualification and professionalisation in the sense of the higher professions is needed to guide, accompany and evaluate the careers of professions responsible for the process of development, upbringing and education.⁴⁰ The overall aim is to create a professional habitus.⁴¹

³⁷ Weyers (2014), p. 259.

³⁸ See, e.g. the discussion on comparing moral and political education in Oser/Biedermann (2014), following L. Kohlberg, and the discussion of progressive pedagogy approaches in Weyers (2014).

³⁹ cf. Oswald/Grillitsch (2015), Sparkling Science (2015), also Ackermann (2017).

⁴⁰ cf. Nürnberg/Schmidt (2018), also Oevermann's professionalisation theories (e.g. 1996) and Schütze (e.g. 1996), who specifically focus on the tasks of upbringing and education.

⁴¹ For the professional habitus needed for the higher professions, see Oevermann's theory of the professions (2002); for an illustration of the phenomenon of professional habitus in the kindergarten, cf. Ruppin (2008).

It is no doubt clear that Pestalozzi's thinking and the cultural traditions in which he is contextualised cannot be transferred seamlessly to the present day. What is currently referred to as 'participation' has therefore been examined for similarities and illustrated by examples from Pestalozzi's pedagogical landscape of ideas. Thus, inspirations for participatory approaches in the system of (early) childhood education and care are made visible in order to generate and facilitate *morality* (and thus participation) in early education, not least through 'reflecting and comparing'.

To remind ourselves of this through Pestalozzi helps to ensure a high level of quality in early childhood settings, supported by staff with a qualified initial and continuing professional development. Especially in view of the struggle for a good education from the start in an everyday, lived democracy, recalling Pestalozzi's ideas – understood as regulative ideas that have not yet been fully realised – is imperative. Cultivating the three states in human beings, the *natural*, the *social* and the *moral*, this is what it is all about, with the help of Pestalozzi's views on education – as a product of nature, society and the person. From the pedagogical perspective of 'inclusion', it is important on this basis to explore, accumulate and enhance *constellations of the pedagogical* in the system of (early) childhood education and care in a justifiable way.

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Professional habitus is part of a person's overall habitus. Habitus determines a person's actions, is acquired during the life course and complemented in higher education through specialist and case study knowledge which is transmitted within the profession in the form of a craft. This craft makes it possible to practise a profession independently.

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