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Directive adult education by political actors: Orientation expectations towards adults in Germany

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Abstract

This paper presents for discussion two empirically grounded theses. First, political actors educate adults, and second, in doing so, they use directive forms of education; that is, they expect adult members of society to adopt certain orientations. Following a theoretical discussion on the directive education concept and its relevance to public pedagogy, the methodology (discourse analysis and documentary method) is explained. Then, three approaches to directive adult education demonstrated by political actors are empirically analysed: (1) directive political education is employed by political party leaders when, in the face of a potential U-turn of their party, they try to change the core political convictions of party supporters; (2) newcomers to society are directively educated to adopt democratic role orientations; and (3) in social fields in which practices are standardised by laws but cannot sufficiently be controlled, directive education for the common good can be observed. These types of directive education used by political actors are discussed vis-à-vis the concepts of paternalism and pedagogization.

Keywords: directive adult education, democracy, discourse analysis, paternalism, pedagogization

Introduction

The notion that adult education centres around facilitating self-directed learning processes of (supposedly) autonomous adults has faced criticism from various strands of adult education research. Drawing from a Foucauldian perspective, several analyses revealed the power-driven subconscious processes of subject formation that occur within adult education, often unnoticed by both the participants and the educators themselves (see, for instance, Fejes & Nicoll, 2008). Conversely, other scholars argue that, if necessary, it is the responsibility of adult educators to guide adults beyond their own intentions,

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particularly when these adults are still acquiring the capacity to 'think like an adult' (Mezirow, 2000). With reference to critical adult education, which urges adults to question their previous (problematic) views, Brookfield (2009, p. 218) alludes to 'the inevitably directive nature of education.' The paternalism inherent in such processes of adult education is considered legitimate as long as educators act in the best interests of their participants (Fuhr, 2013, p. 31).

This article aligns with the criticism that adult education should not be reduced to facilitating self-directed learning processes of (supposedly) autonomous adults. However, the focus of the article differs in two key respects from this criticism. Firstly, it examines processes wherein adults, over a sustained period and reinforced by (threatened) sanctions, are communicatively and overtly expected to adopt specific orientations put forward by others, devoid of taking any individual interests in learning into account. Secondly, such kind of a directive adult education is not carried out by adult educators but, as particular focus of this article, by political actors who do not seem to grant adult members of the society the autonomy to decide how they wish to orient themselves but, rather, seek to prescribe these orientations.

A notable instance of such a directive adult education by political leaders can be found in the speech delivered by Germany's then chancellor, Angela Merkel, in the Bundestag (the federal parliament of Germany) in the autumn of 2020, which coincided with the onset of the second wave of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic. In her address, Merkel spoke not only to parliamentarians but to all citizens:

> I appeal to all of you: adhere to the rules that must also apply in the coming period. Let us, as citizens of this society, collectively take greater care of each other. Let's remind one another that maintaining our distance, wearing nose-mouth protection, regularly washing our hands, ventilating rooms, and using the Corona warning app, safeguards not only the elderly and not only the so-called at-risk individuals but our open, free society as a whole. (as cited in Deutscher Bundestag, 2020, p. 22527; translated by the author).

In the Bundestag, laws and regulations typically become the centre of contentious debate among Parliament members. The chancellor's appeal to the entire spectrum of society to comply with these regulations was extraordinary but deemed necessary from her standpoint. 'After all', as Merkel emphasised, 'all rules, regulations, and measures are of little or no use if they are not accepted and adhered to by the people'.

With these final words, she articulated a problem that is encountered not only during existential crises, such as a pandemic, but constantly: all states, particularly democratic ones, rely on the responsive conduct of their population, yet, lack the capacity to entirely enforce such conduct through legislation. When political actors in democracies find that instilling a certain willingness to act has become necessary, they may resort to communicatively expecting adult citizens to adopt certain orientations. While political actors usually seek, through persuasive communication or even demagogy, to generate support for specific political decisions (for example, for the government's pandemic legislation), in processes of directive adult education, they prefer to strongly suggest a way of acting that people should incorporate into their routine lives as habit (such as wearing a mask). Although these political actors may not perceive their actions to constitute the educating of adults, they rely on an eminently pedagogical practice to communicate their messages.

The empirical findings presented in this article illustrate the way the state and other political actors communicatively expect adult members of the society to adopt certain orientations and, thus, the way those actors seek to educate adults in a directive way. Through these findings, two neglected aspects of adult education are put into the

limelight: 1) political leaders may participate in educating adult members of society, and 2) they may do so by expectantly guiding adults towards specific orientations, but without taking necessarily their individual needs into account. The first aspect has been only briefly touched upon in discussions on 'public pedagogies'; the latter is often counterintuitive, as only children and adolescents are generally assumed to be educated in a directive manner. By contrast, adults are commonly perceived to acquire orientations on their own, given their presumedly developed level of self-responsibility and maturity.

To elaborate on these two claims, I first explain my understanding of directive education. I then discuss the concept of public pedagogy, which aids in analysing directive educational processes for adults that unfold tacitly and are not part of a formal education system. After introducing the methodological background of my research, I delve into three forms of directive education employed by political actors that I empirically analysed.[1] Firstly, directive *political* education becomes relevant when, in the course of a potential U-turn by a political party, its leaders attempt to change the core political convictions of party supporters. The second form of directive education I investigate is directive *democracy* education, which does not revolve around specific political world views but, instead, concerns attitudes towards democracy itself. For example, individuals perceived as newcomers to society, such as adolescents and adult immigrants, undergo educational means of directive democracy education. The third form of directive education employed by political actors that I examine is directive education for the *common good*. Certain areas in society are regulated by laws that are, however, unable to sufficiently control people's behaviour. In cases related to, for example, waste separation, unemployment or the fight against pandemics, forms of directive education for the common good can be observed.

Although the empirical examples I use to substantiate my theses are drawn from the German context, they are in my view relevant to adult education in other democracies as well. This applies especially to the two theoretical aspects through which I discuss my empirical findings: Directive adult education implies an asymmetrical relationship between political actors and the populace, which can be problematised as *paternalism*. Simultaneously, whether the (usually tacit) employment of pedagogical means by political actors results in an illegitimate *pedagogization* of political problems, should be considered as well.

The expectant and encouraging nature of directive education

On a conceptual level and within the framework of an ideal-typical procedure, the concept of directive education gets clearer by juxtaposing it with non-directive education: in German, by comparing *Erziehung* to *Bildung*. Non-directive education necessarily includes 'autonomous opinion formation' (Kloubert, 2018, p. 140) for which, for example, 'methods for evaluating the truth and falsehood, or relative probability, of various claims about the world' are taught, and adult learners are exposed to divergent life projects and world views together with their respective critique (Brighouse, 1998, p. 736). An important feature of non-directive education is the space given to controversies: that is, the space allowed for discourse on divergent world views pertaining to the topic under discussion. This 'multiperspectivity' (Sander, 2004, p. 9) can sometimes even help people to question their own 'meaning perspectives' and – in the sense of a transformation process – open new perspectives (Mezirow, 1978). Even without leading to transformation, non-directive education has similarities with Bildung (Kloubert, 2018).
Implied here is the role of the adult educator as a 'non-directive facilitator working to realise learners' agendas' (Brookfield, 2004, p. 380). This can be contrasted with the

'directive role of adult educators' (p. 383), which can turn adult citizens into opponents of the prevailing political order but can also be used to organise adult education as a process through which 'newcomers' become part [of] and are inserted into the existing social and political order' (Biesta, 2011, p. 149). The latter option verges on 'overwhelming students [including adult learners; A.-M.N.] with pre-determined positions and beliefs' (Kloubert, 2018, p. 142) and may be called *Erziehung*.

I define directive education as the process by which a first actor communicates, in a sustained manner and underpinned by (threatened) sanctions, the expectation to (a) second actor(s) that the latter will adopt certain orientations provided by the first actor. Here, the notion of orientation (Bohnsack, 2014) does not refer to a conscious opinion but to a way of seeing the world (in the sense of Weltanschauung [world view]; Mannheim, 1952) and to a modus operandi in the world that has become habitual.

Such directive education begins when adults obviously fail to inherently acquire an orientation that is provided to them and expected of them to adopt. Initially, they might experience this newly expected orientation as significantly diverging from their current interests and sensitivities and this might cause their restraint. At the same time, directive education implies that the educator is convinced that the recipients of the education are, in principle, capable of adopting the orientation expected of them. In this sense, educating others means strongly encouraging them to adopt a new orientation. (This entanglement of sustained expectation and encouragement is also evident in Merkel's speech quoted previously.) The communicated expectation that the recipient of the education shall adopt a specific orientation becomes sustainable when the outcomes of previous attempts to educate the person are verified through communication; in other words, when someone pays attention to whether the expected orientation has been appropriated by the recipient. This expectation is, moreover, underpinned by the threat of negative sanctions, or, the promise of positive sanctions (see Nohl, 2022b). Such sanctions refer to any form of reaction to, or consequences from, the actions of the person to be educated that benefits (reward) or harms (punishment) the latter, either materially or emotionally.

The debate surrounding the question whether the conceptual distinction between non-directive and directive education, albeit ideal-typical, is mirrored in the empirical practices of adult education facilities, has recently sparked contentious discussions (see, as an overview, Holzer, 2024). Yet, the central emphasis of this article is not pointed to the issue of directive education within adult education institutions, albeit not entirely excluding it. Instead, the focus is directed towards directive adult education as implicitly enacted within public media and by political actors. Considering this, directive adult education can be understood as 'mass education' (Prange & Strobel-Eisele, 2015, p. 203; translated by the author), representing an issue of public pedagogy.

Directive education in the context of public pedagogy

The concept of 'public pedagogy' is broadly defined here as referring to all educational actions taking place outside educational institutions that, tacitly or explicitly, try to shape the attitudes and orientations of citizens in some way. Henry Giroux (2004, pp. 74-75), for instance, argued that, in the age of neoliberalism, 'new sites of public pedagogy' … 'operate within a wide variety of social institutions and formats including sports and entertainment media, cable television networks, [and] churches and [within] channels of elite and popular culture, such as advertising'. Giroux explained that these sites aimed to 'produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain'. In contrast to these rather amorphous sites of public pedagogy, Giroux also noted that specific political actors exist – like the US-American Bush administration

after 9/11 – that succeeded in convincing citizens of their political agenda using educational means such as the transfer of (biased or even false) knowledge (Giroux, 2004, p. 76). Although the notion of 'public pedagogy' is also associated with other definitions (for an overview, see Sandlin et al., 2011), Giroux's work, as well as my analyses, focus on what Sandlin et al. (2011) called 'public policy as pedagogy' – in other words, inquiries into the way 'broadly communicated governmental, legal, and medical discourse and policymaking act as pedagogical outlets for the construction of specific public and private identities' (p. 352).

My analyses concern what Savage (2014, p. 81) called 'political publics'. My focus lies in the explicit orientation expectations that I discuss in this article as directive adult education. In this sense, the three forms of educating political publics in a directive way investigated in this paper are pedagogical activities intended to 'instruct the citizenry', which 'involves telling them what to think, how to act, and, perhaps most importantly, what to be' (Biesta, 2014, p. 21). They appear 'whenever the state instructs its citizens to be something – for example, law-abiding, tolerant, respectful, or active – which the state either does directly or through its educational agents' (p. 21). Such 'educative state action' (Lüdemann, 2004, p. 99; translated by the author) responds to the fact 'that the state and the law are dependent in many ways on accommodating citizens' convictions and ways of life' (Huster, 2014, p. 193; translated by the author). As I discuss subsequently, political actors other than the state – particularly party leaders – may also engage in such directive adult education. Using a very broad definition, I refer to political actors as individuals and organisations involved in bringing about and implementing collectively binding decisions. Within this broad definition, the political actors that are the subject of this article are characterised by their common integration into the state apparatus.

Within the context of public pedagogies, a fine line must be drawn between indoctrination and the educative expectation to adopt certain orientations. Whereas the former tries to eliminate the decision-making ability of the targeted group (Copp, 2016, pp. 150-155), expecting adults to adopt political orientations and values in the frame of directive education still considers and allows for possible disagreement from the adults receiving the education. More precisely, directive education produces (sustainable) effects only if the adults addressed take over the expected orientations within a certain space of autonomy.

The possibility of refusing the expected orientations delimits directive adult education not only from indoctrination but also from propaganda. Although propaganda shares the threat of sanctions with directive education, it 'thwarts our autonomy and agency' (Kloubert, 2018, p. 143). In contrast, directive adult education is always situated in the 'latent conflict' between the individual's autonomous decision-making process and the norms of collective entities (Grube, 2015, p. 180).

Discourse analysis and documentary method

As a pedagogical process that involves both the educating and educated persons, directive education should be empirically analysed by covering both types of actors and, possibly, interactions between them. However, my analyses are limited to the way political actors, within the framework of mass communication, direct the expectation that the population or specific social groups adopt certain orientations to that target audience. To empirically reconstruct this mass communication, I used a version of discourse analysis that was developed in line with the structure of the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2014). While other approaches to discourse analysis reconstruct dominant or society-wide discourses from the outset, documentary discourse interpretation (Nohl, 2016) not only considers the

diversity of discourses but also examines the way multiple social groups struggle ‘to influence … the ‘public interpretation of reality’’ (Mannheim, 2000, p. 196). This is less about the ‘contents of thought’ – that is, the thematic content of the discourses – and more about the ‘way of thinking’ (Mannheim, 1999, p. 67) – that is, the modus operandi for raising a discussion point like the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach makes evident whether political actors are merely seeking approval for a collectively binding decision or expecting their audience to adopt certain orientations, or ways of action to be habituated.

To consider the difference between the content and the underlying mode of thinking, contributions to the respective discourse were first analysed by a *formulating interpretation* that summarised the content in the researcher’s own words and then through a *reflective interpretation*. The latter focused on the ‘perspective’ that ‘signifies the manner in which one views an object, what one perceives in it, and how one construes it in his [or her] thinking’ (Mannheim, 1954, p. 244). The reconstruction of the discourse contributions was intended to elaborate on the way political actors expect their addressees to adopt specific orientations. The focus was not only on the way a topic (such as SARS-CoV-2) was discussed but, above all, on the way, i.e. the means and actions by which, the educational process was pushed forward.[2]

This inquiry was exploratory. Its purpose was not to provide a comprehensive overview of all manifestations of directive adult education by political actors or to determine the significance of directive adult education in the context of the political. Instead, based on the theoretical concept of directive education, the objective was to explore areas and contexts in which political actors educate citizens. The three areas in which political actors pursue directive adult education emerged gradually. In these areas, material was collected through a purposeful sampling: I only interpreted empirical data that served to analyse directive education. This empirical material included speeches by politicians, websites, brochures, open letters and textbooks for adults. For this article, I selected succinct examples to represent each of these areas, which I illustrate with brief insights into the empirical material (this empirical data is translated into English by myself). Of course, the entire discourse analysis is based on a more comprehensive empirical basis (see Nohl, 2022a).

Even if the three areas I discuss next do not encompass all forms of directive adult education employed by political actors, they are significant for the discussion on adult education because political education, democracy education and education for the common good each take place at the boundary between the political field and the field of education (including its informal components). This raises two important normative questions that are discussed following the empirical findings: (1) Is the paternalisation associated with adult directive education justified? (2) Are political problems possibly being inappropriately pedagogized in these three areas?

Directive political education during political party U-turns

Since the reunification of Germany, several political parties have gone through U-turns on questions that mattered greatly to their identity and that of their members and supporters. The *Party of Democratic Socialism* (which had evolved out of the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic and later merged with a Western counterpart into *The Left*) made peace with representative democracy and, to a certain degree, with the social market economy. Under the leadership of chancellor and party chairperson Gerhard Schröder, the *Social Democrat Party* massively reduced welfare programs in 2003. Faced with the situation of Syrian refugees who had become stuck in the Balkans, in 2015

chancellor Angela Merkel led the conservative *Christian Democratic Union* to rapidly change its policy from rejecting refugees to welcoming them. While the parameters of this article do not allow for elaboration on these U-turns and the ways party leaders expected new political orientations to be adopted by their members and followers (see Nohl, 2022a), the case of the Green party is discussed in depth.

The Greens,[3] founded by, among others, members of the peace movement, were prompted to question their pacifist stance when the Serbian army conquered the UN-protected zone in Srebrenica in the summer of 1995 and subsequently slaughtered thousands of Muslims. A directive political education process was initiated when the Green's informal leader (and later Foreign Secretary of Germany) Joschka Fischer (1995, para. 32), in the face of the atrocities that took place in Srebrenica, asked in an open letter: 'What is our response when we suddenly have to deal again with powers and political forces, indeed with people, who don't give a damn about international rules, human rights or even non-violence?'. With this open letter, published in the alternative newspaper *Tageszeitung*, Fischer initiated a 'politics of identity and orientation change' (Schwab-Trapp, 2002, p. 178; translated by the author) as the issue was not focused on a specific collectively binding decision but on fundamental orientations in the sense of a political Weltanschauung, or world view. According to Fischer, his party should go beyond merely questioning its previous pacifist stance. The only conclusion to be drawn from the massacre was that the UN 'must intervene militarily and protect people from mass murder and death marches'. By describing this as a 'bitter realisation', which was also new to him, Fischer not only styled himself as a reflective learner but also built a bridge for those party members who found this change of orientation difficult.

However, Fischer also knew how to garnish his expectation of orientation by announcing positive sanctions. He underpinned that facing up to the facts of war was a prerequisite for assuming responsibility for the federal government. Therefore, he promised the reward of increased power if the party members whom he tried to politically educate followed him. As this illustrates, educationally relevant sanctions do not have to be caused by educating actors themselves; they can also arise from the consequences resulting from the educated person's willingness or unwillingness to adopt the expected orientation.

Fischer was soon able to celebrate his first success. At the end of 1995, many members of the Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag voted to deploy German armed forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Schwab-Trapp, 2002, p. 147). However, Fischer was only able to ultimately succeed in employing directive education when the Red-Green federal government, which came into power in 1998, deployed fighter planes against Yugoslavia in 1999 to prevent it from attacking Kosovo. Opposition to this quickly formed within and outside the Green Party. Proponents and opponents met at a party conference on 13 May 1999. Before his speech, Fischer, who had been appointed as foreign secretary of the new government, was hit by a red paint bag thrown by an opponent of the war. Nevertheless, he stepped up to the podium and – protected by several police officers – gave an impressive speech. Fischer argued that it was not acceptable for the Green parliamentary group and government to pursue a realistic policy while the Green basis cultivated its 'peace policy conscience'.[4] He noted that they were no longer a 'protest party' and had to take 'responsibility':

> And that is not only the responsibility of the government, that is not only the responsibility of the Party Leadership and the Parliamentary Group, but it is the responsibility of the whole party, of all of us, to have the strength now, in this contradiction in which we find ourselves, namely that on the one hand we must stop Milosevic with military means, with a war, and at the same time to use all possibilities to achieve a peaceful solution for the return of the

> refugees and to achieve a permanent silencing of the weapons. (cf. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2010)

With these and other words, Fischer clarified that the Greens could only remain in government if the 'whole party' bore 'responsibility' for the war. Otherwise, the Green party would lose power, Fischer noted, threatening a negative sanction. As he also put his own reputation on the line by speaking at the May 1999 party conference and, thus, achieved 'legitimization through personalization' (Sarcinelli, 2010, p. 274; translated by the author), he gave decisive emphasis to the expected orientation to turn away from pacifism. The motion of the anti-war activists received significantly fewer votes at the party conference than Joschka Fischer's policy (Schwab-Trapp, 2002, p. 350). With this, the party consolidated the U-turn in its foreign policy, which was not to be reversed in the following years but, instead, was expanded after September 11, 2001, with the deployment of the German army in Afghanistan, decided under the second Red-Green government (2002-2005). The sustainability of this educational process shows that Fischer not only changed the minds of the delegates at the party conference but also permanently changed the political orientations of the once-pacifist Greens and their supporters.

Similar educational attempts to bring supporters along during a turnaround of their parties took place among The Left, the Social Democratic Party and the *Christian Democratic Union*. Directive political education, as it unfolded in these political party U-turns, targeted adult citizens' political Weltanschauung (Mannheim, 1952). The respective educational expectation refers to the way society is seen, what is perceived as political and what is assessed as suitable for and in need of a collectively binding decision. As demonstrated by the example of Joschka Fischer, party leaders threw all their prestige and entire symbolic capital into the balance to lead this political education of their followers to success.

Directive democracy education

In directive *political* education, orientations are expected to be adopted by adults that are highly relevant for their political Weltanschauung, including orientations on controversial issues such as asylum law, military operations or welfare state reform. In contrast, directive *democracy* education is concerned with the way such decisions are made in society and bind it as a collective; therefore, this education relates to the *mechanisms of representative democracy*. In directive democracy education, orientations are expected to be adopted that define the way individuals should perform their role as members of a democracy. Interestingly, directive *political* education can only be observed in the context of (informal) public pedagogies, while directive *democracy* education, despite being commissioned by political actors, takes place in (non-formal) pedagogical institutions.

In Germany, young people and adults acquire democratic role orientations usually within the frame of *non-directive* education for which, since the 1970s, a minimum consensus has emerged. Since then, non-directive civic education ('Politische Bildung') has followed three maxims. Firstly, political knowledge is taught considering all controversial views on the respective topic that are relevant in society. Secondly, teachers and adult educators must not impose a specific political stance on learners. On the contrary, they must, thirdly, enable them to develop their own political position (Wehling, 1977; see also, Kloubert, 2018, pp. 150-152). As Drerup (2021) observed:

> Classroom debates about controversial issues and the confrontation with a plurality of views that go along with it can … trigger individual self-reflection and collective

> democratic learning processes that enable students to broaden their personal and political perspectives and to learn to better understand and to tolerate other positions. (Drerup, 2021, p. 256)

In this way, *Bildung* can occur (Kloubert, 2018).

When non-directive political education works, when controversies are discussed and the addressees are empowered to form their own opinions, this process also has a *directive* educational effect. The process has this effect because only as far as the political Weltanschauung is concerned do pedagogical activities function according to the principles of the minimum consensus as noted previously and, therefore, constitute non-directive education. However, these maxims themselves educate, in a directive way, those participants who are not yet conditioned to endure controversy and to strive for their own political orientation. To endure controversy is part of the 'taboo zone that is excluded from the space that has been cleared for contradiction and conflict' (Grammes, 1998, pp. 244-245; translated by the author).

This phenomenon is notably evident in the orientation courses designed for adult immigrants. Within these programs, sanctions are employed as a means to encourage the embrace of democratic role orientations. Many new immigrants are obliged by the German authorities to participate in a 100-hour orientation course after completing language training. Anyone who does not participate is denied a permanent residence permit. However, those who successfully pass the final test fulfil one of the requirements for becoming a German citizen. It is in these orientation courses, in which over three million adult immigrants participated between 2004 and 2023 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023), that directive democracy education becomes most obvious. First, the state constructs these migrants 'as a threat and a disturbance, [as people] who have to be regulated and got under control' (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020, p. 313). The curriculum, which is set by a federal authority, includes knowledge about the history, culture and political structure of Germany. However, beyond this – and this is typical of directive adult education – the curriculum pursues 'affective learning goals' that 'aim at a positive evaluation and support of democracy and the basic rights in the Basic Law', as the state authority that supervises these courses expressed it (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2017, p. 8; translated by the author).

Directive democracy education is particularly evident in the textbooks associated with this course. In addition to many interesting facts that the course participants learn about Germany, they also find exercises that require them to discuss controversial topics. For example, one textbook asks students to discuss the housing shortage in Germany. The participants are supposed to form two parties, one collecting arguments in favour of building high-rise buildings instead of parks, and the other to develop counterarguments. Then the two parties are supposed to discuss the issue. Finally, the textbook asks course participants to 'agree in the end' (Butler et al., 2017, p. 45: translated by the author). Other textbooks provide similar exercises.

Including such an exercise in textbooks implies that the course participants are assumed to have a deficit in their ability to discuss controversies in an orderly manner and to subsequently arrive at an appropriate compromise. This assumption serves as the prerequisite for communicating to the participants the expectation that they adopt certain democratic role orientations. Insofar as these orientation courses for new immigrants contain such components of directive adult education, they 'only serve to support and reproduce the current system; they do not promote the development of independent and politically-active thinkers' (Kloubert, 2020, p. 131).

Directive education for the common good

In the orientation courses, immigrants are educated in democracy and are familiarised with the correct behaviour regarding gender and sexual orientations (cf. Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020, p. 313), the rules of domestic coexistence and waste separation practices. This constitutes a third form of directive education that, in general, is aimed at everyone, not just at adolescents and adult immigrants – examples of newcomers in society.

Directive education for the common good was found in those areas of society where politics has only limited access, where either no laws have been passed, or, laws exist but are not sufficient to ultimately define citizens' behaviour. Waste separation is an example. Although Germany has elaborate rules regarding citizens' waste separation practices, sometimes with severe sanctions for non-compliance, right down to municipal waste regulations, a major lack of control exists because the public order office cannot establish a guard at every waste bin. That is why waste management companies started directively educating the population in the 1990s.

For example, the municipal cleaning company of Berlin tried to cognitively convince its customers to recognise the value of waste separation by referring to climate protection. Besides, attaching 'cool' slogans to waste bins is seen to give waste separation an aura of goodness. Or, feedback strategies show citizens what has been achieved with waste separation. Moreover, as Lüdemann (2004, p. 77; translated by the author) showed, some waste companies also use 'pillorying strategies', through which red cards are stuck on incorrectly filled bins. Communication on the topic of waste separation provides what is probably the most successful example of directive education for the common good, as waste separation has become a widely incorporated routine in German society.

Building new readiness to act in everyday life is the central concern of directive education for the common good. However, what counts as the common good depends on the educators' perspective. Nowhere is this clearer than in directive labour education. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Max Weber noted that capitalism 'educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest' (2005, p. 20). Because 'economic survival' is now cushioned by the welfare state, the latter has become a 'veritable educational agency' and a 'training institution for social action', as Stephan Lessenich (2012, p. 57; translated by the author) put it. This is particularly evident in the German welfare state reform of 2003, initiated by the Social Democrat Party mentioned previously. Following the reform, unemployment benefits were no longer based on entitlement alone but also required the unemployed individual to actively seek work, with employment agencies lending weight to this stipulation. This applied even more strongly to the secondary unemployment benefit allotted after 12 or 18 months of unemployment. In this case, 'the principle of support is' – as the federal employment agency expressed it – 'on an equal footing with the principle of demand' (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2021, p. 16; translated by the author). Here, too, the expected orientation – to accept any job – is accompanied by clear threats of sanctions, above all, the withdrawal of money. Critics have pointed out that these laws push people towards 'market-oriented self-education' and, thus, towards a 'practice of everyday subjectively doing capitalism' even before they are directly educated by employment agencies because everybody aims to avoid unemployment with its degradation and control in the first place (Lessenich, 2012, p. 61; translated by the author).

Discussion

Whether it is a case of political education, education for democracy or education for the common good, an asymmetrical relation is established between the educators (the state, political leaders and other political actors) and those who are to be educated. The communicated *expectation* that specific orientations need to be adopted reflects that the educators attest to an (orientation) deficit on the part of those being educated; they construct them as 'persons in need' (Heinemann & Sarabi, 2020, p. 312). At the same time, the educators diagnose their counterparts' ability to act according to the expectation and to make the requested action (such as waste separation) a habit, while they also assume that those to be educated would not act in this way out of their own will. Implicit in this is the assumption of a gap in competence and legitimacy between educators and those to be educated. Furthermore, this asymmetry of the relationship makes it possible to underpin the expectation of orientations with sanctions.

Such an asymmetrical relationship can be criticised as constituting an expression of (benevolent) *paternalism*.[5] A paternalistic attitude is usually considered problematic but indispensable for pedagogical practices. Because children and adolescents are assumed to have limited autonomy and maturity, paternalism seems legitimate. Such a 'weak' system of paternalism comes into play when and where those to be educated cannot make rationally thought out, mature decisions (Feinberg, 1971; Giesinger, 2019).

However, adults must be assumed to have the ability to make their own decisions. If the adoption of certain orientations is expected from them, these attempts at directive education represent instances of 'strong' paternalism because the autonomy of these adults is temporarily and partially disregarded (Feinberg, 1971). While the autonomy of adults should be fostered rather than disregarded (Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2023), that does not mean that paternalism towards adults is always illegitimate. In any case, in adult education (Fuhr, 2013), but also in the state and society (Drerup, 2020, p. 248), paternalism is inherent in several processes. For example, adults are obliged by their employers to take part in further education courses. They are also prohibited by the state to consume illegal drugs. Therefore, for each specific situation, the critique of adult education's paternalism must be weighed against other values. To illustrate this one could ask whether strong paternalism during a pandemic response is justified because it can save lives?

Beyond questions of legitimisation, Kloubert (2018, p. 155) reminded adult educators that a connection exists between paternalism and learning resistance: 'To recognize the (adult) learner as an autonomous being means to give him or her full respect, to recognize his or her life experience and motives as well as his or her resistance, and to deal with it carefully'. Otherwise, 'learning resistance and avoidance reactions arise in adults when they have the impression that they are being taught or 're-educated'' (Siebert, 2009, p. 321; translated by the author).

Another point of criticism relates to whether the directive education of adults by political actors unduly 'educationalizes' (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008, p. 8) political problems. Usually, 'educationalization' or 'pedagogization' (Depaepe et al., 2008) means that political problems are delegated to the education system to be dealt with in schools or adult education institutions (see Depaepe et al., 2008). In the context of my research, however, pedagogization especially points to the transfer of pedagogical semantics and practices from the education system to politics (see Lüdemann, 2004; Klinge et al., 2024; Nohl, 2022a, 2022b) – a phenomenon that is also referred to in the discussion on public pedagogies.

In *directive political education*, the pedagogical diffuses into the political system. On the surface, this serves to generate approval for the U-turn of a party, for example, for the militarisation of foreign policy by the Greens. At the same time, however, such U-turns have enabled a course to be set for society as a whole, which could not simply have been pushed through using power. For in the Federal Republic of Germany, which is sometimes described as a 'consociational democracy' (Schmidt, 2008, p. 90), central socio-political decisions require a broad consensus, which could not have been achieved without those parties that had to make a U-turn. Such a broad social mainstream would probably not have been possible without pedagogical means, or stated another way, without directive education that affected adults' orientations and attitudes. However, such directive political education can also be experienced by adults as incapacitation.

Directive democracy education can be discussed with reference to a general problem of democracies: 'The liberal secularised state lives on preconditions that it cannot guarantee itself' (Böckenförde, 1976, p. 61; translated by the author). Most importantly, democratic attitudes cannot be enforced by law. Here, the state delegates the educational mandate to the education system, which, according to its own standards and logic, uses pedagogical means to encourage people newly arrived in society, whether they are young people or adult immigrants, to adopt a positive attitude towards representative democracy. As this is not about specific collective decisions but about the principle of consent to and participation in democratic decision-making processes, this pedagogization of politics seems legitimate, and it also shows the limits of the power of the political.

Directive education for the common good also works against these limits of political power. At the precise point where politics does not delegate education for the common good to the education system and, instead, resorts to pedagogization itself, a central problem of the political becomes virulent: while the political system is only capable of providing collectively binding decisions but cannot determine the impact of these decisions on other areas of society, political actors are often attributed a 'steering competence for the whole' – or they arrogate this to themselves (Nassehi, 2016, p. 34; translated by the author). This situation became glaringly obvious in the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic: politicians were expected to contain the pandemic, although this could only be done by the entire population. Under such circumstances, chancellor Angela Merkel decided to address the population directly (see also Klinge et al., 2024). In her Bundestag speech quoted in this article, the chancellor appealed to all people not only to abide by the coronavirus rules but also to admonish each other to observe them. This act of replacing politics with directive education not only marks the limits of politics but also underlines the high, albeit controversial, importance of directive adult education in democracies.

Conclusion

While empirical analyses are contingent upon being informed by fundamental theoretical concepts, such as the notion of directive education, it is imperative to maintain a strict delineation between the empirical analysis and the normative evaluation of the findings it yields. As elucidated in the preceding section, my empirical analyses can be linked to substantive normative discussions. Furthermore, concerning the empirical study, which hitherto remains purely exploratory and confined to Germany, there exist myriad opportunities for further empirical investigations. On the one hand, an investigation could be undertaken to ascertain whether similar forms of directive adult education can be identified in other countries. Potential cross-country variations could prompt inquiries into whether certain forms of directive adult education are specific to particular social

formations and political cultures. On the other hand, an inquiry could also examine whether additional actors, such as trade unions, city councils or large associations, are engaged in directive adult education alongside the political actors I singled out in my analysis. In this regard, the two theses of this paper – political actors educate adults, and in doing so, they communicatively and overtly expect them to adopt certain orientations – might contribute to stimulate debates in adult education.

Notes

1 Concerning the three forms of directive education for adults see in detail: Nohl (2022a).

2 As Randour et al. (2020, p. 439) made clear, there is a lack of empirical research on political discourses, as far as 'the circulation of frames both from a top-down (i.e. from the political elites down to civil society actors) and a bottom-up (i.e. from civil society actors to political elites) perspective' is concerned. The present inquiry serves to provide insights into educational aspects of the top-down perspective.

3 The official name is 'Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen', signalling the cooperation of the West German Green party with an ecologist and leftist opposition group of East Germany.

4 For my interpretation for this and the following quotes, I used an authorised transcript of Joschka Fischer's speech that can be found in the archives of the Green Party. The transcript deviates at times from the original speech (cf. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2010).

5 See also Heinemann and Sarabi's (2020) discussion on 'paternalistic benevolence'.

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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