

Children's Voice in "Nurseries of Democracy". Participation in Early Childhood Institutions

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1 Introduction

According to the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child all children have a right to participation. During recent decades this UN Convention has influenced professionals and policy-makers in Germany as well as in other countries, resulting in changes of documents regulating early childhood institutions. The German Child and Youth Services Act as well as school and educational curricula of the federal states explicitly refer to kindergartens as spaces for participation. The idea of early childhood institutions as "nurseries of democracy" (Hansen, Knauer, & Sturzenhecker, 2009) has gained both professional as well as political relevance. Thereby participation in kindergarten refers to children's possibilities to exercise influence on a range of topics from the rules that are applied in the nursery's course of a day, the daily program, the interior design of the facility, etc. The question which possibilities for participation children actually have in their everyday lives and how they perceive these possibilities is one which has not been sufficiently answered in the international discourse so far (for example Almqvist & Almqvist, 2015; Bae, 2010; Betz, 2016; Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011; Kangas, Venninen, & Ojala, 2016; Nentwig-Gesemann, Walther, & Thedinga, 2017; Quennerstedt, 2016; Wood, 2014). To cover this research gap on the basis of empirical data is the aim of the research project "Participation in Kindergarten" which is located at the Goethe-University of Frankfurt, Germany and funded by the local government of Frankfurt. The study is based on a standardized, tablet-based survey with 546 four and five-year olds to gain empirical insights on children's experiences with various aspects of participation in pre-school institutions. A theoretically and empirically differentiated concept of participation will be developed that encompasses aspects of physical self-determination, co-determination options, and complaint experience. Subsequently, the empirical findings on type and extent of these experiences in kindergarten are related to the democracy-theoretical inspired figures of early childhood institutions as "nurseries of democracy" and broader reflections on social inequalities in early childhood and will be discussed in their consequences for the democratization of pedagogical institutions.

2 Participation as Key Concept of Social Work

At least since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) children's participation und children's Voice constitute a central topic in research, practice and politics in many nation-states. "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" (UN-CRC 12, 1). Voice refers to the right to express their views freely, including an entitlement to have these views heard. In accordance with this internationally accepted convention, legal bases have been formulated in the nation-states to institutionalize the participation of children, especially in institutions of education and care. In Germany, for example, a new Child and

Youth Welfare Act came into force in 1991, through which participation has become a key concept in social work. As a new legal basis for child and youth welfare in Germany, it replaced the old Youth Welfare Law, which was still strongly based on a more conservative understanding of control and intervention (Schone & Struck, 2018). Since then, child and youth welfare services have been framed by a social benefits law to which young people and their families have a legal claim. There, the right to participate is judicially fixed to systematically incorporate the needs of the addressees, their goals and expectations. The Federal Government's 8th report on children and youth, which was published at that time, also explicitly names participation as the constitutive element of a youth welfare service that aims to make people experience themselves as subjects of their own lives (BMFJ, 1990, p. 88). In 2005, a National Action Plan of the Federal Government (BMFSFJ, 2006) was established, which formulated children's participation as an important field of action for a child-friendly Germany. In addition, since the Federal Child Protection Act came into force in 2012, all facilities providing day-care to children have had to ensure procedures for participation and the possibility of complaint in personal matters (Hansen & Knauer, 2016). Accordingly, participation is currently legally secured at various levels. Similar developments can be identified for other countries (Bae, 2009; Sturges, 2015).

At the same time, the core concepts underlying these international and national legal anchors in politics, pedagogical practice and research are determined very differently. Participation is confirmed in law at various levels, with priority being given to the fact that participation should take place. The way in which it should be realized, to what extent and with which methods, remains largely indeterminate. Regarding the heterogeneity of the services for children and youth and the addressees involved there, this openness to interpretation already proves to make sense in terms of age and abilities, for example. Participation thus proves to be multifaceted, but at the same time always in danger of becoming trivial. This dilemma is reflected not only in social work practice, but also in the professional and scientific discourse. What counts as participation and what it aims to achieve is also negotiated from different theoretical perspectives of different origin. On the one hand, there are considerable and barely compatible contrasts, and on the other hand, they sometimes have the potential to complement one another (Abeling, Bollweg, Flösser, Schmidt, & Wagner, 2003; Schnurr, 2018; Wagner, 2017). In the discourse on social work different perspectives can be distinguished coarsely: democratically inspired perspectives, which primarily relate to the configuration of decision-making processes as well as more childhood-theoretical perspectives in which the constitution of social relationships is focused. By referring to professional and organizational theoretical perspectives, the question of the formation of decision-making processes in asymmetrical constellations of social support comes into focus. In principle, the use of concrete services as well as the fundamental formation of services, their performance and organizational structures are seen as important in view of addressee's say, co-determination and self-determination options (Beresford & Croft, 2004; Flösser & Otto, 1998; Pluto, 2018). This understanding of participation takes into account that participation in social work is not only linked to emancipatory goals, but at the same time instrumentally used to legitimize further hierarchically-shaped decision-making processes. Accordingly, it is important to ask to what extent participation is granted only in those spheres where, from the point of view of professionals or institutions of social work, it seems useful for the process of their service production, or even where it can be conflictual (Wagner, 2017, p. 47).

The interlocking of say, co- and self-determination is also revealed in those systematic drafts that deliberately deal with the range of participation in daily kindergarten life. Rüdiger

Hansen and others (2015) name (1) topics that concern above all the individual child, (2) topics that concern issues of living together and (3) topics that have to do with complex planning and decisions about fundamental issues. Topics that primarily affect the individual child can be relevant in the sense of co-determination options (children and adults decide together) as well as in the sense of self-determination (children decide alone). Exemplary areas here are food, clothing and play. On the other hand, topics that concern the everyday lives of several children and complex topics explicitly refer to say and co-determination (for example interior design, excursions, rules) (Hansen et al., 2015, 70ff.).

Reviewing these perspectives, participation in institutions of the social and educational system as a whole can also be understood as a field of learning and practice in which children optimize their subjective and collective resources for the discovery, articulation and assertion of their interests (Betz, Gaiser, Pluto, & Roth, 2010; Pluto, 2018; Schnurr, 2018). To be able to represent their concerns, needs and interests in informal or formalized - and in particular in asymmetric - negotiation situations, individual resources and institutional structures are needed. It is widely accepted that there is an organizational and professional responsibility for children's participation while at the same time it cannot be assumed that children are able to participate without any preconditions. In the professionalization debate, this can be regarded as an essential point of reference for a participatory-democratically corrected understanding of profession (Dewe & Otto, 2002, p. 191). The perception of children to have a say within asymmetrical constellations of decision-making processes concerning everyday life in institutions of education and care can thus be given a central role in the analysis of child participation, combining insights of democratic theory, childhood theory, as well as professional and organizational reflections.

In his classic work on „Exit, Voice and Loyalty“ Albert O. Hirschman (1970) figured out that people have these three options in dealing with institutional requirements. Translated to the context of the kindergarten, Voice means the articulation of one's own interests and the attempt to influence or change the requirements and rules that are addressed to them as part of the use of the institutional offer. Loyalty means that children accept the implicit and explicit requirements and rules and try to adapt to them. Finally, Exit refers to the withdrawal from the arrangement, that means above all the non (more) use.

All in all, however, Hirschman proves that the articulation of one's own interests in institutional arrangements is ridden with prerequisites: in addition to the principle of being able to articulate one's own interests, Voice is closely linked to questions of the position of the speakers: in comparison to Exit, Hirschman (1970, p. 33) states, Voice is expensive and depends on the influence and the bargaining position. The extent of dependency and the degree of Loyalty are of particular relevance. Influence and bargaining position are weakened from the extent that people are dependent on the respective institutions or have no equivalent alternatives to the extent that a hierarchically structured generation relations already generates extensive economic, cultural and legal dependencies of children on adults. This also pre-structures the access to and appropriation of institutions of early childhood education. Such a generational positioning thus goes hand in hand with children who have an inferior bargaining position towards adults.

This may come as little surprise as it was precisely due to such insights into the unequal opportunities of children and adults that first brought the different demands for child participation onto the political and educational agenda. However, the view of the manifold forms of dependency which are effective in day-care is by no means proving obsolete. Rather,

the insights from Hirschman may just sharpen the perception once again. This is particularly true as in the tension between the connection of family work and employment work specific relationships of dependency on institutionalized services are also generated for the parents of the children themselves. Moreover, Hirschman points out that the influence and bargaining position of the users are strengthened to the extent that, firstly, they fundamentally agree with the institution and its possible achievements and, secondly, suppose that they can realize their interests. Thus, following Hirschman, one can refer to the significant fact that Loyalty does not only have meaning in the sense of perseverance as an attempt to adapt to the given circumstances and requirements. A basic agreement with the respective offer, its achievements and the principle belief in the realization of one's own interests proves in this perspective rather as a precondition of interest articulation. The more satisfied I am in a given institution basically the more I can articulate wishes for fine-tuning or influence them. Participation in the sense of influencing opportunities for fine-tuning seem more likely and promising than requests of children, which refer to fundamental issues.

To have something to say, to be heard, and to be able to exert influence turns out to be fundamental in the perspective of Albert O. Hirschman (1970) as the Exit option for children in kindergarten is primarily of a theoretical nature. Children cannot even temporarily leave the facility on their own, they are always dependent on adults. There may be good reasons for this likewise it refers once again to the power of institutionalized, generational dependencies that frame the questions of participation and Voice in kindergarten. Children are usually brought to the facility in the morning and picked up later in the day. They have to join in the meantime, hoping for professionals who will take care of and consider their ever-present needs and interests. Furthermore, they should also go there every day of the week without grumbling. Moving to another kindergarten is considered as an exception, not as a rule. Not using a kindergarten is virtually no option for most of the families in Germany with preschool children (anymore). Against this background, the empirical question of how children perceive influence within their everyday kindergarten life is of crucial importance.

3 Participation in Institutions of Early Childhood

Child day-care is quantitatively the largest offer of child and youth welfare services in Germany. Nationwide, children between three and six years old have the legal entitlement to access institutionalized childcare. In 2013, more than 3.3 million children in approximately 48,000 institutions were cared for by more than 444,000 educators (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014). At the kindergarten age (three years to school entry) the proportion of children enrolled in day-care is 93 percent. Children are cared for at these facilities for a different length of time each day; care can be taken in the morning, at noon or whole day, and more and more full-time places are being used. In West Germany, the attendance rate in the full-time offer is just under 40 percent, in East Germany over 70 percent (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014). In the group which do not use a nursery school place children with a migrant background are just as over-represented as children of parents who have a low level of education (Anders & Roßbach, 2013).

All in all, the empirical evidence base on what is happening in pre-school education and care facilities is currently very rudimentary both nationally and internationally (Anders & Roßbach, 2013; Bae, 2009; Braches-Chyrek, Röhner, Süner, & Hopf, 2014; Cloos & Richter, 2018; Theobald, Danby, & Ailwood, 2011). We still know almost nothing about how childhood is organized in day-care institutions. To consider children as actors in an institutional setting means, firstly, to conceive them as active actors in the sense of self-education and, secondly, to give them a variety of opportunities for participation (Cloos

& Richter, 2018, p. 818). However, this has not yet come into focus empirically in Germany. This applies in particular to the question of how an inclusive setting can be created that can meet the individual needs of the children and offers them comprehensive opportunities for realization. Child day-care has become established as a regular offer in family life in the kindergarten age, more and more children use these facilities in increasingly younger years for an increasingly longer duration of the day. At the same time, there is currently little or no reliable data available on everyday life in these institutions in general and on the opportunities for children to participate, the form and extent of their say, co-determination and self-determination in particular. Also on an international level we have only a few studies which mostly based on qualitative interviews. Other projects are based on the observation of everyday interactions in preschool institutions, using analysis of communicational aspects that predispose children's possibilities for participation (Bae, 2009). Additionally, we have some research which explores how children and their educators can be supported in exploring their experiences in participatory ways in early childhood settings (Theobald et al., 2011). There is furthermore a minimal discussion around practical suggestions of what participation looks like for children and their educators. The reason for this may lie in the difficulty that arises when doing research with young children (Neitzel & Connor, 2017; Sturges, 2015).

However, regarding the participation experience of children as a whole, the studies available so far are rather disillusioning: The perspectives of children, their interests, needs and desires are often ignored, even though children's everyday life is increasingly framed by institutionalized pedagogical settings (Braches-Chyrek, 2014). At the same time, these qualitative studies, such as the recent study by Iris Nentwig-Gesemann and colleagues, can show what constitutes a "good" day-care from a child's point of view: from the reconstructed perspective of children, their self-evident participation and self-determination have a very high value. Children value regulations that are understandable and factual, explained to and discussed with them. It is an important experience for them to be able to define their own boundaries, which are then also respected: not having to eat something, not having to sing a song, being able to choose the place to play is of utmost importance to them (Nentwig-Gesemann et al., 2017, p. 77).

4 Research Question, Survey Design, Sample and Operationalization

The empirical knowledge of participation experiences that children have in day-to-day nursery practice is currently extremely low. Studies that provide information on form and extent of participation experiences in this setting based on standardized surveys are not available at present, if at all, there are qualitative studies or data relating to individual facilities. Based on our data, we will now present results that make it possible to expand international childhood and participation research with appropriate analyses. The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which children report participation experience in day-to-day kindergarten and which areas they refer to. Where do children experience opportunities for participation, co-determination and self-determination in daily kindergarten? How does the extent of participation experience differ along these lines?

4.1 Conduct of the Survey and Description of the Sample

From September 2016 to February 2017 data collection took place in 66 pre-school institutions ("kindergartens") in Germany's fifth largest city Frankfurt/Main with an actual population of 736.000. The study is based on a standardized, tablet-based, face-to-face survey with 546 four and five-year old children. The aim is to gain empirical insights on experiences and participatory practices from the perspective of children in pre-school institutions via

statistical methods for the first time. The children's questionnaire contains a total of 35 questions. They ask for several aspects of participation in one's own kindergarten. The questions relate to various dimensions of participation such as physical self-determination, co-determination opportunities in kindergarten and experiences of complaints. In addition, questions were asked about the positive and negative caring behaviour of the educators, group climate, perceived self-efficacy as well as well-being in kindergarten. Age and gender of the children were also queried in the child-survey. The child-survey was complemented with a short paper-and-pencil survey of one parent. This allowed to determine context variables (especially socio-demographic information) which children of this age are often unable to give reliably (Klein & Landhäußer, 2017, 2018).

Comparable surveys on the participation are currently only available to a very limited extent. Questionnaires of relevant existing studies were reviewed and adapted in terms of language and subject matter, considering the age of the targeted group. Other individual questions and batteries have been specifically developed. Six questions were open questions. The closed questions are based on only three main categories: a positive consent, a middle category and a rejection - each with a different name. Often, however, the three categories are labelled as "yes", "sometimes like this; sometimes like that" and "no". To avoid the well-known tendency to say yes in combination with the tendency to choose the first answer option (especially at the end of the child attention span) we mostly started with the negative responses ("no" or "not so good"). For a systematic increase of the child attention we switched this order for single questions. The fourth, additional answer option was "do not know" or "no answer" to avoid having to answer singular questions. Because the visual memory (not only) of children is better than the linguistic one, a visualization of the response categories was chosen by means of coloured circles. As already mentioned, the interview was supported by a tablet. The kids could spontaneously pick up the answer categories themselves on the tablet. This should also serve to increase the attention span of the children. Finally, an additional picture book served to visualize the topic of each question. After the interview, further data was collected by the interviewers: first, it was recorded whether the questioned child was linguistically, cognitively and motivationally able or willing to complete the questionnaire entirely. Secondly, the concrete survey setting was documented.

Of the children surveyed, 46 percent were four years old at the time of the survey, and 54 percent were five years old. 89 percent of the children live in two-parent families. 45 percent of respondents have a so called migration background, defined by the country in which the child was born, and the spoken language at home. 72 percent of the surveyed parents have received highest school degree (Fachabitur or Abitur) (partner: 65%). 19 percent have a middle school degree (partner: 17%) and 10 percent have a lower or no degree (partner: 14%). 16 percent of the interviewed parents affirmed the receipt of state support. By factor analysis, these three variables were summarized into a new variable "social status". At 84 percent, more than four-fifths of the children visit the facility daily between 6 and 8 hours. 4 percent of children have special needs.

A clear majority of just under 90 percent of the interviewed children like to come to the kindergarten. Most of the respondents also like their educators and the children in kindergarten, whereas the educators are generally seen more positive than the other children. 72 percent of the interviewed children like the other kids, 87 percent like their educators in the kindergarten.

Regarding age, gender and family migration background, the Frankfurt Children's Survey 2016 can be considered as representative. In contrast, children from one-parent families and children from disadvantaged social backgrounds are underrepresented in the sample. In order to check to what extent the sample composition influences the empirical findings, a weighting for social status (redress variable: lowest school leaving qualification on the basis of the data of the Federal Statistical Office for the 20-50 age group) was tested. The impact on the weighted distributions was consistently low enough that the empirical analysis was based on the unweighted dataset.

4.2 Multidimensional Operationalization of Participation

Comparable surveys on the participation of kindergarten children are currently only available to a very limited extent. Questionnaires of relevant existing studies were reviewed and adapted in terms of language and subject matter, considering the age of the targeted group. We adapted individual questions and batteries from the World Vision Study (World Vision Deutschland e.V., 2013), the study by the Institute for Applied Family, Childhood and Youth Research at the University of Potsdam (Meier et al., 2011), the study of the education foundation 'element-i' (Betz, 2016) as well as preliminary studies of the Frankfurt Children's Bureau (Frankfurter Kinderbüro, 2012, Frankfurter Kinderbüro, 2014). Other individual questions and batteries have been specifically developed for the present study.

Participation in kindergarten was operationalized along three different dimensions. Firstly, different facets of opportunities for physical self-determination in kindergarten. Secondly, co-determination in different areas of day-to-day nursery life. Thirdly, it was asked if and to what extent the children already have complaint for something as a specific form of interest articulation and participation.

Table 1: Items measuring "participation experience in kindergarten"

Items to measure physical self-determination

Eating	When eating: Do you decide how much food you have on your plate?
	Do you have to empty your plate at kindergarten?
	Can you decide what kind of food you get in kindergarten?
Drinking	If you are thirsty in kindergarten: Can you just take something?
	Do you have to ask for it?
Accessibility	Do you come to the kindergarten yourself to all toys, books or crafts, if you want them?

Items to measure co-determination

Playing	Can you decide what to play in kindergarten?
	If you do not want to do something in kindergarten: Can you do something else?
Reading	When you read together in kindergarten: Can you decide which book to read to you together?
Outdoor Activities	Can you decide in the kindergarten where the excursion is going?
Room Design	Can you decide in the kindergarten what the rooms or the corridors look like?
Rules	Can you decide in the kindergarten which rules apply?

Experiences with complaints were covered by a single question: Have you ever complained about something in your kindergarten. Moreover, children were asked if there is a fixed time in their kindergarten where they can get together and have a say.

In a next step, these individual questions were analysed by means of principal component analysis to clear to what extent the items represent a common dimension.

Table 2: Dimensions, items, and factor loading

Dimension „Physical Self-Determination“	
If you are thirsty in kindergarten: Can you just take something?	0,677
Do you come to the kindergarten yourself to all toys, books or crafts, if you want them?	0,613
Can you decide what kind of food you get in kindergarten?	0,599
When eating: Do you decide how much food you have on your plate?	0,450

Dimension „Co-Determination Options“	
Can you decide in the kindergarten where the excursion is going?	0,788
Can you decide in the kindergarten what the rooms or the corridors look like?	0,777
Can you decide in the kindergarten which rules apply?	0,699
Can you decide what to play in kindergarten?	0,509

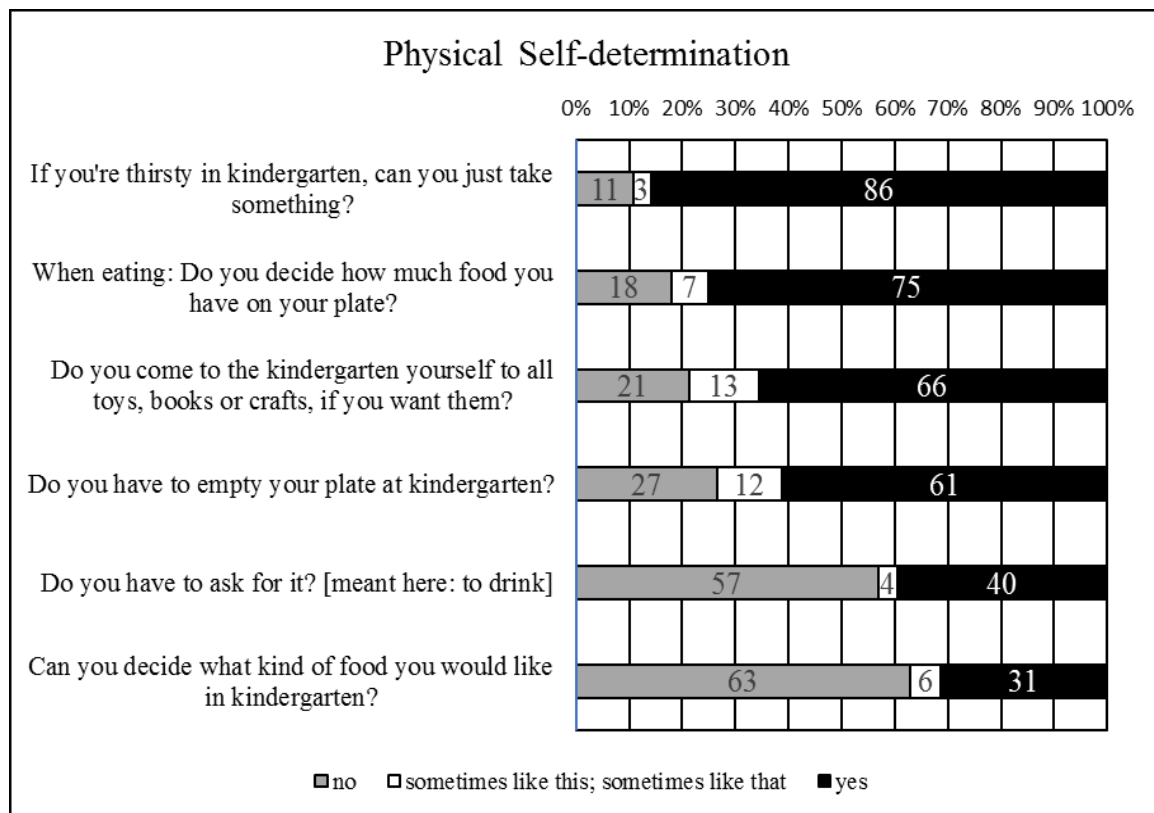
In questions that aimed at physical self-determination as well as those that aimed at areas of participation two variables had to be excluded in the factor analysis. By contrast, the factor loading of the remaining variables is sufficiently high, so that they can be combined to the dimensions of "physical self-determination" and "co-determination options". Due to the explorative design of the study, the variables which are excluded by factor analysis are retained in the descriptive analysis.

5 Results: Children's Experiences of Physical Self-Determination, Co-Determination, and Complaints

80 percent of children report that there is a fixed time in their kindergarten where they can get together and have a say, mostly as a circle of chairs, morning circle or similar. At the same time, the children perceive significantly different manifestations of their opportunities for participation.

The first set of questions relates to understanding the form and extent of children's physical self-determination experiences in the institution's everyday life. In terms of the various aspects that characterize the areas of eating, drinking and the free accessibility of toys the approval rates to participation are between 27 and 86 percent. This means that areas can be identified in which the surveyed children rarely report physical self-determination experiences and those in which a clear majority of children can report self-empowerment experiences.

Table 3: Extent of physical self-determination



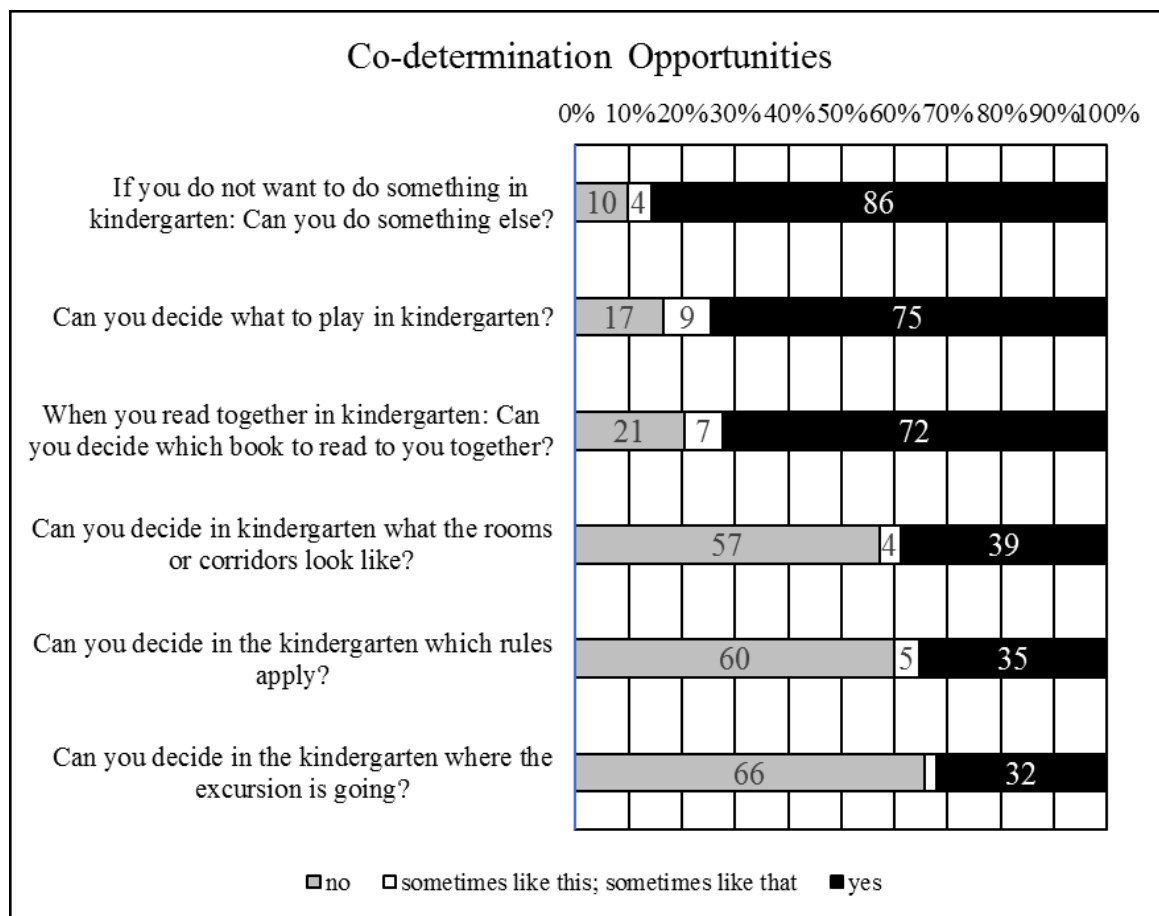
In terms of food, 31 percent of children report they have a say in what to eat, six percent say "in parts", and 63 percent report that they don't have a say. Three-quarters (75%) of the children say they decide how much food they have on their plates, seven percent articulate an "in parts". 18 percent express no self-determination in this regard. In contrast, however, 61 percent of children report that they must eat their plates empty. 12 percent say they are ambivalent, and 27 percent report that they can decide for themselves. In total, hence three questions were asked concerning the handling of physical self-determination regarding food. If these are mutually related, it becomes apparent that there is a connection between the co-determination of what to eat and the question of 'eating something empty' ($r=.191^{**}$). Of those children who can participate with respect to the meal 75 percent must eat their plate empty. Those who are not allowed to participate regarding the meal, with 55 percent. In addition, however, there is no connection between the requirement to empty the plate and whether children specify to be able to decide how much food they have on their plates. Those who can decide how much they have on the plate have to empty it in 61 percent, those who cannot decide in 62 percent.

The self-determination experiences in relation to drinking are significantly higher. A large majority of 86 percent of the children surveyed said they could simply take something when they wanted to have a drink. However, this is not the case for eleven percent. The middle category is rather small with three percent. 40 percent of the children say they must ask for permission. These two questions were also related to each other. There is a strong correlation between them ($r = -.318^{**}$). This means that children who cannot just take something to drink must ask for it in 86 percent. Those who say they can just take something to 34 percent. Furthermore, in physical self-determination, it was asked to what extent all toys, handicrafts and books can be independently accessed by the children. Here, 66 percent express their consent, 13 percent are ambivalent and 21 percent do not specify self-determination.

Overall, these findings show that children in the kindergarten have significantly different possibilities for physical self-determination in the covered areas. Especially in the field of food and particularly the decision about what to eat and how much of it should be eaten children experience hardly any opportunities for self-determination. Rather, the decision on what and how much is eaten seems to be in the decision-making authority of the institution. When deciding how to deal with other basal needs children experience more opportunities for physical self-determination.

Also, regarding individual aspects of co-determination it can be seen that, depending on the subarea, the perceived opportunities for participation of children vary significantly.

Table 4: Extent of co-determination opportunities



Thus, the surveyed children express comparatively rarely to be allowed to determine what rules apply, where the excursion goes and what the rooms and corridors look like. This is only the case for about one third of the children, two-thirds of the children do not experience co-determination in these three areas. On the other hand, the possibilities of participation in everyday play-related activities perceived by the children prove to be much greater. For example, more than 85 percent of the surveyed children report that they have alternative options when they do not want to participate in an activity, and another 75 percent or 72 percent of children say they have a say in what they play and what book we read to them. Conversely, however, this also means that even in these comparatively basal areas of day-to-day kindergarten, between 15 and 20 percent of the children experience no opportunities for participation. Comparable to the findings on physical self-determination, the synopsis also shows a differentiated picture at a low level in terms of opportunities for participation. Interior design, destinations of the excursions and rules are evidently out of their sphere of influence for most of the children although they can be attributed with considerable everyday relevance in the daily kindergarten life. The co-determination opportunities, which most of the children experience in the facilities are much more limited to the field of play.

However, it cannot be assumed that children complain about the limited opportunities for self-determination and co-determination. The question of whether they have ever complained about something in kindergarten affirmed at just 48 percent, just under half of all children.

Conversely, this means that more than half of all children in kindergarten have never made a complaint.

Table 5: Experience with Complaints (numbers in percent)

	no	yes	n
Have you ever complained about something at your kindergarten?	52	48	516

If one now examines the correlative connections between the three dimensions of participation, namely physical self-determination, co-determination opportunities and complaint, it becomes apparent that physical self-determination and co-determination opportunity are strongly connected ($r = .502^{**}$). Children who have a high degree of co-determination are more likely to report physical self-determination (and vice versa), and children who say they have little say in it also show low levels of physical self-determination (and vice versa). Complaint, however, is not significantly related to physical self-determination and co-determination.

6 Discussion: Children's Voice as an Indicator of Inclusion

The sluggish broadening of participation in child day-care compared to other fields of social work is also related to the fact that adult democratic models of negotiation are often seen as too prescient to be used with children up to the age of six (Pluto, 2018). However, more precisely, the topic is not really new here either. How to organize early childhood education and care to focus on the individual needs of each child and to open up opportunities for participation is a much-debated question.

The debate on children's rights in general challenges pedagogical practice as much as the current discourse on the inclusive expansion of the education system as well as child and youth welfare. An educational institution can call itself inclusive if it manages to accommodate every requesting child and provide conditions in which to develop and evolve. It is not the child who has to prove its 'suitability' for the institution, but the institution has the responsibility to do justice to the children and families in their specific situation (Platte, 2014, p. 90).

In this context, the presented empirical findings make it clear that child day-care in recent years has increasingly been able to establish itself as a regular offer for almost all preschool children in Germany. However, participation in terms of access to day-care for children is by no means equivalent to the level of reported experiences of children to participate within early childhood education and care facilities. Rather, the results clarify that the surveyed children report extremely heterogeneous experiences in the field of co-determination, physical self-determination and complaints in kindergarten life. There is no doubt that kindergartens in their everyday pedagogical practice offer countless opportunities for participation, which can also be understood and used as opportunities for democracy education (Knauer & Sturzenhecker, 2016; Prengel, 2016). In the light of the empirical analysis presented here, however, they are at the same time limited in many ways both at the level of self-determination and co-determination as well as at the level of the complaint. The synopsis reveals a differentiated picture in which the possibilities for self-determination and co-determination in the perception of children are predominantly extended to the area of play.

Complex or fundamental issues such as food, interior design, excursions and rules are obviously out of the sphere of influence for the clear majority of the children. With our data, we cannot make any statements about how this perception of the children comes about, and how and if this is reasoned by the professionals around them. Educational professionals are often insecure especially regarding issues that affect the self-determination of children (Hansen et al., 2015). Can children really decide for themselves what, when and how much they drink? Can they really decide on their own what, when and how much to eat? What to wear? Which topics do you deal with? Taking children's decisions is often linked to a desire to give them what they need and a belief that educators are capable of doing so (Hansen et al., 2015, p. 78). At the same time, it is not seldom overlooked that one's own biographical experiences cannot simply be transferred to others, but that every person, no matter how young, develops their own needs and goes their own educational pathways.

The professional debate responding to this, *inter alia*, with the request for target-group-oriented opportunities for participation, which can cope with the differences between children, their different levels of development and agency. Especially in the discourse on inclusion, the postulate of appreciation and recognition of differences has gained in popularity. Differences between children are seen as a rewarding enrichment from an appreciative perspective, with which pedagogical professionals should deal attentively, in order to enable participation for all children.

Inclusive pedagogy is thus addressed as a "touchstone for every model of elementary educational participation" (Prengel, 2016, p. 52), which could serve to enable "the self- and co-determination of children of all levels of development, all skills, all life forms, all genders, all socio-economic milieus, of all ethnic and cultural origins, of all transnational migrating life situations"(ibid.). In contrast, empirical studies show that specific notions of normality and difference tend to (re-)produce social inequalities especially in the everyday interaction in kindergarten between children and educators (Beyer, 2013; Kuhn, 2013).

To the extent that recourse is given to individual attribution as "children with..." (Amirpur, 2018) in the question of enabling participation and Voice, the danger of overemphasizing difference and thus worsening social inequalities and limited participation opportunities occurs. As instances of normalization and integration institutions of early childhood education are involved in social inequalities and are constitutively in danger of involvement in demarcations, normality constructions, culturalisation and processes of inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, social work as a justice profession is also called upon to develop perspectives of criticism and intervention in social conditions, thereby expanding the possibilities for participation and agency of its addressees (Klein, 2016; Riegel, 2016; Schrödter, 2007).

Following the ideas of Albert O. Hirschman to Voice, Exit and Loyalty, our findings may first of all point out that the sense of Loyalty among the interviewed children to their facilities appears to be comparatively high. Most of them like to come to the kindergarten and feel very well there. In view of the fact that Exit strategies for children in kindergarten are comparatively difficult, this may be both calming and unsurprising. If the price of Exit is high, for example through the loss of friendships, important social relationships, but also the risk of reduced self-esteem institutions generate loyalty. The subjective feeling of a high price for Exit can thus also be described as a dependency, which can also lead to the acceptance of experienced disadvantages and injustices. "This" - as Thomas Ley and Holger Ziegler put it in the context of sexualised violence experiences in educational institutions - "is the simplest

possible background to silence those under protection about wrongdoing and abuse, or even more, to make them not recognize injustice and abuse as injustice and abuse" (Ley & Ziegler, 2012, S.270).

In contrast, the enabling of Voice appears as an organizational protection concept that systematically reflects on conditions of power and inequalities. With the positioning in the horizon of the organization a focus on Voice enables "reflexive inclusion" (Budde & Hummrich, 2013) which aims equally at the perception and the deconstruction of differences. Hirschman's Voice is about being able to influence constellations, situations or norms that are considered unjust or inappropriate. In particular, Jean Michel Bonvin has further developed the possibility of articulating interests and contradictions in institutional contexts in a democratic-theoretical way as "Capability for Voice" (Bonvin, 2009). Capability for Voice is tied to specific institutional and cultural frameworks as well as communicative practices. An important aspect is the subjective expectation that one's own concerns can firstly be articulated without sanctions and secondly that they are taken into account. It's not about the children's interests and expectations ultimately having to prevail but it means that they are taken seriously into making decisions. In summary, the question of whether the perception of injustice is reflected in Voice or in mute bearing depends on how effective individuals are in their own actions and on whether an institutional system is perceived responsive to their needs. If these conditions are not met, injustices and humiliation are accepted in an adaptive way, converted into self-incrimination or processed in the form of disillusionment and fatalism (Ley & Ziegler, 2012). Establishing Voice means two things at first: On the part of the professionals an appreciative self-limitation of power potentials in the asymmetric relationship with the children using the facilities is suggested. On an organizational level it is about the fundamental democratization of institutions as it has been developed in the field of child day-care in recent years, especially in the model of the "nurseries of democracy" (Hansen et al., 2015). On the basis of multifaceted, structurally fixed possibilities for participation, the focus is on the systematic consideration of the children's Voice in all decision-making areas of kindergarten life.

In the critical discussion of this approach, attention was drawn above all to the fact that the "dimension of power is permanently brought into focus irrespective of the current issues and interests of children" (Prengel, 2016, p.61). In the light of the empirical findings and the theoretical insights of Hirschman and Bonvin it is less than weakness, but rather the strength of these reflections on the organizational and pedagogical structuring of institutions. Institutions of early childhood education are constituted by power and inequality conditions as well as the opportunities for participation that are made possible in them. Against this background, supposed and actual differences between children can be seen as discriminatory positioning rather than as individual characteristics that are also powerful within early childhood institutions in terms of enabling participation and Voice. Should the profession and the discipline of social work be about "profiling concepts that take into account the relevance and incalculability of difference categories as well as avoid and explain the powerful practices of exclusion, normalization and stigmatization along difference" (Kessl & Plöber, 2010, p. 7) a democratization of pedagogical institutions as understood in this way can be seen as a task of reflexive inclusion that requires political, disciplinary and professional treatment. The multifarious and powerful vulnerability of people has to be taken as much as their multifaceted and powerfully denied struggling for participation and self-determination. For example, in the interplay of Voice, Exit and Loyalty, problematic denial behaviour in kindergarten can be reflected as a resistant Exit strategy of children, which points to

institutionally inadequately opened possibilities of Voice. The same applies to the potential for transforming the professional view of 'disabled' and/or 'disadvantaged' children and their families: Pathologizations and other attributions of deficits which may well lead to forced Exit in day-care point less to children's individual problems of adaption and other disorders but rather to the structural and professional deficits in enabling participation and Voice for all children.

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