

## Chapter # 34

### **MEDIA, LANGUAGE AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S POLITICAL AWARENESS**

#### **Thoughts and Preliminary Research Results of an Interdisciplinary Research Project**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The interdisciplinary project PoJoMeC, funded by The Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) in Germany, examines the political awareness and understanding of preschool and elementary school children. Thereby the interdisciplinary approach takes place from the perspective of political didactics, literature and media didactics, and journalism. The main research goal is to survey how political awareness of young children is expressed. Therefore, we draw on qualitative approaches, in which we focus (a) on the children's explicit knowledge, and (b) concepts of rule-based behavior. The different levels of abstraction of these concepts are based on a modification of the ecological model of human development according to Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979). This article outlines, on one hand, an interdisciplinary investigation for a viable concept of politics for research with children between the ages of 4 to 8 years. Therefore, we consider areas such as political didactics, literature and media studies, and philosophy, and introduce a research framework that does not start with terms and concepts but considers more fundamental forms of social perception. On the other hand, this chapter explains methodological approaches and evaluation methods and presents the preliminary results of a pretest with a sample of German preschool children.

*Keywords:* political thinking, political literacy, early education, early education research, global citizenship education.

#### **1. THE PEDAGOGICAL QUESTION**

Climate change, world peace, sustainable development, inclusive education, and participation of diverse groups in our society are tasks that politics must deal with today and tomorrow. The UNESCO (2019, 2021) outlines these tasks in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are strongly normative. They not only deal with the environment but also with its protection, health maintenance, and social diversity in general. This diversity shall not only become a binding aspect, but human rights shall also follow. If such goals become a reality, the acceptance of these goals by the entire society is required. However, active participation in social reality depends above all on the political understanding from the citizens. This requires not only knowledge but also general political awareness, which must be conveyed and acquired from an early age.

We understand "politics" as human communication and action to create and enforce generally binding regulations and decisions in and between people. Therefore, it is a central educational goal to create an awareness of what this responsibility means and what role the

individuals should play. Since political attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes already develop in early childhood and are difficult to change throughout life (Weißeno, 2022), political or civic education must begin in early childhood (cf. Goll, 2021).

The media, however, plays a central role in conveying and developing a worldview and thus also in securing and sustaining democracy (cf. Marci-Boehncke, Rath, Delere, & Höfer, 2022). Language is just as important as pictures, movies, and other forms of communication. For this reason, we advocate a broad concept of media that goes beyond a purely technical perspective in which the world, and thus potentially every citizen, is internationally networked. The task of "Global Citizenship Education" is to teach children how to behave politically responsibly in this world. In our digital age, this education depends on the knowledge of the political concepts (cf. Dudley & Gitelson, 2002).

Formally, these questions seem to be answerable from the perspective of developmental psychology (cf. Wegemer & Vandell, 2020). In terms of content, however, understanding what impact political awareness has on political education is a desideratum, especially for early childhood. There is still little knowledge of what children understand about politics and whether or which political skills they bring with them to elementary school and develop by the time they move on to secondary school. Empirical research on political awareness and participation is extremely difficult in this age group as this topic is very abstract for young children. In addition, due to a lack of reading and writing skills, it is hardly possible to study this with larger cohorts of participants (cf. van Deth, Abendschön, Rathke, & Vollmer, 2007). In contrast, there is a large body of research on older children (cf. Hunter & Rack, 2016; Rowe, 2005; Flanagan, 2014).

From the perspectives of the three different research areas, political didactics, literature and media didactics, and journalism, we want to examine the understanding of "the political" in the PoJoMeC project (cf. Goll, 2022), funded by The Federal Agency for Civic Education (Federal Agency for Civic Education/bpb) in Germany. The heterogeneities of the research, the target group, the scientific questions, and the wide range of objects initially suggest a multi-method approach. However, we need to take precautions in advance due to the limited research in this area. Therefore, the first task of our project was to develop a viable political concept for research with children in preschool (age 4-6) and elementary school age. This concept had to accomplish three elements,

- (a) be broad enough to capture different phenomena,
  - (b) abstract enough to be able to connect interdisciplinary research as a common basis,
- and
- (c) finally, be conceptualized anthropologically to do justice to test subjects and their social perception before any political partisanship emerges.

## 2. BASIC CONCEPTUAL ASSUMPTIONS

From a philosophical point of view, the question of "the political" can be understood through an anthropological concept that, at least in the Western world, goes back to Aristotle's definition of man. In the *Politeia* he determines the human being as a "political animal" (*πολιτικὸν ζῷον*, Pol. 1.1253a), as a being that lives in a community. The definition of the human being as an "animal sociale et politicum" de regno I,1) was taken over by Thomas Aquinas and thus transmitted to the Christian Occident, where it continues to have an effect to this day. The practice of gathering into communities varies historically and regionally. It takes place concretely, like all practices, not through "the living", an instinct, or a certain form of perception. "There remains therefore what may be called the practical life of the rational part of man" (*λόγον ἔχοντος*, Nic. Eth. 1098a), as Aristotle describes it in the

Nicomachean Ethics. Zoon politikon and zoon logon echon are, therefore, the classic definitions of an individual as a human being that organizes itself socially with other people and, in doing so, draws on a more fundamental competence, namely the logos, which means reason as well as language and spirit. The human capability of reason enables him to independently acquire and implement the regularity that determines his practical life.

We follow this line of tradition in its modern understanding as the functionality of the human to recognize rules, develop them, and shape them independently. Thereby we leave the viewpoint of the ancient world. The regularity of the logos is the basis of rule-governed human action in general. Since the 1970s, the various fields of human activity (besides politics, for example, economics, medicine, education, work, or art) have related to each other in different ways in the educational sciences (cf. Derbolav, 1975; Benner, 1987). They all have in common that the basic acquisition of rules is tied to language. That is, the ability to acquire language means nothing other than recognizing, imitating, and shaping regularities. Reciprocal and cooperative interactions, as well as empathy resulting in shared intentionality as well as the development of a language, are the prerequisites for human community. (cf. Räska-Hardy, 2011; Duncker, 2011; Carpenter & Tomasello, 2011). For us, this also represents the basic skills of humans. In this way, we also draw on Ludwig Wittgenstein's so-called private language argument (1958, § 243). It says that no one can learn a language without using public rules. No one can follow a rule only once and only alone. Rule acquisition, like language acquisition, always takes place publicly and thus socially. Thyen (2006), considering this private language argument and Wittgenstein's question of what it means to "obey a rule" (Wittgenstein, 1958, § 199), has made it clear that from this perspective, the human being is an "intersubject". This means that humans are individuals for whom the learning of language rules stands paradigmatically for obeying regularities. In this way, the human being is always socially integrated and oriented towards sociality.

The anthropological research (Carpenter & Tomasello, 2011) and the political didactic research (Goll, 2021, p. 41) support this perspective. From a social point of view, the first rule of communicative action is linguistic "turn-taking" (Carpenter & Tomasello, 2011, p. 92) through which infants share their emotional states with others.

In the same way, this linkage back to a rule (which reveals both grammar and semantics from pragmatics) can also be reconstructed as human's ability to reflexively access the world through symbols. In his "Essay on Man", Ernst Cassirer (1944) brought this basic ability, which Aristotle defined as logon echon, into the modern form of the human being as animal symbolicum (Cassirer, 1944, p. 26), as a symbol-using creature. This definition, however, should not be understood as pre-modernly substantial, but as "functional" (ibid., p. 68).

At the same time, an important phylogenetic connection is made to an ontogenetic metaprocess. Friedrich Krotz calls this process mediatization since the year 2000. In his work, he shows that during their cultural evolution, humans have used new media techniques to change their communicative practice. The mediatization theory thus offers itself as a "conceptual framework" (Krotz, 2007) to reconstruct the political process of social change. Under the impression of new communication possibilities, the rules of individual communication have changed. This has not only changed social communication but has also triggered a societal change. If one links this media-sociological perspective again philosophically to the anthropological thesis of the animal symbolicum, then mediatization as a media practice (whose first expression is, of course, language) becomes a historical one. This is modified in each case, but at its core, it is permeated by the fundamental "mediality" (cf. Rath, 2019) of the human being's symbolic appropriation of the world through rule acquisition and rule competence. Language acquisition is the beginning of individual mediatization as the acquisition of rules and thus the basis of political consciousness in general.

### 3. “THE POLITICAL”

Against this philosophical-conceptual background, the question now needs to be raised as to what we mean by "becoming political". So what is "the political" that we hope to see children already aware of? However, the phrase "political", which is taken for granted in German and the Romance languages, is difficult to translate into English. Valentine (2006, pp. 505-506) rightly states:

"It is worth remarking that in the English language the notion of the political is an awkward grammatical formulation. The transformation of an adjective into a noun suggests that the notion is detached from its proper enunciation as if to prompt the question 'the political what?' to complete it. The awkwardness has arisen from the translation of a distinction commonly found in Germanic and Romance languages for which precise equivalents are not available in English. Thus, the distinctions between "die Politik" and "das Politisches" in German, between "la politique" and "le politique" in French, and between "la politica" and "il politico" in Italian are rendered in English as the distinction between politics and the political without any obvious reference for the latter term “.

"The Political" (in the following, we will write this formulation with a capital letter at the beginning) is not easy to integrate into the common political science triad of politics, policy, and polity (cf. Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008). These dimensions of the concrete political reality of a society can be recorded and inquired about in terms of political knowledge. In the following, however, we understand the political to mean an awareness of the fundamentally regular organization of the human community. On the one hand, this awareness is not tied to a specific social or even political system. It requires neither knowledge of a concrete polity, nor an orientation as to which politics must be organized and designed for which policy; nor is the social frame of reference necessarily at the level of a concrete polity. With a social frame of reference, we emphasize the different social systems that people develop for themselves in the course of their development. These reference systems expand in the context of ontogenetic development.

Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) differentiated between five levels or systems. He started with the microsystem, which is directly surrounding the child, through the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The macro- and exosystem include, among other things, the political organizations or governments and the associated ideological attitudes and beliefs that determine policies. The mesosystem creates the institutional bridge between the micro and the macro systems. It determines the institutional framework of the microsystem and its actors. The microsystem is the narrowest social framework that goes directly beyond the individual, such as the family, the closest nested educational institutions such as kindergarten and school, and later the peers. These systems, conceived by Bronfenbrenner as concentric, each offer material/resources of varying complexity for the development of a child's political awareness/consciousness. However, the politically relevant aspects, the increasing social integration of the child into existing social structures and their regularity, remain strictly separated in the systems. Although these systems are intended to be permeable, they appear to be differentiated. Vélez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, Vega-Molina, and García Coll (2017), following Bronfenbrenner's revisions to his own theory, were able to construct a less restrictive model of human development. Culture, in its various manifestations, has a comprehensive function in the expanding structure of social relationships. Language and communication are the central practices of culture. Drew Lichtenberger (2012) expands this system model by

Bronfenbrenner significantly. He directly supplements the innermost circle of the microsystem with a "ring" of media communication that encloses the individual. This "ring" shall show, "how technology can now mediate many of our direct interactions with our world and one another". As Marci-Boehncke and Rath argue, this medial ring symbolizes the medial presence in early childhood (2013). In the microsystem, which is characterized by media, symbols and thus language become the central medium of regularity. In other words, the mastery of linguistic rules offers the model for human rule awareness in general.

These rules can then be used sovereignly and thus only become functional as a communication medium when they have become explicitly conscious. As already mentioned, awareness does not only mean "knowledge". Here, awareness shall be defined as a conscious, explicit orientation towards systematically relevant rules, that also can be linguistically expressed. It is not only the rules that have a chance, but always and inevitably the actors who set, represent, sanction, and, if necessary, relativize or revoke these rules. Different levels of media distribution are also one part of it. Beyond this microsystem, journalism plays a central role in raising and sharpening the awareness of civic problems, and in negotiating and communicating rules.

In our opinion, it should be emphasized that a child with political awareness can take a reflective position. This means that the rule has been recognized in terms of its validity for the child. Furthermore, the child experiences its behavior based on the rule and can also explicitly align its actions with the rules or consciously break these rules. This political awareness requires a receptive civic literacy, i.e. the ability to recognize such regular political communication in everyday life (cf. Detjen, Massing, Richter, & Weißeno, 2012, p. 7). This distinguishes these rules of social practice from other laws that children also learn in their lives. Such communicative-social regularities include rules that can limit or extend our behavior. For example, we can refer to locked or open doors or technical and functional necessities such as the flicking of a switch. But also practical irritations, for example, a confrontation with incomprehensible but rule perceived languages or linguistic rule breaking belong to this.

#### **4. POLITICAL AWARENESS**

The Political – like the basic anthropological concepts – is to be understood functionally. It is an idea of social regulation that, as a model (cf. Heidemeyer & Lange, 2010, p. 221) of the social order, already has a normative effect in the microsystem. It thus precedes the development of specific political knowledge (cf. Weißeno, Götzmann, & Weißeno, 2016) or even concrete "political competence" (Weißeno, 2012), which is measurable as the result of knowledge, skills, and behavior.

The disciplinary perspectives of our project thus focus on various relevant phenomena of the Political. Awareness of rules can be grasped above all as practice-based, concrete everyday experience in dialogue. The political knowledge can be captured and measured using various quantitative methods. These methods, however, need to consider the fact that the target group is - due to its age - largely unable or only very poorly able to read. Therefore, action-oriented, media-practical settings are also available to capture the awareness of rules in forms of expression other than language media. But the active component is not just a consequence of the target group lacking reading literacy. Rather, the competence that includes political awareness is not solely based on cognitive knowledge. Alscher, Ludewig, and McElvany argue in their recent article on the theory and measurability of competence in school-based civic education (2022) that political education has to differentiate between the components of political knowledge and motivational, attitudinal, and volitional dispositions

of young children and young adults. After reviewing the relevant theoretical and empirical concepts of competence in political education, they describe their framework model of "civic literacy", which differs in its scope from a primarily cognitive-knowledge-based political literacy. Alscher et al. state that civic literacy expands the cognitive domain of political knowledge to include "action dispositions in the areas of motivation, attitude, and volition" (2022, p. 7, own translation). The motivation includes the "political interest" as well as the "political sense of effectiveness" (ibid., p. 14). "Attitude towards democracy" and "attitude towards a plural society" (ibid., p. 15) are the decisive aspects of political attitude. "Willingness to participate in politics" and "willingness to participate in civil society" are ultimately the facets of political volition. These aspects and facts together determine the components of civic literacy. Regarding our question about "The Political", this perspective of action is significant.

## **5. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: INTERVIEWS WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

However, these aspects can again be captured by Alscher and colleagues within the framework of a purely cognitive text survey. However, unlike Alscher and colleagues, we cannot capture the active components in our target group in a cognitive-text-based manner as motivation, attitude, and volition. However, we will take up their components, which are designed for K7 to K10, via an action-based setting. In dialogue, the rule is in the foreground. As stated above, the rule is not a solipsistic phenomenon. Nobody can follow a rule alone and only once - but above all no one can design, enforce, and follow a social rule alone. Rules are observed behavioral controls whose social dimension is at the heart of political consciousness. Only when the concrete observation of compliance with the rules has led to a model of compliance with the rules can one speak of explicit awareness of the regularity. Here, too, language acquisition serves as a blueprint for the awareness of rules. However, the ability to use linguistic expressions reactively and appropriately to the situation is not yet a sign of explicit awareness of rules. Rather, the rule must be recognized as a rule and actively applied in practice.

In the same way, political awareness is reflected in the concrete, active addressing of rule-specific requirements for all members of a social group. At this point, the reference to journalism becomes clear because it is precisely this community-building function that is emphasized in their definitions of journalism: "Journalism research selects and presents topics that are new, factual and relevant. He creates publicity by observing society, making this observation available to a mass audience via periodic media, and thereby constructing a shared reality. This constructed reality offers orientation in a complex world" (Meier, 2018, p. 13). As a level of discourse between politics and society, professional journalism in democratic societies offers an opportunity to negotiate the need for cooperation and to reach broad social circles quickly.

Through media and language impulses we try to evoke statements about rules, their validity, their legitimacy, and their sanctions. Image material in the setting of simplified "picturizing maps" is used as a reason for discussion in early education (Tkotzyk & Marci-Boehncke, 2022, cf. also Novak & Cañas, 2008) as well as the child-friendly, classic method of questioning as a puppet interview (cf. Marci-Boehncke & Rath, 2013, pp. 58-59; Weise, 2012, 2019) or the encouragement of one's narration.

It is important to remember that research with young preschool children has several limitations. These include linguistic (expression of skills and vocabulary), interactive and cognitive skills, and competencies (Butschi & Hedderich, 2021, p. 104; Vogl, 2021, p. 143).

In addition, young children usually have no points of contact with survey situations (Vogl 2021, p. 154). Accordingly, our research process must be geared toward the child participants, because research methods cannot be adopted unquestioningly from adult research (Mey 2003; Paus-Hasebrink 2017; Weise, 2021). In research with and on young children, it is important to consider that it is not possible to "equate children's resources with those of adults" (Butschi & Hedderich, 2021, p.104). Therefore, we must develop child-friendly methods that engage children according to their level of development and abilities, and childlike perspectives. If we do so, we can research topics, which we usually consider adult topics, and therefore, anchor primarily in the area of the adult world.

The Picturizing Strategy, previously introduced as "Picture Concept Map" (Tkotzyk & Marci-Boehncke, 2022), is a method that we can use to gain access to the child's environment and children's awareness of complex issues about social or political structures (PS). It describes a novel interview method that activates and challenges the reflective capacity of the child participants in a playful way. The basic idea is based on the method of concept mapping according to Novak (1990) and Novak and Cañas (2008). Concept maps are viewed as schematic tools or "cognitive maps" (Stewart, van Kirk, & Rowel, 1979, p. 172) that represent a set of concept meanings, which in turn are embedded in a framework of claims or theses (Novak & Gowin 1984). Put simply, these maps represent a graphical representation that visualizes a system of existing knowledge, its scope, and the connections between different concepts (Graf, 2014). When concept maps are used as a cognitive strategy, they help to sharpen the participants' critical thinking and stimulate self-reflection about their thinking and belief system because participants are repeatedly encouraged to question themselves and their statements.

It is precisely this aspect in which we see the positive effects of our research with young children. In this way, we can minimize less meaningful yes-no answers in interviews and learn more about the processes of children's ways of thinking and their view of the children's living environment in a more complex context (Tkotzyk & Marci Boehncke, 2022). However, the challenges mentioned above concerning the group of very young participants require a child-friendly adaptation of this mapping concept. This is where tools in the form of picture cards come into play. The pictures are selected according to the research topic and assigned to three main categories based on Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem. In terms of content, in this case, we are guided by the basic idea of the awareness of rules. This leads to three main questions,

- (a) Who determines rules?
- (b) Why are there rules? and
- (c) What influence do children have on the regulatory system?

To connect with the children's living environment, we offered topics with which the children are familiar from both media and family (sometimes also peer-based) communication.

1. The first topic, which shapes the child's world to varying degrees at the micro, meso, and macro levels, is "Corona". We are thus building on practical and media experiences during the global pandemic, which, since spring 2020, has changed the life of our society extensively. From the obligation to wear masks to hygiene and regulatory requirements over lockdowns and travel restrictions to vaccinations that have been discussed and experienced, for example, in one's own family, grandparents, or the obligation to vaccinate caregivers in daycare centers or schools.

2. The second field is the "Ukraine war", which has been familiar to the children since February 24, 2022, primarily from the media and primarily affects the meso and macro levels.

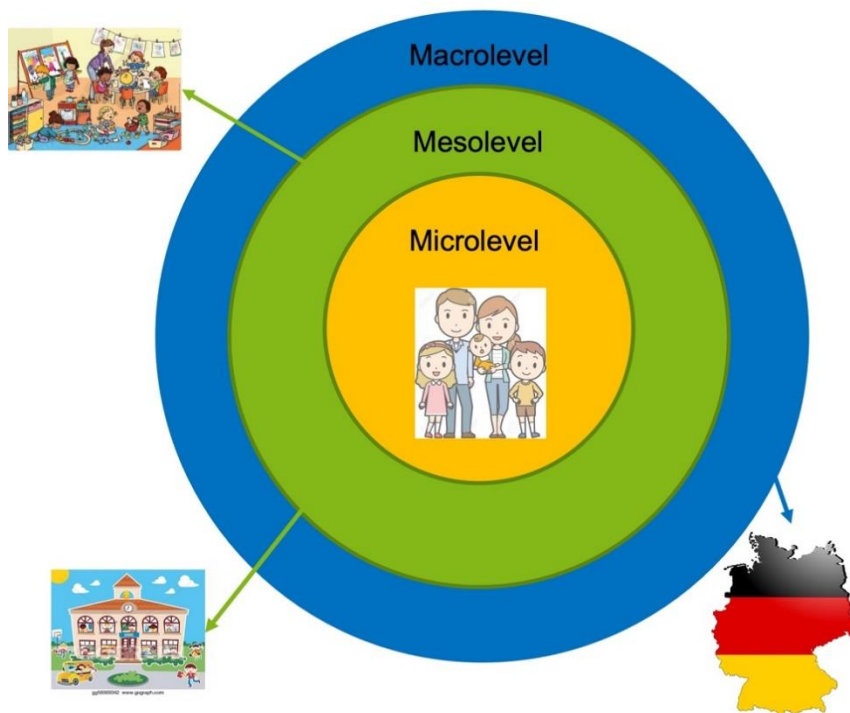
Conversations with adults or among friends, which often come up out of fear, give rise to discussion on rule-based questions. How and why was action taken in a specific case of war? How should action be taken in a fictitious conflict affecting the meso and macro systems?

3. The last subject area, which is not only current but has been running through decades and thus the entire lifetime of the respondents, is the complex concepts of environment and nature. This topic is also present in all systems that Bronfenbrenner named. Currently, the global focus is increasingly on questions of climate change and energy generation.

At the same time, all three themes are always micro-systematically medial and run through them, thus allowing the connection to the macro-systematic medial ring of Drew Lichtenberger (2012).

To carry out a child-friendly survey, corresponding picture cards are created for the three areas mentioned (see Fig. 1), which offer the children opportunities for discussion, and which have to be assigned based on to the Bronfenbrenner system, while the participating children let us participate in their thoughts by explaining why they chose the image and the corresponding layer. With the specification of the different levels, the participating children are given possible strategies for making decisions (see Fig. 2).

*Figure 1.*  
*The Three Upper Categories "micro-", "meso-" and "microlevel" according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) (© R.Tkotzyk).*





*Figure 2.*  
*The Game Board with the Three Upper Categories and Child-Appropriate Pictures*  
(© R.Tkotzyk).



The second part of the name "Picturizing Strategy" is derived from this game-theoretical approach. An extension is made here in that the participants can choose the pictures from a previously defined number of a larger scope. This not only adds a playful element to the survey situation but also gives the children the opportunity to experience more success because they are given more opportunities. For example, younger children may not be familiar with the nasal swab of the SARS-COV2 test but know the lollipop test from daycare. The presence of both images thus increases the probability that a conversation will take place. At the same time, it offers the opportunity to find out whether both types of testing are known and whether the child can recognize them, explain, and assign them to specific levels. Furthermore, the interviewer can ask specific questions and, thereby, draw conclusions on whether the child has acquired their knowledge actively or passively. It is also possible to integrate a hand puppet into this survey process as a puppet interview (Roth, Dadds, & McAloon, 2004, for Germany cf. Paus-Haase, 1998; Weise, 2012, 2019) to offer a fictitious conversation partner "at eye level" with the children. The children are allowed to make their own decisions about the discussion situation. These situations are recorded and the children's statements on the individual subject areas are transcribed. The qualitative evaluation is then carried out using MAXQDA, a software program for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods analysis. In this way, the individual statements are categorically coded and networked. We developed the codes, which were used in the MAXQDA analysis, from Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of Human Development and from a philosophical didactic concept that considers the argumentative depth and social reach which is called the TRAP-Mind-Matrix.

## 6. EVALUATION MATRIX

It is precisely the interdisciplinary structure of the project that allows at least some of Bronfenbrenner's systems of social integration, as described above, to be recorded. Onwuegbuzie, Collins, and Frels (2013) make it clear that quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research like ours can very well consider several systems or levels of Bronfenbrenner's concept. However, the evaluation of the children's answers about the expression of political awareness as an awareness of rules poses a particular challenge. The question arises as to which categorization allows this expression to be determined. From this follows the task of formally categorizing the very different preferences and attitudes of the children, because we are not concerned with the content of a child's response. We are concerned with the type of argument and the social weight of the arguments that are put forward for a political analysis.

Therefore, we use a current system from philosophy didactics, the TRAP mind theory. In his theory, Frank Brosow (2020) distinguishes four levels of justification for normative ideas, similar to the social rules we examined (see Fig. 3).

*Figure 3.*

*The TRAP-Mind-Matrix: Areas, Levels, and Fields of Contemplation (Brosow, 2020, p. 15).*

Area:	Level:	Thinking	Reflecting	Arguing	Philosophizing
<b>Understanding</b>		Idea (description/association)	Concept (justified idea)	Definition (justified set of concepts)	Theory of Meaning (justified justification)
<b>Evaluating</b>		Opinion (believe/attitude)	Judgment (justified opinion)	Argumentation (justified set of judgments)	Theory of Quality (justified justification)
<b>Acting</b>		Impulse (motive)	Decision (justified impulse)	Stance/Praxis (justified set of decisions)	Theory of Behavior (justified justification)

The theory combines two essential aspects. On the one hand, it is based on current empirical results of cognitive psychology. On the other hand, it aims at the fundamental ethical criterion of the universalizability of an argument. She wants to make it understandable what happens when we give more and more generalizing reasons when working on problems rationally to make our preferences or judgments plausible. "The TRAP-Mind-Theory has a functionalistic understanding of reasons. A reason is not a consideration of its kind. Any thought that is deliberately used to support or attack a consideration is considered a reason by the TRAP-Mind-Theory" (Brosow, 2020, p. 26). In practical analysis, the TRAP mind theory offers a matrix of rational argumentation.

It consists of three areas of contemplation (understanding, evaluating, and acting). These define the concrete nature of the problem we are dealing with. At the same time, the TRAP Mind Matrix consists of four levels of contemplation (thinking, reflecting, arguing, philosophizing), which determine how we deal with these topics. "Thinking" remains on the level of description, "Reflecting" focuses on a conception, here on fair regulation. At the "Arguing" level, definitions and contexts of justification are offered. Finally, "philosophizing" includes the ability to develop theories and substantiate them based on theories.

The content presented in our survey is purely exemplary and ultimately understood as random political fields of action and decision-making. We are not interested in the specific positions of the respondents. Therefore, the levels of increasingly generalized justification

("for ourselves, others or all people", Brosow, 2020, p. 15) of preferences are of particular importance for our evaluations (cf. Fig. 4). The test procedure provided in the TRAP-Mind-Matrix is primarily intended for the quality of the argument. This aspect is also not relevant to our question.

Figure 4.  
The TRAP-Mind-Matrix: Levels, and Reasons (Brosow, 2020, p. 15).

Thinking	Reflecting		Arguing		Philosophizing	
Intuition	+ Reasons for me		+ Reasons for others		+ Reasons for everybody	
	before testing	after testing	before testing	after testing	before testing	after testing

With the TRAP-Mind-Matrix we have an instrument at our disposal to capture the cognitive appropriation of social rules as a basis for an understanding of the Political in general, independent of a concrete political system conception.

## 7. FIRST RESULTS OF A PRETEST

In our limited first research sample with five children aged four to five (preschool, K4, and K5), we examined the methodological considerations, especially the "picturizing maps", for their suitability. At the same time, we, as researchers, made our first experiences with the TRAP-Mind-Matrix too. Our analysis showed that:

- The playful implementation of the picturizing strategy was suitable as a conversation starter for all children. In particular, children who found a puppet interview too "childish" were easily reached with the above explained method of picturizing strategy.

- In our opinion, the attention span is particularly important. As in an earlier study (Marci-Boehncke, & Rath, 2013), experiences with child interviews showed that there is no reason to worry that children would not be able to respond long enough and not communicatively to questions. Interviews with children can be successful if they adjust to the children's levels and abilities. In this way, it is possible to obtain a relatively long attention span. In our pretest, this was about 15-20 minutes.

- Of the subject areas offered, the "Corona" focus has proven to be particularly fruitful in our pilot phase between November 2021 and March 2022. The children were able to link directly to Corona and give clearer, more detailed, and more differentiated answers compared to the other topics. The medial and the immediate level of experience are most closely linked here. The subject of environment and nature could be addressed to a lesser extent, although this will be the focus of the next phase of the study.

- For all surveys, Bronfenbrenner's systemic model of human development proves to be suitable for differentiating the political levels.

The analysis with the TRAP-Mind-Matrix made it clear that the respective cognitive awareness of rules as the basis of political awareness reaches different levels of generalization.

- As expected, based on the level of justification for rule specifications, none of the children surveyed reached the "philosophizing" level.

– At least "reflecting" is achieved in the microsystem. The children can offer conceptual ideas of rule-making (e.g. the family picture) that justify the validity for themselves (e.g. as a child).

– In terms of the mesosystem, the children's statements reach the "Arguing" level. The children interviewed can develop definitions of regularity that justify a validity for "myself and others".

– For the macro system, on the other hand, most of the statements remain on the "thinking" level and are, therefore, exclusively descriptive. Our pretest respondents have no concepts or even definitions of the political justification of rules of action in the strict sense of the term. However, the children also show that they perceive the macro system and its rules but are less able to question them critically than the rules in the other two systems, in which they perceive themselves as conscious actors. In this way - one could interpret it - they unconsciously place themselves in the group of addressees of the rules and thus "practice" initial, albeit unintended, political participation. This integration is, at the same time, the decisive starting point for an explicit institutional democracy education, as many German educational guidelines require it.

Overall, these preliminary results already give grounds for optimism but could give a more definitive answer if we had a larger sample size. From K4/K5 children we did not expect an understanding of the political system in the strict sense. But it turned out, however, that there is already a "political awareness", which is found in the close family environment and above all at the peer level, as we described at the beginning of the article. However, this political awareness cannot be ascertained through the political knowledge of the target group. Rather, it can be assumed that the content-filled knowledge of political institutions, rules, and actors (not just naming) still requires political awareness. Our findings indicate that this political awareness develops from the structural awareness of rules that is imparted in the course of socialization, especially language socialization: language acquisition is rule acquisition and leads to a political, because of rule-based, awareness.

We are curious to see what results of our overall study will allow beyond the social references and what conclusions we can then draw from these results for strengthening institutionalized political and democratic education in early education.

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