

bwp@ Spezial 19 | August 2023

Retrieving and recontextualising VET theory

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Online:

https://www.bwpat.de/spezial19/ketschau_en_spezial19.pdf

www.bwpat.de | ISSN 1618-8543 | bwp@ 2001–2023

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Herausgeber von **bwp@** : Karin Büchter, Franz Gramlinger, H.-Hugo Kremer, Nicole Naeve-Stoß, Karl Wilbers & Lars Windelband

Berufs- und Wirtschaftspädagogik - online

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Abstract

With the theoretical reorganisation of VET-theory and VET-science, which extended from the 1960s to the early 1980s, two normative poles were exposed. On the one hand, the orientation towards the ideals of emancipation as the liberation of the students from the perceived oppressive, class-based social form of capitalism, which, even if democratically administered, promised little opportunities for the masses and was interpreted as a precursor to fascism. On the other hand, the reframing of vocational education and training in terms of functionality, so that this could be concentrated on the efficient teaching of vocational skills and competences and thus, eventually, depoliticised. This article presents these two poles in their historical genesis and works out in a dialectical analysis why their coexistence as the meaning of vocational education is illusory, at least from a philosophical point of view.

Keywords: *VET-Philosophy, Emancipation, Functionalism, Meaning, Dialectics*

1 Introduction

Herwig Blankertz (1982, 307) left an onerous legacy to vocational education when he stated that emancipation was the "liberation of man to himself"¹. As a meaning of an emancipatory pedagogy, it offers two things: firstly, conceptual softness and harmlessness, which leaves a lot of interpretative freedom and requires further educational-theoretical and educational-philosophical processing. Secondly, almost in contrast, a normative onerousness, which postulates an educational imperative to counteract what stands in the way of every individual freedom. Blankertz's aphorism becomes a demand that threatens to become schizophrenic for vocational education, which, even more than other areas of education, is confronted with the requirement to measure the people educated by it by the labour power made possible in them: its educational policy premise is to provide the ability to deal with professional situations (KMK 2009, 1) and the teaching of the skills required for the transition to working life (NIHK 2016, 2). Accompanying demands for the adaptation of the young personality to the conditions of society can hardly be attested to have any emancipatory potential (see Kaiser/Ketschau 2019). However, where the utilization of people, especially in the capitalistically organized class society, is potentially a barrier to their liberation, the question arises of how to deal with self-liberation and the claim to exploitation as a meaning of vocational education.

¹ Translated from German: „Befreiung des Menschen zu sich selbst.“

Both norms, liberation and utilization, have been encoded as paradigms in the self-understanding of vocational education, either in open discussion or tacitly through what is made possible in terms of research and teaching. The aim of this essay is to extract precisely those norms and to present them to a (vocational) educational philosophy discussion, which seems necessary in order not to accept either of the two as given.² Rather, they are to be exposed to topicality in order to be able to determine again and again what actors of vocational education and training actually want to accomplish, as well as to reflect what constitutes vocational pedagogy as an academic discipline and scientific manifestation of its associated social system. The argumentation will clearly position itself in favour of emancipation and, at the given point, will also make it clear why this appears to be consistent. This is intended to offer a point of friction for discussion, but by no means a final justification for emancipation as the sole vocational educational ideal.

In a broader sense, many papers and studies, even beyond the times of Blankertz and Zabeck and the paradigm dispute of the 1980s, deal with questions that are located at the point of friction between *what promotes personality development without reference to exploitation and what makes people useful as workforce*. This applies, for example, to the relationship between general education and vocational training (e.g. Ragutt 2016; Kutscha 2011; Blankertz 1963), the design of critical-emancipatory vocational training theory (e.g. Kaiser 2016; Kaiser/Ketschau 2019), the role of the 'Beruf' as a concept and principle in the current developments in vocational education (above all Kutscha 2011; 2008a; 2008b) and also the self-image of vocational education as a scientific discipline (e.g. Büchter 2017). The broad corpus of writings by Aloys Fischer and Theodor Litt would also have to be taken into account for a more comprehensive presentation of the subject. What this essay, which aims to contribute to this conflict of paradigms and norms of vocational education, now offers is a dialectical comparison of the principles of *emancipation* and *functionality* as normative guiding principles and thus a contribution to a basic discussion.

In order to investigate the role of both principles for vocational training and their normative relationship to one another, the first step in the argumentation is to sharpen both terms, which can be reconstructed and expanded from their philosophical and theoretical status quo. Based on this explication follows the core of this paper, articulated as a thesis, postulating the normative incompatibility of the two principles as premises of vocational training. As a justification, those same principles are presented in the form making them applicable to vocational education, namely as their paradigms, which are explained right down to the premises. This is followed, conclusively, by the derivation of their aporetic relationship based on a categorical, comparative analysis. But since the argumentative justification of the thesis does not suffice as a perspective for the normative framework of vocational education, the text concludes with explanations of further theoretical development of the idea of emancipation in vocational training.

² However, the point here is expressly not to present the creative genesis of the two educators Blankertz and Zabeck, who are closely connected with these paradigms, or to weigh them against each other. Likewise, this writing is not a paper on the history of ideas or an empirically based analysis. It is also not about reviving the positivism controversy, no matter how stimulating it may be for the definition of the horizon of vocational training science.

2 Emancipation as a Pedagogical Principle

The justification of the critical-emancipatory perspective in education goes back to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Vogel/Dammer 2015). In order to understand the premises of the critical-emancipatory paradigm, it is therefore advisable to know the main features of this social theory, since paradigm and theory share an essential negative aspect: the rejection of the capitalist social order, which almost tilts to resignation to social conditions, and the analytical suspicion of all of societies inherent potential for oppression.

Reducing the philosophical complex of critical theory in its entirety to a few snippets, especially since it has undergone a variety of evolutions over the past decades, can hardly do justice to the matter. According to Max Horkheimer, who can be considered the initiator of the Frankfurt-style critical theory, it is about critically presenting the world as it is, so that it may shine through how it should not be, and thus giving an idea of how it should be (Schweppenhäuser 2010, 2). Critical theory is not only descriptive and by no means value-neutral. It is normative and articulates values and ideas about the good and bad of society (ibid., 7), which critical pedagogy subsequently took up (Vogel/Dammer 2015).

Emancipation is not a simple, concrete, and unmistakable term, but is used widely and haphazardly in public debates (Lempert 1974, 26). It is probably most common in the context of equality between women and men and thus as a designation for a social movement that is still not over. In terms of developmental psychology, emancipation means the child gaining independence from the parental home, which is essentially equated with building a self-responsible life (Montada/Lindenberger/Schneider 2018, 45ff.).

As a concept of education, or rather an ideal of education, emancipation is a very difficult construct because of the burden of its different interpretations. It is therefore not surprising that emancipation in the context of education is rarely explained and received as such.³ Where Blankertz determines the emancipation of man from the heteronomy of society for the meaning of pedagogical thinking and acting not only as the founder, but as still the most capable representative of critical-emancipatory pedagogy, it is all the more striking that reconstructive description of the term, i.e. of an academically clean definition, is missing.

Lempert (1974, 26ff.) articulates a comprehensive conceptual outline in the context of his papers on vocational training and democracy, which is aligned with this very framework. His concept of emancipation is characterized by its closeness to an idea of social justice and his concern seems to be to justify this idea through emancipation as an educational goal. However, where he almost approaches the identity of the two terms, the question remains whether the ability to articulate needs in a society marked by resource limitations exhausts the principle of emancipation and where the self-liberation aspect focused on by Blankertz is to be found under

³ In particular, the representatives of critical pedagogy use the term more frequently (cf. e.g. Dammer/Vogel/Wehr 2015), but mostly in line with the critical emancipation pessimism of the Frankfurt School, which is mainly based on social, but hardly educational philosophy.

this perspective. As a guiding principle of vocational education, the term is therefore drawn differently in the following, with the claim of defining it as something genetically educational.

The most general meaning of the term is the abolition of human heteronomy or heteronomy. Politically, this refers to the elimination of one-sided relationships of dependency, disadvantage and injustice and thus to a change in social relationships (Lempert 1974, 27f.). In this respect, all emancipation tendencies are egalitarian. They aim at the equality of rights and duties of all members of society (ibid., 29). In educational terms, the concept of emancipation now places the individual ahead of the social perspective. A change has taken place here, from an act of release, e.g., the release of slaves or the child from parental tutelage, to a self-liberation of the underprivileged (ibid., 28). The implementation of emancipation is therefore not the responsibility of a liberator, but of those who are to be emancipated.

Although emancipation emerges from upbringing and education, it is not a process of adaptation.⁴ It is rebellion against the status quo, since the status quo is suspected of being oppressive or exploitative, with the intention of overcoming it and improving it according to one's own ideas and with one's own strength. In contrast, social change itself is not the immediate aim of emancipatory pedagogy, because then pedagogy as a social design element would be loaded with a responsibility that hardly seems politically desirable (cf. Ketschau 2018, 90). Rather, the possibility of social change must indirectly motivate pedagogical thinking and acting as a source of meaning: emancipatory pedagogy wants to form the will in the student to work for social change towards liberation and, as a responsible individual, to be able to recognize what constitutes the bad in society, to reject it and to act against it.

Where emancipative pedagogy focuses on the individual, the personality, emancipation can only be understood as a socially embedded process if it stands for social change. The self in self-liberation therefore does not mean that emancipation can be an egoistic process. Only those who show responsibility for their environment and human dignity can emancipate themselves. Further, the dignity of the individual cannot be separated from the dignity of the species, because every egoistic expansion of freedom provokes the exploitation of others and thus creates such social conditions that make emancipation appear as an impossibility in the first place.

From the point of view of educational theory, the reference to the concept of maturity appears to be crucial for understanding a central idea of emancipation. If maturity itself is understood as an educational ideal⁵, it can be seen as a condition at the beginning of individual emancipation. In this way, reaching maturity becomes the actual immediate goal of emancipative education and at the same time contains its innermost contradiction: maturity as a result of emancipative education can only be achieved through heteronomy, through the paternalism of

⁴ The contrast arises from the still plausible view that education is primarily an instrument of adaptation, as Piaget (1984, 113) states, for example: "Education means adapting the child to the social milieu of the adult, in other words, to change the psychobiological constitution of the individual depending on the totality of collective realities (...)" (Translated from German).

⁵ The humanistic form of maturity is found in the personality that, in the Kantian sense, has the courage and strength to use one's own reason (Kant 1784, 1).

the educator and the control of his education by the educator. However, this in no way undermines the principle of emancipation, it only shows that emancipation takes place in a social space and does not find people as isolated beings but must grasp them in the context of their sociality. Every emancipatory upbringing requires the legitimation of only being coercive to the extent that it aims to overcome it.⁶

The following definition is offered as a condensate of the conceptual sketch, which by no means claims to broadly define what emancipation is and what constitutes it, but to outline its characteristics for the vocational educational context. Emancipation is the self-directed and self-responsible liberation of the mature individual from all avoidable constraints and unjust heteronomy. Heteronomy is unjust when it does not primarily serve the well-being of the particular person, but rather take advantage of them. Achievability of emancipation as an educational aim for some should not endanger achievability for others. Emancipation thus becomes a social act for which emancipatory pedagogy creates the basis as education towards maturity. Emancipation as educational aim is not legitimised by its feasibility, but by the will to fulfil it. The will to address emancipation is nothing other than the will to do better, the sheer possibility of empowering the individual before society and thereby giving it a more humane form. If one understands maturity as the condition of emancipative efforts, then it is the attainment of the individual ability to recognize the oppressor on the one hand and the will to overcome it on the other.

This first guiding idea, the liberation of man from his inner and outer constraints, raised to the meaning of education and training, which then aims at the fulfilment of his humanity, is opposed to the premise of making the subject useful for the other. This otherness was pedagogically justified in the system and the system-theoretical perspective will also be used to approach it in the following. First of all, functionality always needs the reference to what should work and when it can be considered to work, and that becomes understandable in the totality of systems theory and its adaption to educational sciences.

3 Functionality as a Pedagogical Principle

The understanding of education and vocational training on which the concept of functionality is based can essentially be traced back to the theory of social systems, hereinafter referred to as systems theory for the sake of simplicity. Based significantly on the works of Talcott Parsons (e.g. Parsons 2013) and Niklas Luhmann (e.g. Luhmann 1997), systems theory differs significantly from critical theory, since its logic cannot produce or justify any explicitly normative statements. Rather, systems theory itself is an extremely complex, descriptive instrument. Attempts to give systems theory a normative connotation, such as in Amstutz and Fischer-Lescano (2013), are still at the beginning.

Luhmann describes society as a comprehensive social system that includes all other social systems (Luhmann 1997, 78). Social systems are defined by the demarcation between system

⁶ A thought that is similarly reflected in Adorno's education towards maturity, when Becker states that the main task of the educator is to make oneself unnecessary (Adorno 2013).

and environment and are therefore not only occasional and not only adaptive, but they are also structurally oriented towards their environment and could not exist without the environment (Luhmann 1985, 35). At the same time, systems arise and maintain themselves by creating and maintaining a difference to their environment, which in turn is regulated by their borders. Within a social system, individual subsystems develop. Each of these fulfils a specific function for the overall system. Examples are economy, religion, science or education. With the differentiation of the social system into subsystems, three types of system references emerge, which are of central importance in vocational education. First, the subsystems within society each perform a special function, i.e., they perform a systemic task that is fundamentally different from that of other subsystems. Second, the subsystems form the connection between input and output processes, they thus provide a specific service for other subsystems. Third, the subsystems develop a self-understanding in a reflection that penetrates the first two references function and performance (e.g. Luhmann 1985; 1997). These system references have proven to be adaptable to the task of vocational education, so that the subsystems represent a specific, cross-institutional problem anchored in the overall social system (Zabeck 1980, 22).

As shown, the concept of function is of central importance for the systems-theoretical perspective. It is also what the system-theoretically oriented pedagogy essentially adapts as a justification, namely as *functionality*, which is generally to be understood as the attribution of the property to an object to fulfil a function.⁷

In systems theory, social systems can be differentiated by their function, which is defined as the property of the social system that determines the type of product and thus the benefit for the system environment. The form of the product generated by the function is determined by the binary code of the system, but it is not about the logical distinction of whether the function is fulfilled or not. Because already by addressing the specific function, the elements of the system become recognizable as part of their system and not belonging to other systems (cf. Luhmann 2002; 1997).

From the point of view of vocational education, functionality can be related to two objects: First, to the trainee or worker who fulfils a function within his society according to the demands placed on him by it. Second, vocational training itself must also be considered in terms of its functionality, which is also derived from requirements, namely those that make vocational training as an element of society so indispensable that it is reproduced again and again. These assumptions make it clear that, although functionality is not originally a normative concept in the intention of systems theory, it is gaining normativity in the pedagogical context, namely when it is articulated as a claim, i.e., when functionality becomes the goal and meaning of education. The claim justified in this way is: education is successful when students can perform the function intended for them and the education system works when it enables exactly that.

When functionality is so implicitly or explicitly interpreted normatively, the term evolves. Functionality as a guiding principle is then closely related, for example, to a utilitarian view of

⁷ Derived from the meaning of the word, functionality summarizes as a functional nature (Duden 2019) or as the ability of a product or component to perform specific tasks (Wiktionary 2019).

society: value results from the generation of a benefit, or more succinctly: what is useful is good. And it depends on the idea that only what fulfils requirements is justified, namely requirements that can be recoded into the logic of other elements, where, for example, education can be transformed into productivity in the economic sense. Functionality as a guiding pedagogical idea matures conceptually, it becomes a primacy of usability and usefulness. And where usability is determined as a meaning, then pedagogy is already reduced to its shadow, defined in rationality of purposefulness.

4 Thesis: The Incompatibility of Both Guiding Principles

Insofar as the two principles of emancipation and functionality are presented as pedagogical guiding principles, the question of their relationship in the matter of vocational training should be pursued, or rather whether they can be treated as harmonizing, equal norms or not. From the point of view of the philosophy of vocational training, this is denied, and the following thesis is put forward as the starting point for the subsequent argumentation of this position.

The demand for *functionality*, which results from an understanding of society as a system, differs as a pedagogical guiding principle from the striving for *emancipation*, which presupposes the greatest possible individual development.

Functionalism and emancipation are therefore incompatible as primacies of vocational training.

Although emancipation and functionality can both be articulated as guiding principles of vocational training, they are incompatible with the claim of primacy as a central meaning, since their paradigms are not only based on different logics, but rather on different world interpretations and images of man. The aporia of vocational training is revealed in this contradiction between the two main ideas that appear to be significant in themselves.

The articulations of both ideas in vocational educational theory, which is about to manifest itself in the efforts of vocational training science and on which the development in practice is also reflected, are the paradigms of vocational education. These two paradigms, as the concretized discussion of the central ideas made accessible, are now the starting point of the argumentation on which the incompatibility thesis is based.

5 The Antagonists

In the 1970s, two paradigmatic positions emerged in vocational education (cf. Beck/Müller 1991): the critical-emancipatory paradigm, which has since receded into the background, and the system-theoretical paradigm, which was strongly promoted in the massive reception of the so called “realistische Wende”, which means the implementation of empirical scientific logic in the educational sciences. Both paradigms were motivated by the socio-political reform movement on the one hand and the politically motivated demand for greater efficiency in the education system on the other (Krüger 2002, 58).

In accordance with the incompatibility thesis, it can be stated in general that Blankertz's work represents the pedagogical “primacy of maturity” and thus the reference to the subjects

associated with it (Kutscha 2008a, 5). Zabeck's work, on the other hand, represents the "primacy of functionality", which primarily seeks a connection to society and the functional system (Zabeck 1980, 24).

5.1 Arguments and Premises of the Critical-emancipatory Paradigm

The articulation of the critical-emancipatory paradigm was motivated by two things: first, as a response to and to overcome the repressive and discriminatory upbringing and educational conditions, as they were denounced, for example, by the protests of the student movement, which was anti-authoritarian and socially and culturally critical (Krüger 2002, 58). Second, as a renewal of the traditional assumptions of humanities pedagogy, which had dominated the educational theory discussion until the early 1960s, through a socio-theoretical and critical perspective based on the Frankfurt School (ibid., 162; Benner/Tenorth 2000, 250).

According to the idea of the critical-emancipatory paradigm, already presented with the principle of emancipation, the arguments and premises derived from it must now be considered (cf. Kutscha 2008b, 41ff.; Blankertz 1963; 1972; 1974a; Zedler 1989). The arguments are categorized again in order to improve clarity, namely into those that address the *relationship between education and work*, those that relate to *academic orientation*, and those that relate directly to *emancipation and maturity*.

There is only one argument that belongs to the complex of emancipation and maturity, but it is essentially a meaningful one. It says education is a process of emancipation, because the goal of every education in the meaning of the Enlightenment is the maturity of the individual so that it can develop itself and his species for the best. The critical-emancipatory paradigm thus connects with both Kant and neo-humanism.

Four arguments can be made for the second complex, the relationship between education and work. First it is postulated, that vocational education is true education because it results from active engagement with the environment. In contrast to similar arguments in the humanities, e.g., in Spranger, Blankertz deliberately dispenses with a positively connoted concept of general education, which is justified in the following.

Blankertz postulates as a second argument that education can never be acquired directly as general education, since it requires dealing with specific objects and contexts. These contexts result from the respective social conditions, but not from cultural conditions. With the distinction between social and cultural conditions, a demarcation to the humanities or cultural-philosophical based pedagogy is completed, which becomes necessary due to the fundamental rejection of culture as a preserving principle. The objective discussion described is not aimed *per se* at affirmation and adaptation but can develop socio-critical potential.

And Blankertz further articulates his position on general education with the third argument: General education that is canonized in terms of content (material) deforms education into a status symbol, because it is not real education through which one achieves a means of self-

realization. One does not acquire these means by acquiring cultural knowledge without reference to one's own living environment, but only by dealing with concrete tasks.

The last argument in this complex addresses the fact that according to Humboldt's understanding of education, learning for a `Beruf'⁸ was understood as something other than education and less valuable in relation to general education. Blankertz counters that a contradiction between education and work cannot be systematically justified, since human education is to be understood universally. Its goal is the development and perfection of the subject. Vocational training is merely a special expression of the educational principle and nothing averse or opposed to it because vocational training in particular serves to develop the ability to judge and criticize.

In the third complex, the scientific orientation, it is initially argued that vocational training must not be reduced to drill. Apprentices need sensible, scientific and critical learning in order to be able to understand the context and conditions of their work. This also no longer justifies the separation of general and vocational education. However, Blankertz also postulates, and this is the second argument, that teaching must not be exclusively science-oriented, but must also enable critical examination of social conditions. In addition to science and technology themselves, their goals and consequences must also be conveyed, and vocational training is defined by two factors that must be worked out in the classroom: first, the scientific orientation of all learning, based on the scientific form of modern civilization, and second, through the principle of criticism and thus education to maturity, which intends to prevent the ideals of Enlightenment from consuming themselves through reduction to purpose-rationalized social philosophy.

The systems-theoretical paradigm also emerged at the same time as the critical-emancipatory paradigm (cf. Beck/Müller 1991) with the aim of overcoming the classical vocational pedagogy of the first half of the 20th century. Detached from the humanistic ideal of education, Jürgen Zabeck articulated it as a seemingly pragmatic undertaking to explain the social function of vocational education using the system-theoretical perspective and to align vocational educational action with it.

5.2 Premises of the Systems Theoretical Paradigm

Jürgen Zabeck's system-theoretical approach tries to solve the problem of fulfilling social expectations towards education, by conceptualising education as a social subsystem. The reality of education can be inferred from this model, and at the same time it represents a scale for evaluating the functionality of the existing situation. Educational science, which by this approach has already been inferred from the functional idea, can fulfil three different functions in the higher social system: First, it can meet the need for information by presenting and analysing the educationally relevant conditions, considering the causal relationships that prevail in them. Second, it can provide orientation through the interpretation of educational reality by referring to the different types of reference systems. And thirdly, it offers support for designing solutions in educational practice: On the one hand, it helps to identify and convey educational

⁸ At least in the sense of a commercial, industrial or similar activity.

procedures that can be used to deal with specific situations, but also to implement educational norms; and on the other hand, it helps to develop institutional and curricular systematizations from the perspective of making educational practice meaningful (Zabeck 1980, 24). By choosing the system-theoretical paradigm, a meaning is set, whereby the information, orientation and also the design performance receive constitutive meaning (ibid., 26). Zabeck thus defines education exclusively as a technical component that must fulfil functions in relation to other technical components so that the entire machinery of the social system is kept running. Anything that does not serve to preserve the system cannot be considered in this logic.

Accordingly, education, as a subsystem, is aimed at individuals who are described as personal systems. On the one hand, these personal systems should be made functionally valuable for society, or rather for the social system, and on the other hand their personality development should be supported. According to Zabeck, people are thus placed in the environment of the social system, since they cannot themselves be understood as a subsystem. So, the human being is not defined by the interests of maintaining the social system but stands in a relation to it that has the characteristics of indeterminacy and contingency (Zabeck 1980, 25). It is admitted that the human being is more than the system-theoretical foil is able to cover, however, this restriction is explicitly accepted in the articulation of the system-theoretical paradigm. But to take it as an indeterminacy would be what makes people understandable and tangible beyond their role as a system function element, which makes them more than a technical component.

When Zabeck goes into more specific detail about vocational training, he initially understands vocational training as a subsystem that deals with the internal consequential problem of maintaining system properties, which developed as a result of the social division of labour. It is about the question of the importance of the profession for the overall social system and the individual way of life. Zabeck defines professions as institutional, independent, people-related, more or less complex combinations of special services that correspond to the functional requirements of the division of labour (Zabeck 1991, 559). Furthermore, Zabeck articulates the easily understandable assumption that professions exist before individuals are born, so that individuals will usually encounter them. In order to cope with an economically independent life, people must be willing and able to choose and practice a profession that makes sense for them and to be aware of their professional role in the social structures created by the division of labour (ibid.). Since working life does not provide the prerequisites for individual self-realization for all employees, the commitment to the profession as self-determination for moral action in the performance structures of society is indispensable. The question of whether the assignment of people to certain functions as a "vocation" can be interpreted based on talent and interest moves into the background (ibid., 560). The already well-known motive shows itself again: upbringing, education, and people (if understandable) serve to maintain the system.

The subsystem of vocational education is thus faced with two related challenges, namely those of occupational allocation and occupational qualification (Zabeck 1980, 25). The problems that are related to each other and have to be solved together consist, on the one hand, of integrating the next generation into a society organized according to the division of labour in such a way that – in relation to the purpose of the system – they can do the best possible for the whole, and

on the other hand qualifying the individual in such a way that it is possible for him to remain efficient in his professional life over all possible economic-technical change processes (ibid., 26).

The system-theoretical paradigm of vocational education makes the following key statements: First, it assumes that modern society is a social system with primarily functional differentiation and mutual benefits of the sub-systems. This is a basic assumption of sociological systems theory, which was adopted (cf. Luhmann 1997; 1985).

Secondly, it creates meaning for the pedagogy based on it: the integration of people into the employment system has absolute priority (Zabeck 1975, 158). This means that emancipation and personality development are at best of secondary importance, one can almost assume that they are intended to be trimmed away from vocational training as metaphysical ballast.

And so, thirdly, Zabeck himself postulates functionality instead of emancipation as the guiding concept of vocational training (Zabeck 2001, 135). He also describes it as didactic illusionism to use social conditions as an object of critical reflection.

Fourth, Zabeck works out that the educational system is subject to the primacy of a society organized according to the division of labour, not to the primacy of the subject. Subsequent generations must be integrated into a society organized according to the division of labour in order to be able to do the best possible thing for the whole (Zabeck 2001, 135).

Therefore, fifth, the ethical achievement of the individual is to take care of his professional existence, to accept norms, to limit and integrate himself in favour of his professional duties. Self-realization, a term that seems almost paradoxical in the context of Zabeck's argument, thus takes place through adaptation.

Sixth, Zabeck states, that the general and vocational training systems should be separated since both have different tasks in the social system (Zabeck 2001, 135). Like all other postulates, this is also plausible under the assumption of functionally separate social systems, at least insofar as their reproduction now receives normative attribution for vocational education.

6 The Aporia of Vocational Education – Core of the Incompatibility

If you want to summarize the principles of emancipation and functionality, and their vocational education paradigms, each condensed into an argumentative core, in a sentence, their thought leaders offer the appropriate quote. Zabeck pointed out the pedagogical guiding principle from a systems-theoretical point of view as follows: “The integration of people into the employment system has absolute priority”⁹ (Zabeck 1975, 158). According to Blankertz, the pedagogical primacy of critical-emancipatory vocational training is as follows:

⁹ Translated from German: “Der Eingliederung des Menschen in das Beschäftigungssystem kommt absolute Priorität zu“ (Zabeck 1975, 158).

"Educational science reconstructs education as the process of emancipation, i.e., the liberation of people to themselves"¹⁰ (Blankertz 1982, 307).

The lines of argument presented above have already given an idea of how far apart the two are. What is now to be discussed to address the incompatibility thesis of this paper are the normative implications.¹¹

The categories used in the incompatibility argument must fulfil two things. First of all, they must necessarily be suitable for tracing those implications and, of course, the assumption that contradicts them. If this is fulfilled, they appear to be sufficient if the essence of a pedagogy, or rather a pedagogical orientation, can be deduced from them. For the purpose of this analysis, the necessary recognizability and sufficient normativity can be found in the *image of man*, in the *pedagogical reference*, in the *idea of education*, in the *role of education* and in *human dignity*.

The *image of man* describes the idea of the essence of man and how he relates to the world. The systems-theoretical paradigm is based on a utilitarian one. The meaning of man here is not only his productivity, but productive participation in society as a professional. It is utilitarian because utility is paramount, because what is good about people is defined by their service provision. The critical-emancipatory paradigm counters this with a humanistic image of man, which primarily sees the greatest possible development as the meaning of human existence. There is not necessarily a contradiction here, because emancipated and mature people can and should participate productively in society. But the question as to why he does it and where his priority should lie is a subsequent one, in other words: from the image of man follows the distinction as to how and to what extent the productive involvement of the self is reflected.

As the second category, the *pedagogical reference* means what the subject of pedagogical considerations is. The functionality is classified in the framework of systems theory and the associated paradigm does not detach itself from the system as a normative horizon. It is argued in the logic of input-outcome, interactions between subsystems and the code of better and worse function fulfilment. Where the individual is addressed, it is modelled as a personal system and forms a functional element whose functionality serves the social system and which, beyond that, is of no importance. On the other hand, there is the subject focus of emancipation, because although the well-being of the community is not ignored, it does not generally take precedence over the individual. Rather, the development of the species and of society is found to be only possible through the development of the individual, which remains the core of the pedagogical considerations. Society in the meaning of a functioning system, on the other hand, tends to be perceived as something that, in its present form, through its totality, prevents human fulfilment.

¹⁰ Translated from German: „Die Erziehungswissenschaft [...] rekonstruiert die Erziehung als den Prozess der Emanzipation, d.h. der Befreiung des Menschen zu sich selbst“ (Blankertz 1982, 307).

¹¹ What seems to be clarified here is that system theory, as described above, is not normative per se, i.e. it does not explain any meaning or values. However, the explanations in Chapter 3 and in this chapter show that systems theory has normative implications if it is adapted pedagogically.

The third category is the *educational idea*. It can be developed with the question of what remains of education in vocational training. From the point of view of the system-theoretical paradigm, the educated person is someone who has gained insight into subordination and the fulfilment of one's duties. Vocational training transports this as an ethical thought and is otherwise a way of providing qualifications that is limited to the performance requirements of professional activities. In the emancipatory meaning, education becomes a medium of social criticism, which accepts that the mature personality must arise in contradiction to the given. Vocational training plays a central role here since the understanding of the given and thus the ability to participate in changing it can only be achieved through the concrete object of a profession. Vocational training is therefore a component of coming of age.

And where the idea of education is raised, the *role of education* is not far away. Under the primacy of functionality, education is the creation of capacity for work on the one hand and a process of adapting the individual to system requirements and system conditions on the other hand. Education is adaptation. Under the primacy of emancipation, it becomes the opposite: education is empowerment to resist against what is given, assuming that maturity can only develop through resistance.

Finally, perhaps the most important distinction category: the question of *human dignity*. The way it is taken for granted in modern, democratic society seems to make it vulnerable again. As the highest good of the Enlightenment, it seems decisive for the nature of a conception of pedagogy where it constitutes human dignity, because at the latest here it must reveal its intentions. In the previous analysis it was pointed out: below the functionality, the dignity of man is his capacity for work. The logic of exploitation that follows it cannot comprehend anything else. It was different under the primacy of emancipation, here the dignity of man lies in his self-realization, and nothing else can then be the supreme claim of pedagogy and thus also of emancipatory vocational pedagogy.

With these categories, the essence of functionalist and emancipatory pedagogies was outlined and differentiated from each other. They expose their meaning and their non-identity. Where there are at best no similarities in these categories and in the most difficult cases only contradictions, it remains to be seen: the primacy of vocational training can only be one of the two models, at least from the point of view of vocational training philosophy.

This is not enough in terms of educational theory. The postulate that the idea of emancipation should also be given priority in vocational training cannot be upheld without discussion in view of two conditions: first of all, the material requirements of society, which is dependent on the labour power of the individual, which, although in their form and order, but not as necessity should be disputed. And moreover, before the ideological demonization of emancipation, which, like the Enlightenment itself, threatens to caricature itself as an ideology, it is all too lightly recognized for its cause.

7 Emancipation and Vocational Skills – Opposite or Complementary?¹²

The confrontation of the principle of emancipation with the material requirements of society, which is not dependent on the capitalist system but on the qualified workforce of its members due to the high degree of division of labour, leads to the question: if vocational training is to concentrate on emancipation, is the core of VET not neglected, i.e., the training of young people to learn a profession? It goes against the claim of emancipation that exercising a profession, no matter what form, must aim at a performance that is not always, and perhaps not even in most cases, conducive to personality development.

The primacy of emancipation is incompatible with the primacy of functionality. However, the meaning of emancipation does not necessarily contradict the claim of vocational training aimed at training workers, for the content of professional training per se is not a torture tool for man's self-alienation (Blankertz 1983, 809). In no form of society does the mature person seem conceivable without the ability to participate productively and productively, through which he contributes to the preservation and progress of this society. For both paradigmatic streams of vocational education, work must produce added value and vocational training should enable that. Critical-emancipatory vocational training does not mean that the trainees are only prepared to question everything and to neglect their ability to work. Rather, the question is what role education and personality development play in vocational training and where both are placed in relation to the usability claims of the market economy.

The relationship between emancipation and productivity is therefore ambivalent: on the one hand, it is complementary, because the ability to perform, whatever it is, is a condition of participation in the development of society. On the other hand, it is antagonistic when a critical attitude turns into unproductive resistance or when people wither away as a factor in the appearance of neoliberal productivity ideology and their further development finds no place in the logic of exploitation.

What can seem like a relativization gives an idea that emancipation as a principle and primacy must not degenerate into dogma or ideology. The normative uncertainty about how to handle it, especially in its condensed form as a paradigm, raises the next question.

8 Paradigm: Idea or Ideology?

Whether a paradigm is just a concrete guiding idea or whether it already has ideological traits is not an easy question and not to be taken lightly. Both the idea of emancipation and the theoretical background of the critical-emancipatory paradigm are fundamentally opposed to any form of ideologization. Critical theory sets itself the task of unmasking every ideology as such and exposing every danger of perverting the Enlightenment (Schweppenhäuser 2010). And so, it can be assumed that ideology is a mechanism that serves to build up coercive relationships in

¹² Lempert (1971) also takes up this problem, but his concept of emancipation, which is aimed at social justice, results in a different argument, which is aimed in particular at socialization processes in context of professionalization.

front of the individual, to instrumentalize them and restrict their freedom of decision - otherwise ideology as such cannot assert itself and reproduce itself (Mannheim 1995, 78).

If emancipation is now proclaimed as the guiding principle and condensed into maxims, arguments and premises in the form of a paradigm, isn't it itself being dogmatized and turned into an ideology? Because it seems contradictory: emancipation is the rebellion against the given in order to achieve freedom and independence for oneself; at the same time, however, it is prescribed as an educational goal. After all, it would also be a free decision to decide against emancipation in an act of rebellion. This reveals two paradoxes. Firstly, pedagogically prescribed emancipation itself is not an emancipative act. Secondly, the conscious rejection of emancipation is an emancipative act. Both contradictions indicate that even an idea of emancipation that is confronted with the claim that it can be realized can only do so in the dogmatized form of an ideology in order to isolate oneself from those same contradictions.

This finding cannot be avoided or resolved. Rather, it forces pedagogy to deal very carefully and thoughtfully with the idea and term to prevent two extremes: namely, on the one hand, that the term softens into an empty phrase in educational policy if it is articulated too non-bindingly, and, on the other hand, that it thwarts itself and thereby degenerates into an obsession.

The distinction between the concepts of guiding idea and ideology helps with the normative handling of these contradictions and their implications. The first difference is that guiding ideas and the paradigms into which they are condensed leave open the possibility of questioning them, especially when looking for exceptions to their validity. Ideologies do not do this; they are constituted by a claim to unique validity (Adorno 1954). A guiding principle should therefore be understood as a pedagogical normative reference whose universality must never be assumed and whose validity for society and pedagogical action must be continuously questioned. Every argument of a paradigm must be verifiably based on premises, either those that result from valid empirical observations or theoretical premises that are disclosed, discussed and questionable down to their implications.

The second difference is that paradigms must not be applied to educational practice without reflection. The philosophy behind the paradigm, be it critical theory or neo-utilitarianism, is often dichotomous and polarizing in its normative implications, and then offers no differentiated interpretation of the world. Thus, both researching and practicing educators are always instructed to place this dichotomy in the context of the reality that is revealed to them. Otherwise, they would become dogmatists, unable to distinguish between good and bad or between right and wrong.

9 Summary – Premises and Perspectives of a Humanistic Vocational Education

This text was intended to sharpen the concepts of emancipation and functionality as principles of vocational training and, based on a categorical comparison, justify the normative priority of emancipation over functionality as a guiding principle in vocational education. The presentation and discussion of the incompatibility thesis is intended to provide new impetus for dealing with

vocational training theory and to emphasize the need for a critical horizon for vocational training. On the other hand, it is to be feared that attempts to integrate or converge functionalist and emancipatory programs are still more of a utopia than the emancipatory paradigm itself because of the limited resources of vocational training. It cannot be denied that practical vocational training can contain emancipatory and functionalist elements, and it has also been shown that different paradigmatic currents in vocational training science can coexist, in whatever proportion. In the case of vocational training policy foundations, the need for clarity of the pedagogical guiding principle is much more urgent, and for the (vocational) educational philosophical level it has been shown that the integration of functionality and emancipation seems absurd.

Therefore, the present argument clearly positions itself in favour of emancipation as the guiding principle of vocational education. It also supports the assumption that the humanistic concept of education is indispensable for pedagogy. Education should then first of all “stimulate all of a person's powers, so that these unfold through the appropriation of the world [...] and lead to a self-determining individuality or personality, which enriches mankind in its uniqueness”¹³ (Hentig 1996, 40). In the generic character of this stipulation, three fundamental aspects become clear: first, education is a holistic process and can therefore only really be understood in its entirety. Second, the purpose of education is the individual. Thirdly, the meaning of education is (self) development, which should also serve the well-being of fellow human beings and society.

Closely linked to the concept of education is the normative idea of what human nature is, how humans are perceived as individuals and as part of society, and thus also what determines a human's value. The philanthropically oriented and humanistic influenced pedagogy can only understand the human being as part of an individually valuable species, which is not only self-related, but can only be developed in the context of its sociality. Human dignity is at the core of this humanism and its inviolability must therefore be an imperative of every pedagogical consideration and action. Work and education for work must then also be an expression of human dignity.

Under this premise, it is important to understand the nature of vocational education and recognize it as a source of meaning. In a first step, the relationship between the essential conditions of both terms can be determined, i.e., the contouring of socially connected self-development as it is to be understood in the context of profession and work. If one looks at the relationship between the individual and society, the premise of humanistic vocational education, is that a social interest in exploitation and an interest in individual self-realization must be weighed up, without the generalized preference for a position being compatible with human dignity (cf. Ketschau 2019, 38). From the relationship between people and work, humanistic vocational education derives that work should serve people, but not people for work.

¹³ Translated from German: „Anregung aller Kräfte eines Menschen, damit sich diese über die Aneignung der Welt [...] entfalten und zu einer sich selbst bestimmenden Individualität oder Persönlichkeit führen, die in ihrer Einzigartigkeit die Menschheit bereichere“

Insofar as these premises do not appear to be achievable or only with difficulty in the conditions of the existing, vocational education constitutes itself as a medium of social criticism and education as a path to maturity, which aims at the same time to change this existing to more humane conditions. Emancipation becomes a meaning of education, and with it the formation of young trainees and adults into a participatory, reflective and responsible democrat.

What this paper makes clear as a desideratum is the principle of *professional maturity*. In his transformation from an emancipative principle as the ability to gain knowledge and liberation from socially determined constraints (Lipsmeier 1982, 233) to an economically connoted principle, the fulfilment of which was reduced to the strife of increasing worker's productivity (Ketschau 2018, 95f.), the term requires further theoretical processing. Due to its character as described above as a condition of emancipative personality development, such an undertaking seems worth striving for.

Another desideratum that emerged from the explanations on the concept of emancipation is the current lack of a (vocational pedagogical) theory of emancipation that depicts the various indicated and context-dependent facets as well as its universal character attributes in a holistic and forgiving manner and could enrich critical pedagogy in particular. At present, the breadth of the term and its unclear relationship to the existing social structures that are considered necessary seem to stand in the way of further educational research.

In addition to the need for action in the theoretical area, there are impulses for empirical research approaches. Its subject can be the investigation of the emancipatory content of vocational school and company training and further education in connection with the studies by Lempert (1974; 1971) and others (cf. Belitz 1998; Hoppmann/Stötzl 1981; Schapfel-Kaiser 2003). In a more current context, references to sustainable development and digitization could also be addressed here, whose relationship to emancipatory vocational education is still largely unclear. Furthermore, it remains to be examined from a diagnostic perspective which dispositions contribute to critical or conformist behaviour, how these dispositions are addressed as skills in vocational training (consciously or unconsciously) and how vocational training can be designed to support emancipation or perhaps even to be directed towards emancipation.

For the paradigmatic localization, it remains to sum up that adaptation to the given must not be a matter of (vocational) education (Kaiser 2016, 193). And where adaptation is unavoidable as a socialization process, the task of pedagogy is to preserve the moment of resistance as a possibility – otherwise students will ultimately be deprived of the impetus to emancipate.

The following applies as a sentence, as a condensate and as a maxim of critical-emancipatory vocational education:

Man's dignity is his self-realization, not his ability to work.

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Citation

Ketschau, T. J. (2023): Emancipation and Functionality as Principles of Vocational Education: An Essay on the Pedagogical Contradiction Between Individual and System. In: *bwp@ Spezial 19*: Retrieving and recontextualising VET theory. Edited by Esmond, B./Ketschau, T. J./Schmees, J. K./Steib, C./Wedekind, V., 1-21. Online: https://www.bwpat.de/spezial19/ketschau_en_spezial19.pdf (30.08.2023).

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