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RESEARCHING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES – GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN NON-FORMAL DIGITALISED EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

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Research Subject

PISA results show that educational inequality in Europe is prevalent: Many countries score below average in inclusion as well as socio economic fairness (OECD 2024). Thus, in striving for educational and social equity, it is relevant to understand enabling or impeding factors for educational participation of (marginalised) youth. As formal educational institutions, schools are usually seen as key to overcoming educational inequality. The role of non-formal education is often underestimated, especially with regard to digitised societies (Jeong et al. 2018; Spanhel 2020). The term “non-formal education” describes organised places and modalities of education apart from formal education, e.g. child and youth welfare, after school activities, youth centres or sports clubs (Rauschenbach et al. 2004). These non-formal educational arrangements do not aim at formal qualification. Instead, they are voluntary and create learning opportunities. In Germany, most non-formal educational institutions are funded by the welfare state and therefore are free of charge. They are obliged by law to also target marginalised youth, for example by being set up in ‘deprived’ urban areas. Some non-formal educational institutions specialise in digital media activities, such as coding, robotics or 3D-printing (henceforth referred to as “non-formal digitalised educational arrangements”).

Applying a broad understanding of education¹ as a transformation of self-world-relations (Jörissen/Marotzki 2009), non-formal digitalised educational arrangements aim at

¹ In accordance with the German tradition of ‘Bildung’.

contributing to educational and digital equity among youth by enabling processes of learning and experiences of self-efficacy. Recognising (marginalised) youth's realities and establishing trust and respect are considered important factors in order to successfully reduce inequalities in non-formal educational arrangements (Fujii et al. 2021; Streicher et al. 2014; Walther 2014). However, inequalities may be reproduced within these arrangements, if e.g. specific media-related practices are delegitimised (Fujii et al. 2021; Kutscher/Farrenberg 2017; Schäfer/Lojewski 2007). Moreover, it is unclear whether and under which conditions non-formal institutions are successful in the inclusion of marginalised youth (Dawson 2014).

Research Questions

This paper focuses on investigating the participatory potential within non-formal digitalised educational arrangements from a marginalised youth's perspective: *How do non-formal digitalised educational arrangements succeed at enabling educational practices and participation of marginalised youth, therefore reducing social and digital inequalities?* In order to answer this question, conditions that enable resp. limit the range of participation in two non-formal educational institutions specialising in digital media activities and one youth centre (a non-formal institution without specialisation in digital media) will be identified in relation to (marginalised) youth's orientations. Digitality is focused as a potential contributing factor to the (non-)accessibility and appeal of non-formal educational arrangements.

Methodological Framework

Funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research, the joint research project "DILABoration" aims at identifying conditions under which opportunities for participation and transformation of self-world-relations are enabled or impeded within non-formal digitalised educational arrangements, specifically regarding marginalised youth. *DILABoration* focuses on the orientations and realities of the target group as well as how they are being addressed by different non-formal arrangements. This provides an understanding of enabling and impeding factors that entail marginalised youth participation within the arrangements.

Therefore, *DILABoration* is implemented as an ethnographic field study carried out in two different institutions in Germany that offer a variety of non-formal digitalised educational arrangements including activities such as 3D-printing, gaming and coding. Both institutions differ in terms of their structural conditions, resources and location. Comparing both institutions enables the reconstruction of how these different conditions prevent or enable participation. The preconditions for youth participation are investigated through *Group Discussions* with (marginalised) youth who take part in the researched institutions' educational arrangements as well as youth who belong to the potential target groups in the respective neighbourhoods but participate in other non-specialised non-formal institutions, e.g. youth centres.

Group Discussions are analysed using the *Documentary Method* to reconstruct collective patterns of orientations that influence everyday practices (Bohnsack 2010). The term "orientation" signifies the implicit knowledge underlying practical action, from which a group's habitus can be identified (ibid.). In Group Discussions, depictions and narrations are unfolded by the participants. The researchers theoretically explicate the

implicit common knowledge of the group, thereby understanding their framework of orientation. In this paper, the documentary analysis of Group Discussions with youth is applied in order to examine conditions and orientations that enable or constrain participation in non-formal (digitalised) educational arrangements. Participants' narrations and discussions about their experiences within the educational arrangements as well as challenges and objectives in their everyday life provide insights in these orientations. The Documentary Method is combined with a habitus hermeneutic approach, which allows for the interpretation of reconstructed habitual patterns with sensitivity to social inequalities (Lange-Vester/Teiwes-Kügler 2013).

Findings Presented at AoIR 2024

At AoIR 2024, the methodological approach of *DILABoration* as well as findings from three Group Discussions with regard to conditions of participation in non-formal (digitalised) educational arrangements from a marginalised youth's perspective were presented and contrasted with a privileged youth's perspective. They mirror previous findings on habitual differences of children and youth in relation to social inequalities. Firstly, self-descriptions of skills in formal education by marginalised youth as opposed to privileged youth correspond with Jünger's (2008) findings on resource-specific (formal) educational logics and are proven to hold true for non-formal contexts: While marginalised youth describe themselves as unskilled in formal education and relate their non-formally and informally acquired skills to future professionalisation, privileged youth describe themselves as skilled in various educational contexts while they do not discuss possible career perspectives. Secondly, patterns of resource-specific structuring of leisure time activities, similar to Lareau's (2011) findings, were reconstructed: While marginalised youth describe mostly spontaneous and unstructured activities and focus on material (i.e. financial) aspects of daily life, privileged youth describe highly structured weekly schedules and focus on programmatic aspects in non-formal activities and represent an orientation in autonomous self-unfolding / self-expression. In relation to findings from ethnographic research within *DILABoration*, it can be stated that elements of "non-formality" in educational arrangements, that is openness and flexibility, are more likely to match with marginalised youth's orientations.

Regarding the conference theme "Industry", this approach provides an alternative perspective on digital education, which is often discussed in relation to requirements of the labour market and employability, see e.g. the discussion on *future and education skills 2030* (OECD 2023). This paper rejects a perspective on digital education that primarily considers industries' requirements and education as producing labour force. Instead, non-formal digitalised educational arrangements are researched as structures that may provide support and acquire meaning in marginalised youth's everyday lives within their respective communities by taking up a (marginalised) youth's perspectives.

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