"Participation is everything"
Young people’s voices on participation in school life

av

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Abstract


This thesis shows that participation is an important and comprehensive concept for young people. The aim of the thesis is to explore young people’s perspectives on and experiences of participation in school. Young people are in this research project understood as competent participants and as valuable contributors in research. Young people (aged 13–19 years) are involved as both research partners and research respondents. The design is explorative and mixed methods are used. Study 1 describes an interactive research circle with young people as research partners. Participation and asymmetric responsibility are identified as integral to research with young people. Study 2 describes a youth survey about young people’s participation that was conducted by the research partners in the research circle. This study shows that young people’s opportunities and abilities to communicate are crucial to their participation. Supportive relations are an important aspect and the young people describe that they want adults to support them in taking responsibility themselves. Study 3 is based on the results of the youth survey and describes a model of young people’s perspectives on participation. Viewed from young people’s perspectives, participation is shown to include social, educational and decision-making dimensions. Communication is identified as a central participatory dimension. This study describes how participation in school is created in both horizontal and vertical relations. Study 4 is about participation and exposure to bullying and threats in school and is informed by the results of the youth survey. This study shows how students with disabilities and especially students with multiple disabilities are in a vulnerable situation. They face greater risks of being excluded from participatory dimensions in school or of being more exposed to degrading treatment if they do participate. Girls with multiple disabilities seem to be in an extra vulnerable situation. Overall, this research project shows that young people’s perspectives are an important complement to adults’ perspectives on participation in school.

Keywords: children’s rights, human rights, participation, youth, interactive research, mixed methods, communication, intersectionality, disability

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