

Student participation in everyday school life

The students', teachers', and observer's perspective

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1 Introduction

Although student participation is required by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and many school laws, this is no guarantee for its implementation in everyday school life, because the implementation of such laws is “constructed through conversation among teachers, administrators, and external experts” (Spillane, 2004, p. 60). And tensions may exist between social and legal demands and its realization in everyday school life. Therefore, it is important to investigate how these tensions are dealt with and how student participation is realized in schools. This poster contribution will show how student participation takes place in daily routines and how it is perceived by students and teachers.

2 Previous Research

Research indicates that student participation occurs in different areas of school life such as school and class councils (e.g. Andersson, 2019; Brückmann & Lippert, 2014), creating individual learning plans (e.g. Quinn & Owen, 2016) and project weeks (e.g. Hecht & Hartmann, 2014). Despite several known areas where student participation occurs, and the fact that students do wish to participate (e.g. Müller-Kuhn, 2020), many students do not perceive school as a place of shared decisions and possibilities for participation (Forde et al., 2018). Students do not feel heard (Keisu & Ahlström, 2020) and they rarely have the opportunity to actually make an impact (Andersson, 2019).

3 Research Questions

1. How do members of the school community perceive participation?
2. Do correlations between the students' perception of participation and characteristics of the students exist?
3. How does participation appear in the daily routine at school?
4. Do correlations between the practice of participation and characteristics of the students exist in the daily routine?

4 Design

Two data sources from the Swiss study “Strengthen Participation – Improve School” were used and combined in a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). All data stem from the same five schools.

- The quantitative survey data depicts the perceptions of students and teachers.
- The qualitative participant observation data provided an external perspective on participation in the daily routine.

Quantitative data:

- 762 students (grades 4 to 9)
- 182 teachers

Participant observation data:

- Three classes in upper primary school (grades 4 to 6; students aged 9 to 12)
- three classes in lower secondary school (grades 7 to 9; students aged 12 to 15)
- 48 hours of multi-sited participant observations

5 Findings

1. How do members of the school community perceive participation?

Mean levels, standard deviations, level of significance (p) and effect size (d)

Participation measure	Students n = 762		Teachers n = 182		Group Comp.	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p	d
Encouragement	2.83	0.72	3.60	0.41	***	1.51
Voice	2.96	0.58	3.01	0.55	n.s.	0.08
Taking part	2.91	0.56	3.27	0.41	***	0.73
Satisfaction with possibilities	2.81	0.79	3.09	0.57	***	0.40
Satisfaction with result	2.90	0.79	3.03	0.62	*	0.18

Note. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, between students and teachers. A 4-point quasi Likert scale was utilized, ranging from 1 meaning low to 4 meaning high.

2. Do correlations between the students' perception of participation and characteristics of the students exist?

Correlations of participation and student characteristics; N_{Min}=725, N_{Max}=762

Measures	Grade ¹	Gender ²	Migrati- on back- ground ²	School perfor- mance ²	Like going to school ²
<i>Participation</i>					
Encouragement	-.16***	.08*	n.s.	.11**	.41***
Voice	-.23***	.09**	n.s.	.15***	.40***
Taking part	-.23***	.08*	n.s.	.11**	.39***
Satisfaction with possibilities	-.26***	.11**	n.s.	.12**	.36***
Satisfaction with result	-.10**	.11**	n.s.	.11**	.27***

Note. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001. ¹Spearman's rho, ²Pearson's correlation coefficient; scales: range = from low to high; gender: 1=male, 2=female

3. How does participation appear in the daily routine at school?

Participation took place regarding...

- ❖ Content and topic
- ❖ Organizational aspects of learning
- ❖ Negotiating with teachers
- ❖ Role inversion
- ❖ Sharing opinions, making suggestions and negotiating in class councils

4. Do correlations between the practice of participation and characteristics of the students exist in the daily routine?

- ❖ Correlation between participation and school grade: Participation in *primary school*: various forms of participation; learner-centered teaching styles with a higher level of participation. Participation in *secondary school*: teaching was less open and teacher-centered instruction was more prominent.
- ❖ Correlation between participation and student's gender: no coherent picture.

6 Conclusion

Student participation is not yet a self-evident attitude. Secondary schools have not yet internalized student participation. Primary schools are further developed in this area. It takes time for schools to reduce the tensions between social and legal demands and the realization in everyday school life. Research can support schools in that endeavor. Viewing (non) participative situations in their unique contexts can be also a helpful tool for each teacher to approach and improve their teaching practice.

