

Conference “Die Kunst der Partizipation in der Schule”; Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich

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The role of students in digitality-oriented school development: Insights into the German-Belgian SMASCH project

Over the past decades, and particularly promoted through the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have increasingly integrated ‘edtech’ (education technology) into their daily practices. Such edtech comprises learning management systems, communication systems, individual learning apps, and so on. While pandemic policies hereby understandably focused on the fast roll-out and implementation of digital infrastructures, quick solutions, standardized ‘ready-to-use’ systems, and usage skills (Cone et al., 2022), these foci have remained surprisingly dominant in edtech integration in schools, equally in post-pandemic contexts. This, however, also means that many schools in Germany and Belgium do not really consider digitization as integral part of school (community) development, but rather as something organized by small school delegations (such as media representatives, ‘Medienbeauftragte’, or engaged individual teachers). Consequently, debates around the digitization of schools have commonly been held unrelated to schools’ vision or pedagogical concept development (Hartong et al., 2022). Students, in turn, have typically been assigned the role of passive edtech users, who are hardly ever included into processes of edtech selection, design, or reflection.

Related hereto, even though over the past years, more participatory approaches towards edtech (co-) design and implementation have been developed (e.g., Richter & Allert, 2017; Chimbo & Gelderblom, 2014), these approaches have only started to become more systematically adopted in digital school development context. This equally means that there is still a substantial research gap in empirically investigating what exactly happens (differently) in schools when such approaches are implemented, also with specific regard to student participation.

Responding to that gap, this presentation provides insights into the German-Belgian SMASCH (Smart Schools) project (www.smasch.eu). For a duration of four years, this project works with 13 schools on integrating orientations towards digitality (which implies a focus on digital *culture*, instead of on technologies alone – Stalder, 2021) into individual school development contexts. From a research perspective, the interest of SMASCH lies in the concepts, (comparative) methodologies and school-internal dynamics that can be (used to) observe(d) when, and how, schools start a long-term, systematic engagement with the topic of digitality.

Providing insights into the project’s experiences in the schools thus far, this presentation particularly focuses on the question of how the role of *students* in digital school development manifested in the schools prior to the project, which activities were designed to enhance, but also to systematically reflect on students’ involvement, and which effects of these activities

could be observed. Examples of such activities hereby range from digital learning material development for multicultural language contexts, VR-based school vision development, to the design of a new school app from scratch.

References

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