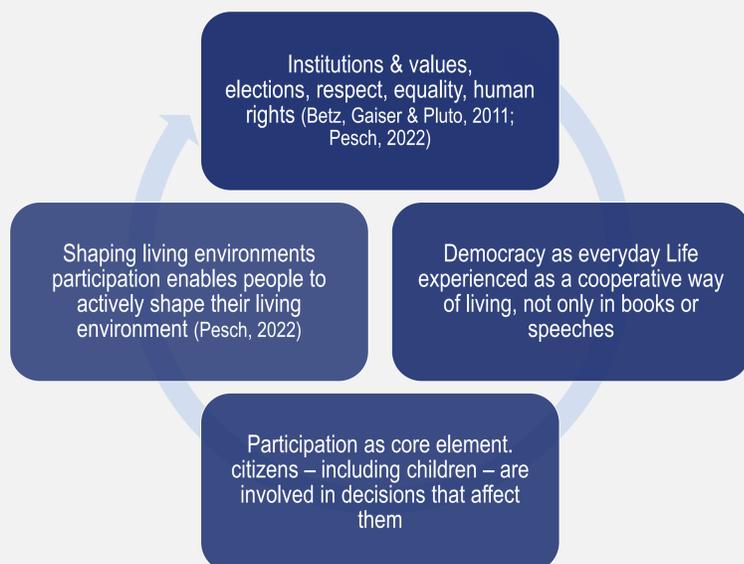# Participation as a Resource in Primary Democratic Education: Student Involvement, Discourse Competences, and Teacher Well-Being

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Democratic systems

Institutions & values, elections, respect, equality, human rights (Betz, Gaiser & Pluto, 2011; Pesch, 2022)

Shaping living environments participation enables people to actively shape their living environment (Pesch, 2022)

Democracy as everyday Life experienced as a cooperative way of living, not only in books or speeches

Participation as core element. citizens – including children – are involved in decisions that affect them

The role of teachers and their job satisfaction

- Diffusion of responsibility, reluctance to share power, and lack of binding structures often hinder genuine participation in schools (Besand, 2019, p. 265; Fatke & Schneider, 2008, pp. 7f)

- Research indicates that teachers' job satisfaction is closely linked to different frames: class well-being and learning activity; students' individual personality development; the feeling of "making a difference" on students' attitudes and actions; and sustaining subject-specific, research-oriented learning (Schneider, 2020, pp. 40f)

- Classroom participation and negotiation processes can thus be seen not only as means for students' democratic education but also as a resource for teachers' sense of meaning, self-efficacy, and possibly their job satisfaction

Democratic education

- Democratic education is conceptualised as a learner-centred, holistic educational process enabling students to understand, reflect on, critique, and transform social reality (Haarmann et al., 2020, p. 1; Himmelmann, 2017, p. 26; Kenner & Lange, 2020, p. 48f)

- Beyond factual knowledge, it emphasises critical thinking, discussion, and negotiation skills as core elements of democratic competence (Haarmann et al., 2020, p. 2)

- Discourse competences are viewed as prerequisites for political participation and as a key component of democratic education in general studies (Haarmann, et al 2020, p. 2; Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, 2024, p. 14)

- They are an important component of curricular requirements (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, 2024, p. 14)

Young Citizens and student participation

- Young Citizens are children who, through critical and reflective engagement with the political world, experience themselves as autonomous political actors (Kenner & Lange, 2022, p. 18)

- Student participation is understood as students' meaningful involvement in decisions and processes that affect their learning and school life (Kenner & Lange, 2020, p. 2; Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, 2024, p. 14).

- It is a child's right (UNCRC) and can reduce educational inequalities, support learning and development, and foster self-efficacy and responsibility in power-sharing settings (United Nations, 2009, p. 5; Büker et al., 2021, p. 392; Widmaier & Nonnenmacher, 2011, p. 7)

- Empirical findings show that German primary school children have fewer opportunities for co-determination than in other types of school (Althaus & Andresen, 2023, pp. 25–28; Hanke et al., 2024, pp. 28, 33ff)

- Clear wishes for involvement in school and everyday life are expressed throughout different age groups (Althaus & Andresen, 2023, pp. 25–28; Hanke et al., 2024, pp. 28, 33ff)

- Lack of school participation can weaken democratic convictions and satisfaction with schools (Althaus & Andresen, 2023, pp. 25–28; Hanke et al., 2024, pp. 28, 33ff)

Planned Study – Ideas and Questions

Aim: To map the current state of student discourse competences and teachers' understandings and practices of participation in primary general studies, and to identify ways of addressing perceived barriers and potentials.

Idea 1: **Guided interviews** with **teachers**, focusing on their perception of student participation

- Is it appropriate to focus primarily on the teachers' perspectives in order to address the study's aim?

Idea 2: **Group discussions** with **primary school students** to make their discourse competence and will to participate visible

- How can children's discourse competence be captured in an age-appropriate and ethically sound way?
- Which tasks or prompts help to make „genuine" participation visible rather than staged?

Idea 3: **Case studies** combining classroom observations, short **students** group discussions, and **teacher** interviews in selected classes

- Which sample should be selected (e.g. selection of schools, number of classes examined)?
- Which indicators could best link quality of participation, pupils' discourse competences, and teachers' job satisfaction?

Bibliography

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