

Introduction

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Education and *the social* are intrinsically linked as education happens within a social context, through social interaction and provides orientation in the social world. The term education itself carries a series of meanings that range from more formal education in the sense of *Bildung* or *formazione*, to an understanding more closely linked to concepts such as socialisation and *Erziehung* (Loch & Trott, 2020). Education is a social process influenced by the entire environment, in which all those involved (the individual, families, schools etc.) bear responsibility (Deutsches Schulamt, 2008) and play an active role in both the mediation and appropriation of education itself. Much like the contributions in this chapter, education accompanies the individual throughout all stages of child- and youthhood and – in an optic of lifelong learning – well beyond that, throughout their entire life.

Formal education has long been found to be a powerful tool in striving for social justice and social inclusion, in empowering the individual and thus whole communities (Mittler, 2000; White, 2014). At the same time, education constitutes one of the central institutions in which and through which society recreates social inequality (Antoninis et al., 2016). Challenging the recreation of inequality and social injustice is thus a central task of (social) education.

Both formal and non-formal education, as well as initiatives in the borderlands between the two, can support families and communities in the lifelong processes involved in the socialisation of young and/or new members of societies, through which they acquire the tools necessary to successfully navigate their lifeworld (Thorpe, 2019).

The authors of this chapter look at the social impact or meaning of education in different institutional settings, across different life ages, namely an early childhood education and care setting for zero to three years-olds, young

pupils' transition from kindergarten to elementary school, and a peer-education project for young people offered by a youth club. Jointly, this chapter addresses some of the most pertinent challenges currently facing the field of education and training, identified by the European Commission: Access to and quality of early childhood education and care (European Commission et al., 2019), the integration and closer collaboration of the educational system across school forms (Council conclusions 2019/C 119/02), and the development and management of skills, also outside of formal education.

In her contribution, Anna Aluffi Pentini shares her experience of an inclusive and participatory project in early childhood education, that turns a space of institutional education for the smallest members of society into a space of learning and participation for the whole family. In her analysis, the social value of early childhood education derives from reflective professional practice the educators' intentional efforts to locate their practice within the lifeworld of the children. Building relationships with the children and their families and connecting them with existing local and cultural initiatives further promotes possibilities to augment the social value of institutional early childhood education.

Ulrike Stadler-Altmann and Susanne Schumacher use photographs to trace the transition of children – and their families – from kindergarten to primary schools in three distinct geographical contexts, namely Germany, Italy and Japan. In doing so, they construct the transition from one institutional and educational context to another one as a social and individual challenge for both the pupils and their family members. The photographs shown highlight different individual and collective coping strategies applied to overcome said challenge within the respective national and cultural contexts. Despite all differences between the three educational systems represented, all transition practices are united by the joint symbolic performance of transitional routines and traditions.

Finally, Ulrike Huber Girardi and Doris Kofler move the reader's attention to spaces of non-formal education, looking at the value of peer education in youth work in the context of a coming-of-age adventure project for young people. At the core of the project – which sees young people receive leadership training and then pass on their skills and offer mentorship to younger peers – is the development of a set of skills: the development of a coherent

concept of self, the development of a concept of relationship, the development of an individual concept of knowledge and methods, and the development of authentic leadership skills.

Jointly, the contributions here presented provide an overview of how institutional actors, the individual and their families co-create different environments of lifeworld education, continuously negotiating their respective roles in the process.

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