

Education in the life course - educational relations

Individual, Culture and Institutions in Global Change

Research and teaching in the Department of Education and Social Sciences of the Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of Cologne are characterized by an active-critical reflection of the processes and results of global change, whereby education is fundamentally understood as education in the life course as well as integrated into social relations.

Education is investigated on an individual, institutional and societal level as well as in their interconnectedness. The individual level includes educational processes and trajectories in the life phases of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. The institutional level includes the design of educational offerings and educational practices in elementary school and out-of-school education as well as in higher education, adult education, and geragogy. On the societal level, mediality, interculturality, migration and gender as well as social milieus are focused on as factors that both co-determine educational relationships and that are generated and transformed by them. The levels are permeated by social and cultural practices, heterogeneity and diversity, and encompass both (non-)formal and informal educational processes.

At the global level, the focus is on critical reflection and analysis of the constructive and destructive effects of our actions and research on the environment and our fellow human beings, and on global and ecological responsibility with its ethical implications and conflicts. Related to this, in research and teaching, is work on the transformation of education to develop knowledge and trust to meet the challenges of the ecological crisis in the context of educational processes.

Since the early 1990s - the end of the bloc confrontation and the Cold War - processes of Europeanization and globalization have gained additional momentum, linked to the 'digital revolution' that has intensified since the end of the 20th century: This has had and continues to have the effect of changing almost all areas of life, and is permanently altering world society, as are the global climate and demographic changes in Western civilizations, not least in West German society. Pedagogical practice is involved in these highly complex and accelerated processes of change, which are effective globally, regionally and locally. These processes are characterized on the one hand by an increasing spatial and temporal dissolution of boundaries of information and education, but at the same time also by the

limitation and threat to learning experiences and forms of knowledge. Cultural forms of knowledge and individual educational processes are changing, as are the instances and contexts of socialization processes and the demands and courses of educational, professional and life biographies. The changes generate new relations between homogeneity and heterogeneity, integration and segregation, individual and collective identities, formal and informal education, and alter the structures of lifelong learning, education, and continuing education.

From the perspective of the educational and social sciences, the current phase of digitized globalization brings about novel challenges in dealing with complexity and contingency, with enhancing confusion and uncertainty. Societal and climatic, but also biographical side effects of subjective decisions, choices and actions need to be dealt with, and problems of high complexity require mastery. Life-world, cultural and social diversity in heterogeneous societies, overlapping economic, ecological and social inequality structures and changed migration processes, cultural identities and gender relations, entrepreneurial and fitness-related self-optimization pressures and historically changed domestic and non-European forms of government and political discourse practices all pose new challenges to education and knowledge, and impact on everyday pedagogical life. Additional challenges require attention to the consequences of social poverty and precariousness on the one hand, as well as changing mechanisms of privilege on the other; the consequences of the segregation of cultural milieus; and the splitting off of political scenes and media networks in their contradictory facets and performative practices. Education has become, not only a constitutive feature of modern economy, but furthermore an organizing and integrating principle, as well as a problem source for modern societies in their cultural diversity. Education, knowledge acquisition, educational management and further education are organized in and permeated by specific social relations; they encompass the entire life course and are at the same time a lifelong task for each individual. Each individual receives formal education in institutions ranging from early childhood to adult and continuing education. However, processes of informal and non-formal education begin early in the life course, both within and outside of educational institutions, and continue throughout the life span. Questions of the individual about identity formation and social participation in areas of production and reproduction repeatedly arise at many points in life. Individuals learn and educate not only within educational institutions, but learning and educational processes

unfold throughout life in all lifeworld contexts. These can be interconnected or they can be mutually exclusive and lead to conflict. This results in persistent and reconfiguring social inequalities in the educational system, both in terms of persistent disadvantage of social groups by social origin or cultural attributions, and in terms of the educational privilege of the social middle, which has become a lifelong educational compulsion. Education is neither limited to learning experiences in educational institutions nor to those in certain phases of life, and a focus on transcultural and democratic societies requires the educational and social science conceptualization of an education in the life course.

Education is not a straightforward process, but is rather ambivalent and contradictory: On the one hand, the subject is to be promoted in its diversity, aesthetics and reflexivity; on the other hand, processes of selection and exclusion, of identification and formation, are always connected with it. Education can be interpreted as a comprehensive and purposeless development of the human being and yet it always means school and vocational education against the background of specific expectations and standardizations. Educational advancement and educational disadvantage are closely related, as individual education contributes to social integration in the context of social norming and collective separations; these processes of integration, classification, and separation are in turn linked to practices of classification, categorization, and distinction. Thus, while education refers to general and universally recognized life skills, these are not equally available or desirable for all people. The profile "Education in the Life Course - Educational Relations. Individuals, Institutions and Society in Global Change" examines education as a life-time process of perceptive, thinking and acting engagement with oneself, others and the world. An essential characteristic of such educational processes is the repeated experience of difference between institutional requirements and individual abilities. From an educational and social science perspective, the focus at the individual level is therefore on those educational processes with which difference becomes tangible as a biographical experience in the life course within and between the life phases of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age, and can be traced in its reproduction or processing. Educational biographies unfold in relation to 'inner logics' of educational institutions over the lifetime and the respective historically evolved educational system of a society. Knowledge about individual processing is therefore supplemented in the profile by empirically founded and theoretically elaborated research and teaching on the institutional framework conditions of elementary, school and out-of-

school education as well as further education and geragogy. This is a prerequisite for the production of pedagogical and sociological professional knowledge and includes knowledge about medially mediated and digitalized forms of practice. In addition, this knowledge makes it possible to create professional offerings and school and out-of-school situations in which people of all ages can be challenged to creatively engage with themselves, with others, and with the world.

Furthermore, the educational and social sciences face the task of placing global as well as local or (trans-)national standardizations and requirements of modern knowledge societies in their interconnections and manifold manifestations in the context of their individual processing. In this context, the department's study of education takes into account social conditions with regard to technical and mediating effects, worldwide migration movements, conditions and results of global and local interculturality and ecological transformation processes, changed living arrangements and gender relations, questions of persistent and changing social inequality and demographic change.

In this perspective, educational processes (non-formal, formal and informal) cannot be grasped without taking into account cultural and social practices and the heterogeneity and diversity they weave through each other. Heterogeneity and diversity are thus as much research and teaching topics as are the organizational forms of school and out-of-school educational settings, through which cultural and social practices are generated and transformed at the same time. Learning and education as the formation of subjective patterns of interpretation and reflexive self- and world relations take place in these contexts. This is not only a matter of researching educational acquisition and the processing of knowledge stocks among children, adolescents, adults and the elderly, or the educational content and medially organized forms of practice in preschool, school and further education institutions. Contingencies - such as the unavailability of knowledge and the behavioral patterns of social milieus designated as educationally distant, as well as the ambivalences and resistances of adolescents and adults to standardized, economized, and digitized instrumentalization - are equally relevant and central to this profile, since questions of the resistant, the corporeal, and the incommensurable, of transformation and the problematic, violent, and conflictual are of equal interest.

It is then also the task of the educational and social sciences to work through relevant theories and discourses of their disciplines in their scientific genesis in order to be able to

gain interpretative horizons for problem definitions. Furthermore, it is a matter of (further) developing theories against the background of an interdisciplinary exchange, which enable the perception, research and analysis of problem situations. In this way, historically critical terms, concepts and strands of argumentation are elaborated for educational and social science questions and subject areas, and perspectives for possible further developments are sketched out. At the same time, the empirical view is expanded through a methodological discussion, which understands practice as the field through which processes of communicative negotiation and definition can be analyzed. A balancing between educational theory and educational research, between theory development and methodologies, scientific approaches to learning, education and educational relations and empirical processes of knowledge about practice, organizational and professional action evokes critical reflections on basic pedagogical and social scientific assumptions.

Given the presence of education, upbringing and socialization in public discourses and the high expectations placed on education and educational institutions, another central task of the educational and social sciences is to examine them scientifically, but to pursue this examination through the design of educational and social science concepts, and to analyze these concepts in terms of their educational and social consequences and side-effects. In this sense, the educational and social sciences not only provide knowledge about the design, reception and effectiveness of educational relationships and processes and their professions (e.g., about the actions of teachers). In a reflexive perspective, they always see themselves as an authority that distances itself from its object by describing it from outside, takes it for granted, and frees itself from everyday convictions and control expectations in order to illuminate the social prerequisites and conditions of education. This includes the inclusion of interdisciplinary knowledge from those disciplines that deal with health and care, with housing and space, materiality and technology, with questions of justice or social and ecological management.

The research fields of formal, non-formal and informal, school and out-of-school learning and educational processes of individuals, which are related to the individual phases of life, always contain international and transcultural issues. International comparative research on institutional forms, conditions and practices of professional action in different systems as well as pedagogical practices in social contexts and individual lifestyles take global change into account. In this way, research opens up the possibility of looking at infrastructural and

living standards, social poverty and the education system, but also structures of social inequality and differentiation from an international perspective and at the same time analyzing them critically: Which countries have which educational standards, forms of schooling, ways of life, and (trans-) cultural and media-mediated forms of practice? Which of these enable more possibilities for learning and educational processes in childhood and adolescence, in adulthood and old age? What insights can be derived from this for educational policy, and what educational measures can be established?

Against this background, individual forms of life and subjective processes of upbringing and education are placed in the context of biography, culture, social norms and resistance to them, as well as institutionalization and the entanglements, overlaps and indeterminacies between social, symbolic and material practices and field-specific structures, between socio-cultural milieus and organizational cultures and their intra- and intergenerational relations, between reproduction and renewal of cultural forms, patterns and movements, focusing in particular on socially and pedagogically relevant, gender- and migration-related, as well as age-, class- and scene-related classifications and stereotyping.