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DOING REFLEXIVITY IN A SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING SETTING

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Self-reflection has gained central importance in the educational reform discourse in many countries. The recently introduced curriculum for compulsory education in the German-speaking Swiss cantons, for example, prominently emphasizes self-reflection as a competence. Being capable of “self-reflection” and “reflection on one’s own learning process” are identified and operationalized by the curricula as basic interdisciplinary competences. In accordance with the policy trend, reform-oriented schools that prioritize new curricular objectives, such as individualized teaching and autonomous learning, highlight the importance of self-reflection on their home pages, school programmes, and mission statements. Autonomy-oriented school settings promise to successfully support self-reflection with specific tools such as learning logs or individual coaching sessions. Finally, self-reflection appears as a comprising strategy in teacher education and training. The guiding pedagogical framework of our own University of Teacher Education defines self-reflection as an instrument that should enable pupils and lecturers to “reflect on and successfully practice their daily work” (PHBern, 2012).

Given the popularity of the topic, it is surprising that self-reflection is far less prominent in educational research. Didactical and practice-oriented approaches identify self-reflection as indispensable for the optimization of the learning process and operationalize it for teaching practice (Gläser-Zikuda & Hascher, 2007; Helmke, 2003, 2009; Hilbe & Herzog, 2011). Furthermore, psychological approaches conceptualize self-reflection as a facet of metacognition in models of self-regulated learning. Beyond these strands of scholarly concern, self-reflection is conspicuously absent in educational research in general and in empirical classroom research in particular. Overall, the questions about how self-reflection takes place in pedagogical settings and to what extent these

practices can be understood as self-reflection at all, therefore, remain largely unanswered. We think that this discrepancy between the omnipresence of the programmatic discourse and the scarcity of empirical research hints at the “taken-for-granted nature of reflection” (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013, p. 24).

To problematize the ostensible self-evidence of reflection as an instrument for improving learning outcomes, it seems necessary to cast the critical gaze in two directions. On the one hand, it calls for zooming out and for asking how the increased popularity of the concept is located in a broader socio-political context. On the other hand, it requires zooming into the concrete pedagogical practices of reflection and examining these efforts with regard to their programmatic framework as well as their inherent difficulties. The current chapter falls into four parts. First, we reconstruct the socio-political framework within which self-reflection is to be situated and we conceptually analyse the theoretical construct. Second, we recapitulate the rather scarce empirical research that focuses on reflective practices in classroom settings. Third, we will present our own empirical material, and, finally, we will draw a conclusion attempting to shed light on some of the fundamental problems associated with reflection within the educational context.

Self-reflection as a central imperative in reflexive modernity

The prominence that reflection has gained within the educational discourse since the end of the 20th century is related to the socio-political development in the second or late modernity, known as “reflexive modernity” (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Beck & Holzer, 2004). This development is characterized by a growing degree of complexity, opacity, and a decrease in reliable means of orientation. In this increasingly contingent and unstable environment, the individual is challenged to make decisions in a situation of uncertainty, without a reliable basis for decision-making at their disposal. Thus, the “ultimate responsibility of decision-making” (Beck, 2007, p. 347) is placed upon the shoulders of the individual. Within reflexive modernity, the individual is required to make rational decisions through reflective practices such as questioning and examining, planning, assessing, and calculating (Wiesenthal, 2009). In this context, the critical self-reflection of one’s own preferences and wishes is a central aspect of autonomy (Dworkin, 2015). The demanded reflexivity serves as a compass for the always momentary decision-making processes under conditions of uncertainty.

Transferred to the social sciences, the central aspects from the philosophical understanding of reflexivity – the thinking of thinking, recognition of recognition (Forster, 2014) – are maintained, while the frame of reference is expanded. While the classical philosophical concept is concerned with the subject and limited to it, a social science perspective may widen reflexivity to a whole social system, a historical epoch, or a specific scientific practice (cf. exemplarily for a

“reflexive educational theory”, Rieger-Ladich, Friebertshäuser, & Wigger, 2009). Thereby, a clear-cut, systematic distinction between reflection and reflexivity can hardly be made (*ibid.*). While in the case of a subject it may be helpful to distinguish between reflection as a practice and reflexivity as an attitude, this distinction is barely possible in the case of social (sub-)systems. Leaving this distinction, it can be concluded that the “reflexive turn” refers to a new mode that affects the individual level, social systems, or scientific practices, which uses reflexive distance to critically assess the premises and consequences of decision-making under increased uncertainty.

The discourse on “lifelong learning” seamlessly follows the theory of reflexive modernity. In the context of contingent conditions of decision-making, the outcome of learning processes is fundamentally open. Learning then becomes a form of permanent and never-ending reorientation and adaptation to economic and social changes. Thereby, the focus is no longer on the accumulation of knowledge and qualifications but on a reflexive understanding of learning. Reflexivity instead of reflex is the motto of the demanded adaptation to transformation and uncertainty (Edwards, Ranson, & Strain, 2010). The theory of lifelong learning initially was developed in adult education, especially in professionalization theories. Schön’s (1983) early concept of the “reflective practitioner” served as an inspiration and marks a discourse that has prevalently concentrated on teacher professionalization since the end of the 20th century (Altrichter, 2000; Chak, 2006; van Manen, 1995). The concept of the “reflective practitioner” also works within this discourse on teacher professionalization as a response to crises and difficulties that are identified as belonging to “reflexive modernity”: confronted with new and unpredictable problems, trained routines fail and need to be adapted and readjusted. Here, reflection is supposed to function as a kind of transmitter that translates the observations of previous actions into an improvement strategy. While “reflection-in-action” takes place implicitly and during the action itself, “reflection-on-action” steps out of this flow. The latter mode distances itself during the act of explicating and tries to become aware of the action’s inherent logic.

Reflective practice has been understood as the ideal of professional teaching practice and a “central guiding principle in teacher education” for several decades (Neuweg, 2010, p. 44). It is assumed that gaining awareness of one’s own action-guiding beliefs, norms, and emotions inevitably leads to improved practice (critically Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013). Thus, reflexivity and autonomy have become “magic words” in teacher education and training (Wrana, 2006). They are implemented within autonomy-oriented learning settings in the form of portfolios, learning journals, feedback loops, and coaching sessions. This didactic of reflexivity has also managed to reach classrooms at the school level – at least in German-speaking countries. An autonomy-oriented practice controlled by reflexivity is considered superior to rehearsed routines. This dichotomous view creates an opposition between the rational, self-governing subject on the

one hand and conventions, traditions, and ritualization on the other. Successful “uncertainty management” (Wiesenthal, 2009, p. 38) is connected to a reflexive actor, who increasingly reflects not only on his own actions but also on her own self for the purpose of optimization. And while one analytically may distinguish between an epistemological form of reflection that focuses on one’s actions and an ontological one that centres on the self (Rolfe & Gardner, 2006), the systematic distinction is often difficult to make in practice: the optimization of action and of the self overlap; thus, the demand of optimization reaches the self.

Actor-centred theoretical approaches assume that the autonomous reflexive actor is able to examine their own practice from the outside, in order to reflect on and intentionally change it. Thereby, the distinction between reflection and practice is not only a categorical but also an essentialist one. Sociological theories of practice, on the other hand, understand reflection itself as a practice. “Doing reflection”, the performance of reflecting, is a cultural practice, which, like other practices, draws on culturally shaped patterns and codes and produces specific subject positions (Reckwitz, 2009). Rather than programmatically propagating reflection as a strategy for coping with crises and optimizing one’s own practices, a practice-theoretical perspective focuses on the doings of reflection itself. It is then a matter of analysing the cultural conditions in which reflexivity is embedded and of scrutinizing the social effects it generates.

Ethnographic perspectives on pupil self-reflection

A few authors in the field of German-speaking educational ethnography address the phenomenon of “doing reflection” in individualized, autonomy-oriented classrooms. Rabenstein and Reh (2007) analyse various forms of pupils’ learning process documentation and related teacher-pupil conversations. The authors conclude that the pupils’ documents are primarily a monitoring tool in the hands of teachers, while pupils perform as self-reflecting and improving learners during the conversations with their teachers. Menzel and Rademacher (2012) scrutinize the structural logic of questionnaires used for pupil self-assessment in a Montessori school. They show that the questionnaire is formulated in such a way that it requires pupils to relate themselves to their social environment in a self-problematizing way. This demand, the authors conclude, does not foster self-assessment competences but obliges pupils to position themselves in relation to the school demands (*ibid.*, p. 91). Under the disguise of autonomy and reflexivity, the identification with and the internalization of the school norms is pursued. Therewith, the instrument subjugates the pupils while obfuscating its governmental technology of power at the same time.

Finally, Martens (2018) focuses on teaching sequences in which pupils are encouraged to openly reflect on their own learning behaviour in front of the class. He also concludes that the point of reference for these reflective practices is not the pupil’s own self and preferences but the teacher’s expectations (*ibid.*, p. 100). Ultimately, it is a matter of fulfilling the school norms and integrating

them into the system of performance evaluation. In sum, the studies show how self-reflection is reduced to self-evaluation as part of a school-based assessment process, which ultimately fosters the reproduction of school norms and expectations.

These briefly summarized ethnographic studies suggest that reflective practices are uniformly enacted in the classroom. Moreover, the constricted gaze on the observed micro-practices prevents them from including the structural dimensions of the field in their analysis. In contrast, our discussion pays attention to the possible varieties of these practices and considers the structuring effects of the field.

Practices of self-reflection in a self-directed learning setting in Switzerland

The following analysis is based on an ethnographic research project on autonomy-oriented classroom settings at the lower secondary level.¹ The project encompasses five case studies in the French and German-speaking parts of Switzerland.² The project analyses from a practice-theoretical perspective the sociality of classrooms that distinguish themselves by a focus on pupils' self-directed learning. With a practice-theoretical perspective (Reckwitz, 2002) and following Foucault's (2000) notion of governmentality, the project is particularly interested in the practices of guidance and self-guidance that the *dispositif* of autonomous learning produces in the classroom, and beyond, in the school as an organization. Fieldwork included participant observation in a variety of classroom settings, as well as in coaching interactions, team meetings, and school conferences. These observations of teachers' and pupils' practices were, when possible, supported by audio recordings and supplemented by ethnographic interviews with teachers, pupils, and headteachers.

The following discussion is concerned with pupil self-reflection, which was in all five case studies an important issue. The analysis monitors the extraordinary efforts made to stimulate pupil self-reflection in one of the case studies. The research in this school comprised 90 visits or a total of 200 hours spent in classrooms and team meetings between October 2017 and February 2020.³

The school is located in an urban neighbourhood where residential and industrial zones merge together. It accommodates around 600 pupils from age 12 to 15 from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The school was built only a few years ago: therefore, the construction of a new school building was developed in line with the new pedagogical concept. Instead of conventional classrooms, larger pedagogical units with heterogeneous student composition form the backbone of the school. These units materialize the transformation of the classic disciplinary classroom towards an autonomy-oriented setting with individualized support of pupils. The centrepiece of the pedagogical unit is the learning studio, complemented by two smaller rooms: one for subject class instruction and one for group work. Architecturally similar to an open office, the learning studio offers working space for 60 pupils and several teachers. The learning

studio is where the pupils spend about one third of their time, sitting at their personalized tables and working individually on their given tasks (Hangartner, Fankhauser, Budde, Forkby, & Alstam, 2022). The rest of the time, the 60 pupils of the unit are organized into sub-groups for class teaching. These groups vary depending on the subject and usually transcend either grades or performance levels. As a result, pupils meet in a wide variety of learning constellations during a school week. The pedagogical unit is supervised by a small team of five to seven teachers. They are responsible for subject teaching, as well as for individual coaching during the three years that the pupils spend in the learning studio. The pedagogical units thus create small, social habitats within the school at large.

Accompanying self-directed learning in the learning studio, self-reflection is an explicit cornerstone of the school's pedagogical concept. The importance of self-reflection as part of the autonomy *dispositif* is made obvious by the devices created for this purpose: at least once per quarter year, each pupil meets with her or his coach for a session in which the pupil's learning progress and behaviour are evaluated and goals for the following weeks are defined (Hangartner, Kaspar, & Fankhauser, 2019). One lesson per week is reserved for heterogeneous learning groups in which the pupils are supposed to reflect on their learning. According to the school's pedagogical vision, the exchanges taking place in these groups should assist the pupils towards improving their social and self-competencies. In addition to these interactive opportunities for self-reflection, teachers use written tools to guide the pupils' reflection: a learning journal is to be used for planning and reflection. Furthermore, various standardized forms for reflection and the self-assessment of learning sustain the preparation of coaching sessions or parent-teacher meetings. The mid-term school report includes such a self-evaluation form, with which the pupils, in addition to the teachers, are to assess their performance and behaviour. In addition to the regular coaching appointment, the weekly learning group meetings and the self-evaluation forms, the pupils are also asked to engage in self-reflection situationally, for example, to reflect on extracurricular projects.

While the multitude of tools reflects the proclaimed importance of reflection for autonomous learning, the experiences that we witnessed during fieldwork came across as ambivalent. At a school conference a few months after the beginning of fieldwork, the principal reported on the results of an internal evaluation that included not only teachers but also pupils and their parents. Among the critical evaluation results, reflection tools were identified as a challenge, right after the prominent issue of excessive teacher workload. The principal summed up the feedback by saying that "something doesn't work out" concerning the learning groups, that the teachers were uncertain about the success of the coaching sessions, and pupils assessed that the learning journals were totally unnecessary.⁴ The principal concluded that in the long term, the instruments for reflection were challenged and that new ideas would have to be sought. However, the teams should not stress out and could continue to work as they did before or as they saw fit.

The criticism of the reflection tools revealed by the evaluation was also evident in the two pedagogical units in which we did our research. Already at the beginning of fieldwork, the “learning journal” was presented to us with the comment that the pupils were reluctant to use it properly. Instead of using it for planning and reflection, they used it merely as a daily planner. In the learning group lessons observed in the first months of fieldwork, the expected reflection did not take place. For example, pupils were asked to reflect on communication strategies, give feedback on each other’s presentations, or help each other with the “learning jobs”. The majority of the pupils were reserved towards the prescribed exchange in the groups that were heterogenous in age and performance level. The pupils tended to complete the demand of group work as quickly as possible and without any content-related discussion so that they could return to working on their individual learning tasks as soon as possible. Based on the pupil feedback that the learning groups amounted to “wasted time”, the teacher teams discussed adaptations of the tasks and goals of the learning groups in both pedagogical units. Finally, the learning groups were spared the imperative of reflection; instead, pupils were allowed to work on specific tasks (e.g., planning for the winter camp) in groups selected by the pupils or to devote more time to individual work on the learning tasks.

In one of the pedagogical units, a new reflection tool, the so-called green booklet, was introduced to encourage individual reflection on the learning process (see the following section). In the interview with the ethnographer, the teachers disclosed ambiguous stances towards the standardized reflection tools. While some teachers valued the forms as a means of preparation for the coaching interview, others criticized the instrument as useless since the pupils would only mechanically fill them out.

All in all, the school used a variety of devices to encourage the pupils’ reflection on their learning. By evaluating the experiences with the reflection tools, the school as an organization itself demonstrated a reflexive self-understanding. In the realm of pedagogical practice, however, dissonances were revealed between the teachers’ sincere efforts to implement the conceptual objectives and the critical reactions of the pupils, accompanied by doubts from some teachers as well. Due to the ever-so-ambivalent experiences, the teachers opted for a pragmatic approach by trying out new reflection instruments and putting the old ones aside.

In the following part, we shall discuss the differences between the logic of the reflection instruments and their – varied – processing by the pupils, using the example of two reflection tools. The first instrument is the “green booklet” mentioned earlier; the second example analysis is a reflection prompt in the context of a weeklong project on climate change. Both examples are written reflection tasks that we explore as materialized manifestations of reflective practices. Given the limited insights into how teachers dealt with these particular reflection exercises, we analyse their written traces to identify the cultural codes they activate and the subject positions they produce.

Doing reflexivity: The “green booklet”

The “green booklet” consists of a notebook in which pupils should write down their reflections. The notebook is accompanied by a reflection questionnaire, from which the teacher chooses a question on which the pupils are to reflect. The questionnaire began by instructing the pupils to briefly review the past school week and to take five minutes to write notes down in the green booklet. The instrument thus serves the intention to evaluate previous experiences and to derive helpful insights for the upcoming week. The five sections dividing up the questionnaire (“Subject-related”, “Work behaviour”, “Personal level”, “Emotions”, “Self-reflection”) contain three to six questions each. The thematic differences between the blocks are blurry, leaving the last section filled with all the leftover questions. Beyond the thematic division, the questionnaire roughly contains two categories of questions. The first category calls for expressing the perception of one’s own experiences, interests, meaningfulness, feelings, and motivation in relation to school subjects or learning. It asks for example: “What is important to me in relation to the content learned in subject XY?” These questions ask pupils to connect their selves to learning as a process and its content. Through such subjectifying introspection, learning becomes something that belongs to one’s own and that is not dictated from the outside.

The questions belonging to the second category intend to evaluate and improve learning. Here, time management and efficient planning, the choice of learning partners, and learning achievements are put to the test. The focus is not to attain subject-specific goals but to optimize learning as a technology and process. The integration of these two different sorts of questions imparts the questionnaire with cultural codes of both self-development and self-optimization (Reckwitz, 2009, p. 174). Due to this dual approach, pupils are addressed as autonomous, self-responsible subjects actively acting on themselves through self-reflection (Edwards, 2008). The formulation of the questions using the “I”-form implies that introspection does not come across as externally imposed, but rather as a skill that the pupils internalize while simultaneously acquiring the technique of self-interrogation. So, what does the application of the tool look like in practice?

Reflection through the use of the green booklet was scheduled for Monday mornings at the beginning of class when pupils gathered in the learning studio. After its introduction at the beginning of the year, the green booklet was used regularly for five months and a total of nine times. The booklets were still lying around on desks some weeks after the next school year had started, but they had not been put to use again. The majority of the selected questions belong to the second category of self-optimization, with the exception of the question “What makes me satisfied/dissatisfied when learning?” and the question about connections between the topics of different subjects. The following insights are based on an analysis of the booklet entries of five pupils (from different grades and performance levels), as well as on interviews with the pupils.

The first striking impression when looking through the entries in the booklets are their brief length and their formality. Furthermore, the pupils' entries conspicuously reveal a prevalence of self-accusations and moral intentions of improvement. The pupils' use of identical, general formulations however suggests that pupils repeated corresponding appeals. The repetitive completion of self-assessment forms which the pupils are accustomed to seems to contribute to the transformation of reflection prompts into routines of processing (Matter & Brosziewski, 2014). In contrast to these dominant patterns, two questions – asking about the connection between the different subject contents and about one's own contribution to a productive learning environment – were answered in such a diverse way that these do not seem to belong to the usual repertoire of self-reflection questions.

In the following, we take a closer look at the variety of the pupils' answering behaviour. The question chosen belongs to the subject-related section and asks about typical mistakes pupils make and how to avoid them. The answers repeat the dominant patterns but nevertheless disclose distinctions among the pupils.

The first and very obvious observation that can be made when looking at the answers (depicted in Table 7.1) is their lack of connection to subject-related learning. Nonetheless, the entries nuance the trend of generalized self-diagnosis and moral intentions of improvement. Pupil M.'s entry reveals the internalization of school expectations when it comes to evaluating her learning strategies and their improvement. The diagnosis of her mistakes shows both a conscientious effort to meet school requirements and self-criticism for putting herself under too much pressure. In contrast, the self-reproaches of E., N., and S. as well as the resolutions (also of M.) are formulated in such a way that they

TABLE 7.1 Answers (translated) to the question about typical mistakes and how to avoid them from the “subject-related” block

	<i>Where do I make the same mistake again and again?</i>	<i>How can I avoid it in the future?</i>
E., boy, first grade	That I talk too much during class.	? idk (I don't know).
M., girl, second grade	I always put myself under pressure when I have a test, for example, or a lot of tasks that I still have to do.	Just by starting and going step by step.
N., girl, third grade	I usually keep learning the wrong way for a test.	I should take more time for the English tasks because I always do that at the last minute.
S., girl, third grade	I start working too late. The same goes for the learning tasks.	Keep at it. Try harder.
T., boy, first grade	I forget that the others might not be so good at a given subject, and I say it's easy.	I could just keep it to myself.

refer to routine norms of school communication. These answers raise the hypothesis that the standardized citation of school norms involves an aspect of silent resistance on the part of the pupils: by routinely performing standardized self-critique and promising improvement, pupils may protect themselves from the requirements of self-inspection. Nevertheless, the demands of self-inspection, as well as their formula-like confessions, might impact the pupils and shape their subjectification. In contrast to his four classmates, T.'s self-thematization, which is exceptional both in terms of the choice of topics and the perspective on them, comes across as an unexpected introspection into his feelings and behaviour, which might be perceived as authentic reflection.

These three different response modes surfaced again during the interview when the pupils looked back on the instrument. In general, the tenor of the assessment turns out to be critical: pupil E. said, with a grin, that he did not get the point; he just did it, so it was done. N. added that the booklet served to write down the weekly goals, which she had in mind anyway, and she thought of it as "already something like wasted time". After a moment's reflection, M. paraphrased the purpose of the booklet as "to reflect on what we've done, and you can then take it to the coaching session". She added that there was no need for the booklet at all, "except when the good questions came. Like how I can improve". Her statement indicates once again that she already had internalized the self-optimization code. Pupil T. answered that the booklet was "good feedback for the teachers". Thus, he deployed not only his willingness to scrutinize his feelings and motivations but also to disclose and to communicate them via the booklet with the teachers.

In summary, the use of the green booklet is designed to guide pupils towards becoming reflexive subjects. Scheduled at the beginning of the week, it manifests the importance of reflection as fundamental for, especially self-directed, learning and integrates it into daily classroom practices. Pupils are introduced to the practice of self-interrogation and are expected to adopt it. The booklet is superficially reminiscent of a diary in which the pupils record their experience of self-exploration. However, the materialization as a notebook – in which given questions are to be answered – already hints at schoolwork routines. The moulding of the instrument by school routines becomes even more obvious in its handling. The five-minute time limit to write "a few sentences" already reminds one of the school mode of "getting things done". Furthermore, the option that the reflection tool could be used for coaching or parent-teacher meetings implies that the addressee is not the pupil themselves, but the teacher.

While the series of questions includes personal and subject-related issues, the topics selected by the teacher reveal a cybernetic logic: self-reflection is here instrumentalized as a technical instrument to blunt self-optimization. This logic is reinforced by pupil answers conveying straight expressions of self-incrimination and self-improvement. As discussed earlier, pupil entries thereby vary between identification with the self-optimization code and an

approach to authentic introspection. The dominance of formal affirmations of self-optimization, however, raises doubts about their seriousness. This interpretation is reflected by the critique expressed by some of the teachers that pupils only mechanically fill out reflection forms. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the use of the reflection instrument was, without any explanation, not resumed in the next school year.

Doing reflexivity: Pupils reflecting in the context of a “project week”

The second example illustrates the use of reflective exercises during a project week focused on ecology. Pupils engaged, outside of school, with topics such as climate change, up-cycling, and forestry. Again, the pupils were asked to reflect on their learning process during that week, by answering nine questions from an assigned catalogue: the relevance of the topic, task satisfaction, personal involvement, and cooperation within the group formed the themes of the questions. The questions showed a strong resemblance to the ones concerned with subjectivation used in the green booklets. However, there were no self-evaluation questions such as those about mistakes, personal weaknesses, and intended improvement. In contrast to the green booklet, the pupils answered the questions in the format of a more or less self-contained text, similar to a school essay. It is beyond our knowledge, whether this format was required by the teachers. However, it can be deduced from the material that the pupils had all the questions in bulk and that they had to answer them in writing. The questionnaire helped to break down the experience of the project week into different aspects and to guide the pupils through the writing process. Not everyone complied with the task, some pupils wrote an experience essay and ignored the questions completely. Other pupils adhered strictly to the questions, incorporating them word-by-word into their text and visually distinguishing their answers through underlining. Some pupils, finally, confidently integrated the perspective given by the questions into the logic of their own text.

Comparing the eleven texts with the entries in the green booklets, we notice some striking differences: the texts dedicated to the project show a tendency to narration. The reflection on subjective well-being, the expectations and the significance quickly lead to descriptions of the various programme activities of the project week. The pupils highlight their experience, and its narration overshadows the original intent of the questionnaire – namely, encouraging the pupils towards reflection. Furthermore, some texts, while remaining in line with the narrative format, also display signs of authorship. The claim to authorship is recognizable in the title (“A Reflection by Noa Müller”) or at the end, similar to the credits of a film (“End – by Mia Gerber”). The texts are furthermore characterized by the use of highlighters for emphasis, such as punctuation marks (“We built a chair!”) or intensifiers (“totally important”, “really

fun”). All in all, it can be concluded that the focus of those texts is not the evaluation of work behaviour and the meeting of school norms. The only question that points in this direction is the one about group work: “What will I do so that we can have a good work atmosphere in the group?” The following quotation is an example of a lengthy response, which first looks back on the joint experiences before ending with a wilful intent:

The group work triggered in me a certain urge to learn something new and it was fascinating that some members of the group really engaged with the topic, and some just didn’t engage with the topic and didn’t show any interest, but they didn’t have any either, which was, in my opinion, quite a pity because the topic is very important for us and our future. In order to have a good work atmosphere I will actively engage with the subject and not sit there bored or half-asleep.

This statement can certainly be interpreted as a commitment to ecological awareness and thus be recognized as a proof of a socially desirable response. It cannot be dismissed that the pupil intends to present herself as a committed and interested pupil, concerned with what is sustainable and who performatively distinguishes herself from less desirable pupil subjects. At the same time, however, the passage reveals an authentic flavour, which might derive from its formal structure. The socially desirable habitus, personal concerns, and legitimation of these very norms are mentioned here in a very lengthy, breathless sentence deprived of punctuation. The relevance of the topic “for our future” justifies the intention of appearing as a woke, interested pupil. Even though the argument might be strategically motivated, it does not exclude its authentication by the process of writing it down.

The reflection on group work, motivated by the corresponding question, was answered by several pupils. The experiences that were reflected upon and the conclusions drawn from them noticeably differ from pupil to pupil. Here the citational character is less obvious than it is in the answers from the green booklets. While the pupil cited above addresses the problem of unequal engagement in group work, another mentions the issue of frequent speakers and notes “that some kids almost didn’t get a chance to speak”. An improvement is also suggested by this pupil: “Regarding this point one should make sure that next time, everyone has access to approximately equal speaking time”. And finally, a third pupil laconically states: “Working in a group was easy, but you have to discuss a lot to make it work”.

We conclude that such considerations on the part of pupils may certainly be identified as reflexive engagement with school experiences. They emerge as short moments during which introspection and confession meet. Albeit the guiding questions set the tone, the answers, unlike those in the green booklets, can be recognized as at least partially independent reflections. Also in this

exercise, reflection takes the form of a written monologue that is guided by a questionnaire. However, the code that is activated is one of narrative reporting: pupils are addressed as writers who are required to relate to what they have learned. Thereby, the occasion, the focus, and the form of questions make for a certain leeway thanks to which the pupils can position themselves. The reflections on that project week bring forth pupil subjects that have something to say. And this is in a double sense of the word: they have experienced something that is worth talking or writing about, and what they have to say has relevance.

Conclusion

If reflection is to be understood as a method in which a subject bends back towards itself and positions itself in relation to its actions and preferences, then a broad spectrum of such practices can be observed in the field of education. As the discussed experiences in one school demonstrate, pupils are able to relate to their learning process and performance, as well as to their behaviour and the corresponding behavioural norms. However, if we summarize what we observed at the school, it is striking to see how prevalent specific practices are. Overall, evaluative self-interrogation predominates in the teachers' questions as well as the pupils' answers: pupils are encouraged to locate errors and formulate resolutions to improve their learning and behaviour. This logic of self-optimization is formally reflected in the pupils' standardized response behaviour. What follows reminds one more of the quality of reflex than of reflexivity (Edwards et al., 2010, p. 525): the pupils' formula-like citation of school norms serves both the performance of expected behaviour and the attempt to keep certain demands at bay. It is therefore comprehensible that many of the pupils are critical of this reflective practice and perhaps show a certain resistance to the school's subjectification processes.

Nonetheless, other forms of self-reflection were observed, during which pupils, albeit fragmentarily and casually, find their way towards authentic expression. In these moments, pupils not only repeat expected school norms but at least rudimentarily engage in introspection into their interests and preferences. The opposing experiences at the school allow to draw conclusions regarding the conditions that need to be in place for pupils to live through true experiences of self-reflection in the school: if reflection is detached from concrete subject-related content and prescribed in a decontextualized setting, it tends to become formalized and formalistic. The school form overrides the content and by doing so, the logic of adaptation and optimization, which is inherent in the concept of learning per se, takes on a life of its own. As a result, learning primarily becomes a technology of improvement and optimization, no matter in what and with regard to which goal. Reflection in the form of interrogating intentions of self-improvement and of an institutionally desired

behaviour and habitus turn into rituals of verification (Power, 1999). Thereby, the process of writing serves as the reinforcement of formalization. The integration of self-reflection into broader evaluation and feedback loops subjugates reflection to the logic of assessment, which remains one of the main features of the grammar of schooling. If reflective practices, regardless of their concern with either self-development or self-optimization, are integrated into the all-encompassing framework of assessment, they are turned into performances and are evaluated as such. As a consequence, the reflective effort exhausts itself by absorbing the preferences of the evaluating institution.

If, in contrast, self-reflection is perceived in the sense of the autonomy concept as taking distance from oneself and critically engaging with one's own desires, inclinations, and attitudes (Dworkin, 2015, p. 14), then these reflective practices first have to be granted a space where they can be voiced. This space needs to exist without subjecting the individuals to an external agent of assessment – also in, and particularly in schools. There obtains a need for a space in which the pupils' reflection on their learning and their development would be stimulated not by questionnaires and written answers, but by dialogical conversations. Reflective practices would then facilitate the emergence of a space for a self that does not want to be judged but is rather respected and taken seriously in the way that it portrays itself at a particular moment in its development: always provisional, often contradictory, and sometimes suboptimal.

Notes

- 1 In the lower secondary school, pupils attend the seventh to ninth school year and are between 12 and 15 years old (according to the official new counting, which includes the two years of kindergarten, it corresponds to the ninth to eleventh grade).
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- 3 Fieldwork in this case study was done by Angela Kaspar. Names have been changed and context information has been left general or modified to protect the anonymity of research participants.
- 4 The oral and written quotations in Swiss German or German standard language have been translated by the authors.

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