Article

Participative Cooperation During Educational Transition: Experiences of Young People With Disabilities in Austria

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Abstract

The results of international research studies show that early and careful planning, preparation, and implementation can contribute significantly to a successful transition from compulsory education to vocational training and employment. One key aspect in this respect is participative cooperation (i.e., involvement and active participation in the planning process), above all of the youths with disabilities themselves as the target group, but also of their parents. The project Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions of the Austrian Science Fund is the first Austrian project conducting research into participative cooperation. It aims to find out about and analyse the experiences of cooperation of youths with disabilities and their parents with professionals during the period of transition from education to vocational training and employment. Based on qualitative, longitudinal data material from the project, the present article illustrates the experiences of participative cooperation of the youths with disabilities who participated in the project along with their parents. Our main aim is to show the experiences reported by the interviewed youths and their parents concerning cooperation during the period of transition from education to employment. An additional goal is to provide impulses to improve the planning of vocational transition from education to employment in relation to the inclusion of youths with disabilities.

Keywords

Austria; disability; education-to-employment transition; participative cooperation; vocational transition;
youth with disabilities

Issue

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1. Introduction

Educational transitions generally act as intersections that facilitate discrimination in terms of risks and opportunities for those who undergo them (Kutscha, 1991, p. 128). Existing social inequalities (e.g., education, gender, social and cultural background) take increasing effect during these transitions, and additional processes of inclusion and exclusion come into play to further promote the process of social selection (Walther, 2011). In particular, youths with disabilities find that their tran-sition from compulsory school to continuing education, vocational training, and employment bears a number of risks and uncertainties (Atkins, 2016; Fasching, 2010, 2014). They find their transition particularly difficult, taking detours, making wrong choices, and sometimes facing failure. In most cases, this transition process cannot be managed without extensive support (Tarleton & Ward, 2005; Turnbull et al., 2011). Many of the young people undergoing this transition rely on professional support, as do their parents or guardians. Cooperation between all those involved in the process is essential for successful

transition planning (Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Hetherington et al., 2010; Landmark et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2013). There is a need for research into inclusive educational transitions, and more specifically that of youths with disabilities. Such research should place the voice of the target group at the centre of attention (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Pallisera et al., 2016; Todd, 2007) as it is for the members of this group that the measures are being devised. The aim of participative cooperation must be to actively involve youths with disabilities and their parents in the structures of cooperation for transition to allow them to take part in shaping the support process.

This article reports on the results of empirical research into the experiences that youths with different types of disabilities have had, as well as their parents or guardians, concerning participative cooperation with professional support providers in their transition planning process from school to continuing education, vocational training, and employment. The results were obtained from a five-year longitudinal research project. Section 2 provides an overview of the political and institutional framework for the support of young people with disabilities during their transition from school to vocational training and employment in the Austrian context, as well as some theoretical reflections embedded in the international context. Section 3 explains the research project and research design. Section 4 provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the experiences of participative cooperation. Section 5 discusses research results in relation to the question "What is needed for participative cooperation?" in the context of inclusive transition planning and support from school to the employment of youths with disabilities. Lastly, in Section 6, we propose some recommendations for optimising educational transition planning and make some critical reflections.

2. The Austrian Context: Political and Institutional Framework in the Transition From Compulsory School to Vocational Training and Employment

On an international level, the legal basis for participation in education, vocational training, and employment of persons with disabilities in Austria is determined following articles 24 and 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). On a national level, the legal basis is founded principally on the National Action Plan on Disability 2012–2020 as an implementation strategy of the UN CRPD and the Austrian Federal Disability Equality Act, the Employment of Persons with Disabilities Act, parts of the Occupational Training Act, and the Compulsory Training Act on Education Up to 18. Educational and training systems take different forms in different countries (Esmond, 2021; Euroguidance Austria, 2021). In Austria, compulsory schooling ends after year 9, usually at age 14 or 15. Considerations related to the transition to other forms of schooling or vocational training begin at an earlier point. The 9th and

last compulsory school year can be completed at different types of school including a polytechnic-type school focused on vocational orientation. After the nine years of compulsory schooling, all young persons must continue with higher secondary schooling in an academic secondary school (upper cycle, at the end of which a university entry exam can be taken), or attend either an intermediate or higher vocational college.

Nowadays, in Austria, inclusive schooling for pupils with disabilities or impairments at the higher secondary level is possible only on an experimental basis or in private schools. For this reason, except schooling on an experimental basis, a "normal curriculum" that does not include provision for children with special educational needs is imposed at the higher secondary level (Moser, 2018). After completing the final compulsory year of schooling it is also possible to transition directly to employment via dual training/apprenticeship (part-time vocational school and apprenticeship in a training company) rather than pursuing higher levels of education (Euroguidance Austria, 2021). Youths with disabilities or certain other important disadvantages also have the option of integrative vocational education. This can take different forms (extended apprenticeship or partial qualification), but mostly involves an apprenticeship on the regular labour market (Fasching, 2010).

In Austria, the Compulsory Training Act on Education and Training up to age 18, adopted in 2016, aims to ensure that every youth undergoes some form of schooling or dual vocational training up to that age, whether it be in a regular, extended, or partial qualification form (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2016). However, the non-regular labour market is considered in cases where it is impossible to find or maintain employment in the regular labour market, resulting in a prolonged stay in the transition system. Employment in non-regular labour markets is principally a measure of vocational rehabilitation, one of the tasks of which is to promote reentrance into the regular labour market. If youths up to the age 18 are in neither of these two schemes (the so-called NEET, i.e., not in education, employment, or training), if they drop out of school or vocational training early (EAL, or early school leavers), or if they are undecided as to their educational/vocational future, then they are encouraged to participate in one of the measures of the so-called "transition system" (Bacher et al., 2013). The transition system is viewed as a sub-system of the vocational training system and contains diverse measures which do not aim at vocational qualification, but rather act as a sort of bridging offer. They serve as a type of vocational orientation, vocational preparation or qualification for vocational training, and thus as orientation towards competencies that are relevant for vocational training (Kohlrausch, 2012). Thus, at the higher secondary level, the systems of education, vocational training, and transition run in parallel. It is common that youths transitioning from school to employment go back and forth between these systems.

2.1. Individual Transition Planning and Support for Inclusive Transitions to Employment for Youths With Disabilities

Based on inclusive schooling in regular systems, the goal is to thoroughly prepare and support youths with and without disabilities who are undergoing this transition process so that they will be successful in choosing their paths following their abilities and possibilities. An inclusive transition, meaning access to continued education, training or employment in regular systems, must be made available (UN Convention, 2006, articles 24, 27). The timely and thorough planning, preparation, and implementation of the transition from school to continuing education, training and employment are critical for its success and can be referred to as the individual transition planning (ITP) process (Soriano, 2006). Such a process generally starts one or two years before finishing compulsory education, addressing decisions about education and professions at the transition from compulsory school to continuing schooling or employment. Teachers, the youths, their parents and additional external professionals are jointly involved in the process. However, the youths are the focus of attention, which is why the participation of the youths themselves, as well as their parents, is essential (Soriano, 2006, p. 26). The ITP of the European Agency was developed primarily for pupils with special needs or disabilities and emphasises the importance of participative cooperation of all those involved in the ITP process. In Austria, the ITP is an offer of a voluntary nature that is accepted with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the different types of lower secondary schools (Fasching, 2012; Husny & Fasching, 2020). In the USA, in contrast, this type of ITP is compulsory for all pupils as established by the 1996 Educational Act (Defur et al., 2001; Trainor, 2017; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). In Austria, this has yet to happen.

As previously mentioned, integrative secondary schooling for youths with disabilities in Austria is likely to encounter different types of obstacles. The change to a vocational training system with dual training (theoretical part in the vocational education school together with the acquisition of professional skills in a training company) receives more political support and is more successful in practice (Esmond, 2021; Moser, 2018). Nonetheless, very few manage to directly transition to vocational training. In Austria, therefore, graduates of compulsory schools with disabilities often end up in the so-called "transition system"—also known as the "repair system"—with diverse offers of vocational orientation and qualification. The *Netzwerk Berufliche Assistenz* (NEBA; https://www.neba.at), or network for vocational assistance, is one of the most well-known offers. Commissioned by the Federal Office of Social Welfare, it gathers the most relevant projects and activities from the field of counselling, assistance and guidance of youths with disabilities and other youths in danger of exclusion under the label "NEBA services" and implements them

in close cooperation with the most important strategic partners (e.g., public employment service, the regional coordination service "AusBildung bis 18," that is, education and training up to 18, regional service providers, schools and companies). The Austria-wide NEBA offer, which exists in all nine federal states as a voluntary, free, and low-threshold support offer, currently comprises five types of measure: youth coaching, the project Fit for Vocation, vocational training assistance, workplace assistance, and job coaching with differing content focuses (see Table 1). All the measures pursue the common goal of supporting an inclusive transition process from school to continuing education, training, and employment. Below, we provide a brief description of each of these measures.

Inclusion in the regular education system and on the regular labour market must receive preference over qualification and employment in segregation (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2016). The offer of support measures presented above is largely in line with the demands of the UN Convention with respect to labour market policy and the provision of active support offers for persons with disabilities (UN Convention, 2006, article 27). Article 27 of the UN Convention, related to work and employment, refers to the aspect of vocational participation of persons with disabilities and explicitly emphasises the active promotion of people with disabilities in accessing post-school education and qualification. It states: "Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training" (UN Convention, 2006, article 27d).

2.2. Transition From School to Work in a European Context: Theoretical Reflections and Transitional Regimes

The careful planning, preparation and implementation of the transition from school to training and employment are crucial for vocational integration. Different countries respond to this challenge in different ways. Walther, when searching for patterns in the different institutional and structural setups across borders, developed a heuristic typology of "transitional regimes" (Walther, 2006, pp. 124–126, 2011, pp. 73–98; Walther & Pohl, 2005, pp. 38–41) according to which the national transition systems in Europe can be divided into four regime types: the universalistic regime (Nordic countries), the liberal regime (Anglo-Saxon countries), the subprotective regime (Mediterranean countries), and the employment-centred regime (continental countries). The Austrian transition system is an employment-centred regime, characterised above all by high standardisation, high differentiation, and a high degree of social selection. As already mentioned, Austria has a broad range of highly differentiated measures and offers numerous support measures for the transition from school to employment;

Table 1. Institutionalised measures of inclusive transitional support in Austria.

Youth coaching	Professional counselling to prevent the premature dropout from vocational training and foster skills and knowledge which are crucial for employment. After an initial meeting between the youth and the professional, the two develop a long-term plan and the latter assists the youth in finding employment.
Project Fit for Vocation	This measure teaches basic competencies, relevant cultural techniques, and social skills. These can be summarised as soft skills in an institutional setting.
Vocational training assistance	This measure, which is only available for youths with a disability, helps the youths receive vocational training. The professionals mediate with an employer and support the youth's learning process throughout the period of the contract between the youth and the employer.
Workplace assistance	This is a measure explicitly for youths with a disability and aims at supporting them in their vocational lives and with their mandatory task of interacting with government agencies. The assistance professional also communicates with the employer.
Job coaching	The professional job coach fosters the youth's skills regarding independent workplace competencies and soft skills. The coach is also responsible for sensitizing and coordinating the wishes and concerns of the employer.

Source: Fasching and Fülöp (2017) and Husny and Fasching (2020).

it can also count on the participation of a large number of institutions (Public Employment Service, Federal Office of Social Welfare, schools, social partners, diverse collaborators, coordination offices on the national and regional levels, and different umbrella organisations for vocational integration).

What is normal and what is not normal, what constitutes a successful or a failed transition are predefined by the system. Such preconceptions are rooted not only in individuals and in institutions, but also in society (Walther, 2014, p. 78). So-called "transition regimes" can be understood as nationalistic frameworks in which transition paths are predetermined. They are "constellations of the societal regulation of transitions" (Walther, 2014, p. 80). Transition regimes become visible through legislation, through structural requirements, and the moment and extent of gatekeeping processes on the part of professional actors on different levels. This means that the actors who support these transitions, as well as the youths themselves and their parents, find they have a limited scope of action which is pre-structured by this logic. Transition schemes can be seen as nationalistic assumptions of normality, interwoven with socio-economic and institutional processes (Walther, 2014, p. 78).

The political framework conditions and institutional support systems and measures which have been described in this article must always be reflected not only in regard to their possibilities but also to their limitations. Nevertheless, there is a need for inclusive support measures which are based on individual needs to support youths with disabilities in their transition from school to employment. There is an equally urgent need for participative elements of cooperation (between pro-

fessional support providers, the youths, and their parents) to be able to prevent risks of exclusion. Herein lies the importance of our research project. By providing empirical research into participative cooperation we aim to make an important contribution to the further development of research and improvements to the current practices in school-to-employment transition in the context of inclusion.

3. Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions: Methods and Methodology of the Project Design

This article discusses data obtained from a qualitative longitudinal study in the framework of the project Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (https:// kooperation-fuer-inklusion.univie.ac.at/en). The project duration was five years (October 2016 to September 2021), during which the experiences of cooperation of youths with disabilities and their parents (with or without disabilities) were explored in depth. The project applied the constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz (2014) for interviews (intensive interviewing) and data analysis (initial coding, focused coding).

The data were surveyed by conducting a qualitative research circle which was repeated three times. The key research question was: What are the experiences of cooperation of pupils with disabilities and their parents/families with professionals at the transition from lower secondary to higher secondary or employment? (for more details on the research design see Fasching et al., 2017). This question was explored using two qualitative methods (intensive interviewing, reflecting team) and their triangulation in a research circle (for more

details on triangulation see Flick, 2013). At the beginning of the research circle, the whole sample was interviewed (18 families of different formations: youths with different types of disability and/or their parents with or without disabilities). Charmaz (2014) recommends the method of intensive interviewing for grounded theory studies. The application of this method in our multi-annual grounded theory study proved to be successful due to its flexible character (e.g., adaptation of the guidelines). In line with the iterative proceeding in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), the data analysis was initiated in parallel with the data survey.

In addition to the interviews, four youths with disabilities and four parents (with/without disabilities) participated in so-called reflecting teams, which have their origin in systemic family therapy (Andersen, 1987) and are mainly applied in counselling and coaching contexts (e.g., Cox et al., 2003). Nowadays, they are also attracting increasing attention in the social sciences in the context of disability (e.g., Anslow, 2013). This method was adapted as a participatory research approach for the project at hand to place special focus on the individual needs of the youths with disabilities and their parents (Fasching & Felbermayr, 2019). We worked with the reflecting teams for two main reasons: (a) It was possible to discuss the initial hypotheses from the interview analysis with the participants in the reflecting teams, which (b) allowed for a continuous theory generation on participative cooperation. Reflecting teams were formed with both the youths and with the parents. An additional reflecting team was also formed that comprised professionals working in school and non-school contexts (vocational counselling at school, post-school qualification project, vocational training assistance, and family counselling for parents with a child with a disability transitioning from school to employment; see also Husny & Fasching, 2020). As the professionals were not interviewed, this allowed us to additionally survey and consider the perspective of these professionals.

Of the whole sample (18 families), we interviewed five families on three occasions throughout the longitudinal study. Concerning the method, it should be noted that an uninterrupted sample is always a major challenge for longitudinal designs (Thomson & Holland, 2003). For reasons of research ethics, the participants were informed that they could abandon the project at any point without repercussions, and this was respected at all times (Thomson & Holland, 2003; Walford, 2005).

4. Experiences of Participative Cooperation

What are the experiences of cooperation of youths with disabilities and their parents at the transition from education to vocational training and employment? What aspects must be fulfilled to speak of participative cooperation and what are its characteristics? In the following analysis, we consider two cases from the sample (all names changed). Interviews were conducted with two

youths with physical or learning disabilities and three parents (two mothers, one father). This selection was made based on the fact that (a) it was possible to interview them three times and (b) the transition from school to vocational training and employment was the focus of attention. The first intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2014) were conducted at the end of form 8 (final year of lower secondary), while the other two were conducted one and two years later, respectively. This allowed us to observe the transition and the cooperation experiences continuously over two years. In our two sample cases, the settings differed after transition: One youth transitioned from school to a vocational training institution for youths with disabilities and the other to an institution for persons with special needs. The main focus of both institutions was to orientate the youths and help them obtain qualifications. The youths received no vocational training certificate upon completion.

4.1. Cooperation

We use the term "cooperation" as opposed to "competition" (P01_02_Em_I05) and in relation with "team" (*team work*, *team player*, *team working skills*, etc.). The information in brackets are interview codes that varied over the course of the study and according to the different participants in the interviews. Cooperation thus means "*working as a team*" (P02_01_Ep_I06): conceiving oneself and others as players in a common team, not as competitors. The youths and their parents felt that three aspects had to be accomplished to ensure successful cooperation within a team: (a) willingness to cooperate (*wanting to cooperate*), (b) communication (*wanting to speak*), and (c) activity (*wanting to act*). A more specific concept than cooperation, participative cooperation refers to the explicit involvement of the youths with disabilities and their parents in transition planning and the related research (participatory cooperation). As a result, cooperation takes place in a triangle between youths, parents, and professionals. Cooperation can be seen as the basis of participative cooperation. Only when what is needed for cooperation has been established can the more specific participative cooperation take place. Figure 1 below offers an overview of the surveyed aspects which characterise (participative) cooperation according to the views of the youths with disabilities and their parents. The figure is depicted in circular form to illustrate that experiences of participative cooperation cannot be understood without a previous understanding of the general concept of cooperation. The general aspects of cooperation also apply to participative cooperation.

4.1.1. Wanting to Cooperate

The category *wanting to cooperate* indicates the willingness of each individual to cooperate. The "Kraft" family said that the willingness to cooperate increased when the cooperation partners were familiar with each other.
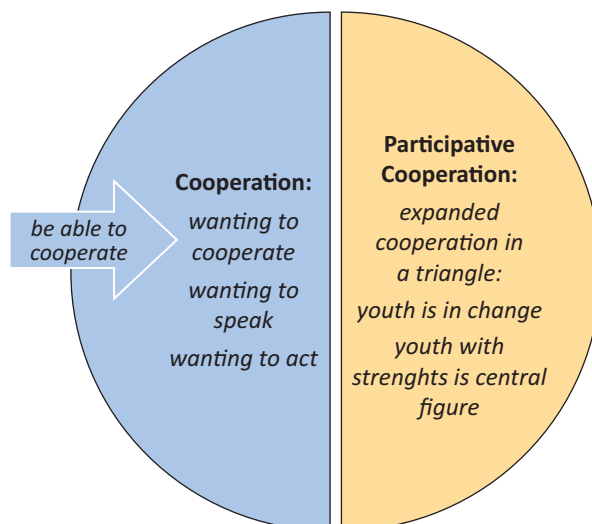
Figure 1. Aspects of (participative) cooperation.

This raises the question of how a relationship of trust can be established between the cooperation partners. Additionally, it must be taken into account that cooperation partners (e.g., counsellors) are often assigned ad-hoc in many cases of transition, and therefore a relationship of trust cannot exist from the beginning. The parents further mentioned that a situation in which all the cooperation partners shared the same values increased the willingness to cooperate. This includes above all a resource-oriented view of the youth (focus on strengths, not weaknesses), honesty, and a respectful, attentive, and appreciative attitude towards the resources (e.g., time) of all those involved. Moreover, it requires similar ideas about the abilities and possibilities of the youth in terms of their education and outlook. This is reflected in one mother's statement: "Well, cooperation would mean that everyone works together towards a goal" (P01_01_Em_I02). The participants mentioned that they were pursuing the regular labour market. This goal must be pursued by all those involved in educational transition in order to ensure that the cooperation is successful and the goal is reached.

Apart from the individual requirements for cooperation, such as values, certain structural framework conditions must also be in place to *be able to cooperate*. At school, exchanges with other parents take place in the context of teacher–parent meetings, described by one father as "a place to meet and talk to each other" (P01_01_Ep_I03). However, this requires structures for parents to meet and interact. The following quotation shows how, in many cases, structures have yet to be established: "Well, there should…one should (6) create structures (8) in which group activities (4) can take place, yes" (P01_01_Ep_I03). This raises the general question about the necessary (structural) preconditions for cooperation. If the interviewed youths with disabilities are to gain experiences of cooperation, for instance at work (e.g., during internships), they must gain access to such contexts. This can be accomplished by receiving positive

evaluations of their vocational skills. The youths with disabilities thus depend on the evaluations of other people to open the doors to companies for them. This illustrates that apart from *wanting to cooperate*, the pertinent framework conditions must also be in place (*being able to cooperate*).

4.1.2. Wanting to Speak

Communication is an essential characteristic of cooperation. Without the willingness to communicate (*wanting to communicate*), cooperation will have little success, if any. This was also noticeable in the interviews when successful cooperation depended on the willingness to communicate of the individual. Cooperation thus depends not only on whether the individual persons *want to speak* but also on how much information they will give to the other cooperation partners. The potential of the work in/with groups becomes evident in this context. Group settings can increase the participants' willingness to speak and communicate. This manifested itself in the project at hand when the youths with disabilities were more talkative in the reflecting teams (group setting) than in the interviews, which raises the question about the role of peers for cooperation processes in groups.

4.1.3. Wanting to Act

Communication is not the only requirement for cooperation. The youths with disabilities and their parents felt that a willingness to act (*wanting to act*) was also necessary. Cooperation, therefore, means to *speak* and to *act*. The youths felt that acting was only possible when all those involved (including the youths themselves) were willing to act. In this way, each individual person has a responsibility to make cooperation work. This was also emphasised by the parents. Cooperation in the sense of team work does not take place automatically but relies on the activity and the initiative of those involved.

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The parents mentioned above all two aspects which for them characterised activity in the context of cooperation: (a) activity on equal terms in the sense of "giving and taking" (P03_01_Ep_I02) and (b) viewing the activity as "meaningful" (P03_02_Em_I07). For the parents, activity meant activity of all those involved. However, they only expanded on and demanded activity on the part of adults (counsellors, teachers). For instance, they demanded teacher activity in terms of provision of information. Cooperation thus always relies on the trust of the individual cooperation partners—trust in people to become active and to provide (sufficient) information. This is directly related to *wanting to speak*.

4.2. Participative Cooperation

In terms of structural framework conditions, the analysis showed that participative cooperation—meaning the involvement of youths with disabilities and their parents in the transition planning (and research)—existed only in formalised settings in the context of compulsory school, taking place in obligatory talks between children, parents, and teachers (German term *KEL talk*, where K stands for *Kind*/child, E for *Eltern*/parents, and L for *Lehrer*/teacher). These talks are set up for pupils at compulsory school (forms 1 to 8) and their parents on a regular basis and seek to address the future paths of the youths after lower secondary (form 8). Even though the structural conditions are favourable, in the interviews these talks were not mentioned in detail and were not viewed as opportunities for participative cooperation. This, in turn, means that the setting and the "taking part" alone is not enough to experience talks as (positive) experiences of cooperation.

Positive experiences of cooperation were gained outside the school context, namely in projects of the transition system. These projects, which plan for the transition from school to employment and guide the youths throughout the process, were accessed by the youths with disabilities and their parents voluntarily. Some forms of structure for participative cooperation are thus required. Rather than being spontaneous and unplanned, participative cooperation takes place in formalised settings. In contexts outside school, however, an expansion of the concept of participative cooperation can be observed. Expanded cooperation in a triangle takes place through the involvement of additional cooperation partners. Talks do not only take place between youths with disabilities, their parents, and professionals; other important family members, for instance, also participate. This context provides for two positive aspects: (a) youths are in charge and (b) youths with strengths are the central figure.

4.2.1. Youths in Charge

One positive impression of this form of expanded cooperation is that a youth with a disability chooses the additional cooperation partners. One father stated: "Well, the parents aren't in charge there, [of] what they want…the child really does that himself…and organises [too], when it'll take place, who it'll be with, where it will happen" (P01_01_Ep_I03). This statement emphasises the active role of the youth with a disability, who is "in charge." Youths with disabilities decide who they want to invite for the counselling sessions as cooperation partners. In this way, in addition to the youth with a disability and one parent or both, other people that the youth views as relevant are present, resulting in an expanded cooperation circle. For the parents it is also a form of relief when the invited person participates in supporting the youth in the school-to-work transition by, for instance, finding an internship. Talks take place with the additional cooperation partners in an expanded triangle. Cooperation takes place in that all those involved work towards a goal together, "as a team" (P01_02_Em_I05).

4.2.2. A Youth With Strengths Is the Central Figure

Lastly, the longitudinal component must be taken into consideration in terms of the kind of changes that could be observed during the survey period. There were surprisingly few changes in the cooperation partners at school and outside school. New cooperation partners were included only in a few cases. When problems or questions arose in the course of the transition period, the parents turned to the cooperation partners they were familiar with, which means that the parents were aware of which contacts were available and approached them actively. This also applied for projects outside the school context in which experiences of participative cooperation were made and which were accessed proactively by the families. What was also revealed through the longitudinal analysis of the interviews is that the interviewed youths with disabilities and their parents repeatedly faced deficit-oriented views. By contrast, expanded cooperation facilitates a focus on the strengths of the youth with a disability. Parents especially pointed out that the strengths of the youth served as a starting point from which the team jointly planned the youth's future path, and that "the focus is *not* on the weaknesses" (P01_02_Em_I05).

5. Discussion

The analysis shown in the previous section shows the general requirements for cooperation at transition from school to employment as well as the specific requirements for participative cooperation. The participants described the topics of willingness to cooperate (*wanting to cooperate*), communication (*wanting to speak*), and activity (*wanting to act*) as preconditions for a positive experience of cooperation. Participative cooperation manifests itself as expanded cooperation in a triangle which can include additional cooperation partners. As regards positive impressions, according to the

participants the youth with a disability is in charge and is the central figure with his or her respective strengths (Atkins, 2016). The concept of expanded cooperation in a triangle with additional cooperation partners as presented here is similar to the concept of personal future planning with support circles for people with disabilities (Niedermair, 2018; O'Brien & O'Brien, 1999). Similarly, participative cooperation is possible when youths and their parents are actively involved in the support process, when the youths' desires and concerns are heard and understood, and when the focus is on their abilities and possibilities. One precondition for this is a common language for "all" and a professional-pedagogical working relationship which is characterised by an open mind and a respectful and appreciative attitude (Fasching & Felbermayr, 2019). This professional and "inclusive attitude" is essential for a valuable working relationship. Beyond this, regular exchange and reflection, as well as a willingness to make change happen and to opt for an inclusive attitude towards the participation of professionals, are necessary for participative cooperation in a pedagogical process (Fasching et al., 2020; Husny & Fasching, 2020).

This is in direct reference to the structural framework conditions which are required on the part of the institutions, meaning that a *willingness to cooperate* (*wanting to cooperate*, *wanting to speak*, *wanting to act*) also requires the pertinent structures for participative cooperation (*being able to cooperate*), as shown by interview analyses. Experiences of participative cooperation require a formalised setting. Participative cooperation does not, according to the data, take place spontaneously and without planning. Furthermore, and vitally, one framework condition that is necessary for participative cooperation is time. Time is needed, for instance, to invite additional people to the setting; the invited persons must have time to be able to participate; and, finally, time is necessary to build a relationship of trust with the cooperation partners. This relationship of trust is essential, as our data analyses show that cooperation between persons who are familiar with each other tends to be evaluated more positively. Time is also required to reflect on what is needed to increase the willingness of all the cooperation players to communicate and act. The potential of participative cooperation lies in the involvement of additional cooperation partners to support the transition of youths with disabilities from school to employment. Time is a vital framework condition in this respect (quality of the process) in the context of inclusion. This is reflected in the title of the project at hand: Cooperation for Inclusion in Educational Transitions. Abundant time is necessary to implement "cooperation for inclusion" because dealing with variety and diversity also requires more time. After all, variety also bears the potential for conflict. Accepting variety, understanding lifeworlds which are different from one's own, and learning common processes of communication require time. It is precisely in this regard that the constraints of time as a char-

acteristic of pedagogical quality most probably have their greatest impact (Fasching et al., 2020).

6. Conclusions and Implications

What relevance do these research outcomes have for the transition of youths with disabilities from school to work? The experiences of cooperation of the youths with disabilities and their parents constitute valuable feedback for optimising the transition planning and for further developing its quality in connection with the inclusion and participation of youths with disabilities. What is especially important in this context is to establish structures within which (expanded) participative cooperation in a triangle can take place. Even if some good examples exist, especially outside school, it is of utmost importance to implement them on a macro-level (politics) and on a meso-level (measures). The following recommendations should be considered: (a) formalised settings for participative cooperation (e.g., talks between child, parent, and teacher) in the context of vocational orientation at school in the Austrian educational system and in all school types of the lower secondary level, (b) an increased offer of personal future planning with a support circle, and (c) a transition planning process which starts at an early stage (as early as the penultimate form of compulsory education) and which is obligatory for all pupils.

If these recommendations are followed, it will be possible to implement a participative form of cooperation (counselling in a triangle between the youth, their parent(s), and professionals) that will above all enable youths to participate actively, support them, and afford them the possibility to plan and manage their own future and make their own decisions about it. Time and personal resources are necessary for ITP processes so that a respectful and appreciative communication on equal terms can be implemented as a quality-assuring characteristic of a successful and professional-pedagogical working relationship.

To conclude, we would like to offer some critical reflections on transition research. Firstly, it should be noted that the educational approach to transitions classifies them as thresholds or obstacles, thus creating further transitions. Secondly, selection or discrimination mechanisms are strongly interwoven with the organisational aspects of educational institutions. In this way, the field of education itself tends to (re-)produce hierarchisation and inequality (Walther, 2016). With this in mind, we want to highlight the limitations of educational action at transition. This is precisely why (inclusive) transition research in the educational sciences should not assume that transitions are natural events and then, from this perspective, interpret them as individual failures due to delay or non-compliance. Instead, "the agenda of a transition research as conducted by the educational sciences, which conceives of itself as reflective, must be characterised precisely by not considering transitions as

matter of course and instead declare its creation as the very subject of study" (Walther, 2016, p. 127). In the context of education, transitions can be conceived as constructs of heuristic research (Walther, 2016), especially in regard to the character of their process, to counteract rash classificationism. This is equally valid for research into participative cooperation. Consequently, professional educational work has a key role at the intersection with institutions.

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Conflict of Interests

Co-author Katharina Felbermayr left the project on 8 September 2021. Her statements in this article were made as a private individual.

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