

**HSD SK**

# STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND CULTURE

**From impacts to benefits: User re-  
search as a change of perspective  
for studies on the practice of drama  
education**

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AUS DER  
FORSCHUNG  
DES FACH  
BEREICHS

DER HSD

SOZIAL-  
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# ABSTRACT

This essay looks at the potentials and limitations of user research for studies on the practice of drama education. To date, this field has been dominated by impact studies. After illustrating the blind spots that are created by taking this research approach to the practice of drama education, we will present the user research perspective and look at the opportunities that it provides to generate new, differentiated knowledge. User research makes it possible to illuminate the processes of acquiring and using knowledge in terms of its delivery. It also provides a potential framework of analysis for placing these processes in the delivery context, which includes subjective learning types, relevance and institutional and social conditions. This expanded perspective will make it possible to identify the factors that foster and limit benefits and reflect them in practice.

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# *From impacts to benefits: User research as a change of perspective for studies on the practice of drama education*

**Anne van Rießen & Henning van den Brink**

## 1. INTRODUCTION: ALL A QUESTION OF PERSPECTIVE?

Research into the practice of drama education is dominated by evaluation, practice research and impact studies (cf. Hill, 2008). These approaches aim to identify influential factors that cause changes or stabilisations in the recipients' patterns of behaviour and attitudes. In the field of drama education, a number of empirical studies have now been carried out into the impact of individual (pilot) projects. Their main purpose was to assess the extent to which the objectives have been met and whether they can be transferred to programmes. The core assumption in this research approach is "that a particular *treatment* [produces] corresponding changes in behaviour in clients – or does not produce them, or only produces them partially. [...] So the direction of the impact is normally conceived in a monolinear way"<sup>1</sup> (Schaarschuch & Oelerich, 2005, p. 15, emphasis in original). This means that the focus is particularly on the outcomes, so on the effects on the participants themselves. They should be linked back to the programmes, on the assumption that this will make it possible to draw conclusions about the success, quality and effectiveness of drama education programmes and projects. Therefore, impact-based approaches turn the spotlight onto the programme as the main control tool (cf. Kessler & Klein 2010, p. 68).

This research perspective is not without controversy. Even researchers who carry out impact studies in the context of arts education point to the methodological difficulties of gathering and evaluating data and the underlying methodological suppositions (cf. Al-Diban, Magister, Matko & Walther, 2012, p. 355 f.; Lind-

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from texts originally published in German were translated into English.

ner, 2008, p. 169; Studer-Lüthi & Züger, 2012, p. 75). Criticism is particularly directed at political and administrative bodies for using such impact studies, which primarily aim to optimise the means-to-an-end context (cf. Bamford, 2010, p. 189; Hirschfeld, 2009, p. 72; Ziegler, 2012, p. 93 f.). Impact studies have also tended to suppress institutional and social conditions and their influence on how impacts can be developed or blocked. They tend to remain bound up within the programme itself, for example when they set employability as the main or sole benchmark for the evaluation of drama education projects. Impact studies only ever reconstruct a certain selection of indicators and criteria for measuring quality and success, so they always reflect certain perspectives and positions (of power) (cf. Albus & Ziegler, 2013, p. 177). Critics go on to claim that there is always the danger that the participating actors will be viewed as subordinate and that the practice of drama education will be functionalised and instrumentalised. This is particularly the case when impact studies are carried out and interpreted as studies of transfer effects, which focus on existing areas of life and learning that go beyond the meaning of theatrical rehearsals and production.

Oelerich and Schaarschuch (2005a) developed a research approach that is distinct from impact studies and based on other premises: user research based on social pedagogy. User research empirically analyses the (potential) benefit and the use of social services from the perspective of those who are the users of institutionalised social work programmes.<sup>2</sup> It focuses on the question of the practical value of social work and on the conditions that limit or foster benefits. It refers to discursive proceedings in social work and the actual producer of social services. At present, many social work programmes are characterised by an asymmetrical relationship between the professionals and the recipients of the services. This may be owing to the privileged status of the professionals, based on their social mandate and their resulting functional role. At the same time – as a result of the prevailing orientation of social work towards lifeworlds and subjects – social work programmes increasingly see themselves as reciprocal co-productions of social services. When looked at from this perspective, users are the actual producers of social services, while the professionals take on the role of co-producers.

The aim of this essay<sup>3</sup> is to identify to what extent such a shift of perspective in social work studies could be fruitful and productive for research into the practice of drama education. First of all, we will present the key findings of impact studies on the practice of drama education in Germany (2.1), then move on to investigate the need for research in the field of drama education (2.2). We will then present an overview of user research and its theoretical background (3.1), epistemological interests (3.2) and research methods (3.3). Certain aspects and structural elements of the two key areas for analysis in user research – process

(4.1) and content (4.2) – will then be studied with regard to their potential for addressing unresolved research questions in the field of drama education. Finally, we will present the specific opportunities and limitations of user research in this field in contrast to impact studies.

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<sup>2</sup> In the following, the term social work refers to the two fields of social pedagogy and social work in theory and practice – despite their different histories and theoretical perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> The paper at hand is an English translation of our previous publication (cf. van Rießen & van den Brink 2015).

## 2. IMPACT STUDIES IN THE CONTEXT OF DRAMA EDUCATION

Impact studies also include approaches that are designed to take into account the perspective of the participants, for example alongside that of the professionals. Admittedly, this does not occur in such a targeted and systematic way as in user research, but in light of the participants' perspectives identified previously in impact studies, the differences and potentials of a user perspective to user research can be articulated more clearly. We will therefore present the methodological basis and results of such empirical studies, which have at least been taken into account (for example as part of an impact-oriented evaluation) in order to carry out a scientific evaluation of drama education programmes in relation to their impact on the participants. Here, the practice of drama education includes all courses, programmes and forms of drama education, including not only drama projects in a narrow sense, but also projects which require similar practices in terms of performance and production, such as musicals and dance theatre. The term *practice* denotes "an individual or collective exercise, practice or activity that is embedded in a historical and cultural context" (Karl, 2005, p. 36).

### 2.1 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF THE PRACTICE OF DRAMA EDUCATION

In most cases, the authors of studies on the impact of drama education programmes tend to draw positive conclusions. In their evaluation of the Darmstadt theatre project *Die Hiketiden*, Aulke, Flohé and Knopp (2006, p. 25 ff.) observed that the participants clearly dealt with each other in a respectful and unbiased way, showed a strong sense of identification with the project, and improved their self-confidence, ambition, concentration, their capacity to voice and receive criticism and their ability to work as a team. The findings of the *Die Hiketiden* project are in line with the results of the study carried out by Finke and Haun (2001) as part of the *Lernziel Lebenskunst* project. It looked at the psychosocial impact of active participation in drama among young people in seven youth drama groups in five cities. The results of 42 interviews with the participants showed that drama fostered their self-confidence, creativity and capacity for self-expression. They particularly mentioned the positive effects of appearing before an audience, the sense of belonging to a group and an increased capacity for empathy. Aulke, Flohé and Knopp (undated, p. 6) also studied the *Kultur und Schule* programme run in North-Rhine Westphalia. They noted that it helped the participating children and adolescents to look at themselves, their environments and their fellow students with fresh eyes, particularly with regard to "self-confidence" and "working together". A further positive effect was the fact that they

now felt they could present themselves better through improved posture, more confident demeanour and an increased ability to express themselves (cf. Aulke et al., undated, p. 7). Another key finding came from the studies carried out by Vanessa-Isabelle Reinwand (2008, p. 196). She noted that

the stimulus to be autonomous that the subject experiences during artistic processes [produces] an increase in self-confidence through reflection, that is to say consciousness of one's own capacity to act and [delimits and frees up] the way they look at themselves and the world from patterns of thinking and behaving that are set by others.

Reinwand's study also traced the impact of drama on 15 amateur performers with the aid of a biographical research approach. Al-Diban et al. (2012, p. 355) voice a similar explanation for the increase in social reflexivity, self-worth and self-confidence in social interactions in their study on the effect of active participation in drama on personality development in young people: "The protected space allows them to step out of their everyday roles and explore their own identity in a playful way." This finding highlights the value of the social dimension in theatrical participation. The evaluation of the *TuSch – Theater und Schule* drama project also highlighted the increased self-confidence, social sensibility, capacity for empathy and improved ability for self-expression that result from participation in drama projects (cf. Behörde für Bildung und Sport der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg & Körber-Stiftung, 2003, p. 9 and Lindner, 2008, p. 177 in his study on the drama project *Ich lerne zu leben*). Lindner summed up his findings in an earlier partial publication of the study (Lindner, 2004, p. 96) by saying that different drama education programmes can provide very different learning outcomes.

The effects of the practice of drama education on expectations and experiences of self-efficacy were also studied by Romi Domkowsky (2008). She noted that generalised expectations of self-efficacy and the expressive capacity of students in the test group developed more positively both inside and outside the drama group than in the control group. This provided evidence of transfer effects (cf. Domkowsky, 2008, p. 163). This can be traced back to the positive impact of participating in drama, particularly in the area where personal skills intersect with social skills. These include openness and a willingness to embrace new things; being sociable with other members of the group; and being prepared to speak in front of the group. But she added the caveat that it was the participants who demonstrated stronger personal skills at the beginning of the course who were more likely to get involved in drama. As a result, they were then able to benefit more intensively from drama as a way of developing these skills (cf. Domkowsky, 2008, p. 162 ff.). Albert Bandura (1977) identified four key factors as being crucial for the development of self-efficacy in children and adolescents: experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological factors. The *Ku.Ki – Kulturarbeit mit Kindern* project, which combined elements of dance, theatre and musicals, showed that these four factors are used very intensively, but also in very different ways (cf. van den Brink & Strasser, 2008, p. 39 ff.). The evaluation study also demonstrated that the development of per-

sonal, social and domain-specific skills was also very varied (cf. van den Brink & Strasser, 2008, p. 49 ff.). The personal contrasting experiences elicited by performing in public and recording songs in the studio played an important role (cf. van den Brink & Strasser, 2008, p. 31 ff.). In his study, Tobias Fink used video material to conduct an analytical interpretation of the learning culture of a dance and drama project. He sees public performance as a prerequisite for the development of “dramatic self-efficacy”, which in turn he believes is an important quality criterion for arts education as a whole (cf. Fink, 2012, p. 388).

With regard to methodology, we can conclude that multi-methodological approaches have generally been preferred, with the consistent focus of the methodological mix being on high-quality data collection tools (cf. Aulke et al., 2006, undated; van den Brink & Strasser, 2008). The empirical material encompassed participant observation, personal statements by the participants and/or statements from people who were directly involved in the project, such as artists and teachers. These statements were gathered during interviews or group discussions. So far, studies have generally not included the observations of people in the participants’ social milieu, such as parents and friends. Along with the multi-methodological studies, there are also a few purely quantitative studies of control groups (cf. Al-Diban et al., 2012; Domkowsky, 2008). There are also studies which only used qualitative methods (often guided interviews) (cf. Finke & Haun, 2001; Lindner, 2004, 2008; Reinwand, 2008).

## 2.2 RESEARCH GAPS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Most studies agree that participants in drama education programmes benefit from positive impulses for change. However, research is somewhat patchy when it comes to answering the questions: which changes, which participants, to what extent, and why do they occur in similar or different ways? Mention has been made of some potential influences on this process, but the individual interplay of the various influencing factors has not been addressed. Quantitative studies have failed to identify the reasons why specific skill levels increased, decreased or stayed the same at the point when they were measured – apart from the fact that they were not consistently systematised and operationalised, making it difficult to compare different thresholds. Previous qualitative studies have also failed to present empirical proof of the (group) dynamics and processuality of changes in terms of particular parameters relating to the participants’ skills, attitudes and behaviours. Few conclusions can be drawn from their results, and there is little evidence that similar or identical changes could be at the heart of different processes. In addition, the studies either fail to differentiate or differentiate only very generally between the various groups of participants. It is generally assumed that, by and large, all participants make positive use of the

programme to the same extent and in the same manner. None of the studies used a differentiating or contrasting typology.

The shortcomings of this earlier research led to the identification of areas that require further research in the field of drama education. Kristin Westphal argued for the need to “observe, record and evaluate specific training and learning processes in drama education” (Westphal, 2007, p. 57). In contrast, Biburger, Wenzlik and Hill (2009, p. 277) turn the spotlight on processuality and call for case studies: “The process-oriented character of arts education processes becomes clearest in individual cases, from which we can derive and abstract ‘patterns’ of individual developments, group processes and types of instruction.” With this, they are also addressing the biggest challenge faced by research into the practice of drama education in the medium term: how to create a comprehensive system that will cover all these case studies (which still have to be carried out) in terms of terminology, methodology and evaluation in order to improve the comparability, transferability and verifiability of the results. Reinwand (2008, p. 182 ff.) also points to the need for a process-oriented perspective when studying the impact of drama education. Artistic *learning* processes (in the shape of individual gains in self-confidence, social skills, knowledge of the subject and methods, and artistic skills) cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, they are necessary prerequisites for *educational* processes that not only change the way people view themselves and their surroundings but also transform their behaviours.

### 3. SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL USER RESEARCH – THEORETICAL REFERENCES, EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTERESTS, RESEARCH METHODS

Impact studies only have a limited capacity to close these research gaps. They need to be approached using different methods and methodologies. However, at present the question of whether user research could provide an alternative or additional way of closing or at least narrowing research gaps relating to the practice of drama education can only be addressed from a theoretical perspective. To date, and as far as we are aware, user research does not include any completed studies on drama education projects or activities with a corresponding research design and epistemological interest.<sup>4</sup> User research activities have tended to focus on ‘classic’ social pedagogical fields, such as helping the homeless (cf. Maar, 2005), parent-child centres (cf. Hellmann, 2005), intensive social education (cf. Dolić & Schaarschuch, 2005), debt counselling (cf. Sanio, 2009), educational counselling (cf. Krassilshchikov, 2009) and help for drug users (cf. Müller, 2013). Overall, user research is still used with caution by researchers in Germany.

#### 3.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO USER RESEARCH

In theoretical terms, user research is based on the fairly recent *theory of service provision* (cf. Schaarschuch, 1999). Schaarschuch draws on learning concepts (cf. Winkler, 1988) and theories relating to service provision from the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Gross & Badura, 1977; Gartner & Riessman, 1978). He defines service provision as “a professional mode of action that is based on and driven by the perspective of the service’s clients as active creators of their lives and consumers of services” (Schaarschuch, 1996, p. 90). In this way, the service’s clients, who themselves generate the benefit of the social service provision, become the starting point for social pedagogical interventions. So the benefit is not a matter of course or something that can be planned as a direct reaction. Instead, it reveals itself in the complex processes of the specific, subjective acquisition of skills, attitudes and different ways of behaving and acting (cf. Dolić & Schaarschuch, 2005, p. 109). Oelerich and Schaarschuch define a benefit “as

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<sup>4</sup> As part of their dissertation projects, the authors carried out user research to examine the benefits and use of drama education programmes in a variety of contexts and a range of target groups (cf. van Rieën 2016; van den Brink 2018).

*the intrinsic practical value of professional activities with regard to productively addressing the requirements that arise for users as a result of tasks they face in their lives”* (Oelerich & Schaarschuch, 2005b, p. 81, emphasis in original). The term *intrinsic practical value* highlights the subjective usefulness of programmes for individuals, who always have their own subjective needs and expectations. Any such definition harks back to Karl Marx, who distinguished a utility value from an exchange value and stated that a utility value is only realized through use or consumption (cf. Marx & Engels, 1961, p. 16).

#### 3.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTERESTS OF USER RESEARCH

This ‘textbook’ way of acting serves as a theoretical background for the empirical analysis of user research and at the same time demonstrates its epistemological interests, which

are [directed] at both the analysis of that which represents the practical value of social pedagogical action for the users and at the identification of those structural characteristics of social pedagogical action and social pedagogical practices that foster productive learning processes in the sense of providing autonomy in the lives of the users or which prevent, limit or thwart them in their contradictory amalgamation. (Schaarschuch & Oelerich, 2005, p. 13)

The analysis of conditions that foster and limit benefits also has the use-oriented goal of increasing the practical value of social work for users (cf. Schaarschuch & Oelerich, 2005, p. 17). The origins of this research approach date back to the 1980s, when there was much discussion about social work issues, such as ‘controlling and disciplining recipients’ and ‘incapacitation through experts’. Alternative concepts for social policy and social work were drawn up in response to the associated criticism that social work in capitalist societies aims to normalise ‘abnormal’ behaviour (cf. Offe, 1987; Oik, 1986; May, 2004). This postulate was taken up by user research, as it required a standardised and concise definition of use. However, it reconstructed it strictly from the perspective of the users and hence gave them both the responsibility and the power to define use – rather than giving it to the professionals, contracting parties or sponsors. So the term describes use in the framework of social service provision and the practical value (at content level) to the users of the social work programmes, along with the process of use itself (at process level) (cf. Oelerich & Schaarschuch, 2005b, p. 83).



## 3.3 RESEARCH METHODS OF USER RESEARCH

Although the content and process levels are closely related and each refers to the other, there is still the need for a range of research methods and procedures in order to deduce specific aspects from the empirical material. Only by drawing on different approaches, the two levels of analysis yield insight into opportunities and limitations with regard to research into social pedagogical practices.

With regard to the reconstruction of *use processes*, Dolić and Schaarschuch feel it makes sense to “display an open, explorative attitude towards the material, which allows the gathering of a maximum of different phenomena, without excluding certain phenomena in advance due to selectivity derived from theories” (Dolić & Schaarschuch, 2005, p. 100). Previous studies on user research have only investigated use indirectly via data generated during interviews. As “second-grade constructions”, they do not allow any inferences to be drawn about actual actions (cf. *ibid.*). In order to focus “directly” on the use process, it is necessary to study learning activities in the direct interaction process, such as through participant or video observation (cf. Schaarschuch & Oelerich, 2005, p. 20).

However, this is not imperative for the reconstruction of the *content-related benefit*. Of course there are also open research methods which are able to capture the multi-layered complexity of the meanings and contextualisation in the respective frameworks. Open or semi-structured interviews with the users lend themselves to this purpose. Here, narratives offer a glimpse into respondents' views and understanding, yet participants may also be asked to elaborate on a given aspect (cf. Schaarschuch & Oelerich, 2005, p. 20). Contrariwise, it is almost impossible to draw conclusions about the subjective benefit of these actions from actual or, more precisely, observable actions. The conditions for conducting the interview and the attendant ‘working relationship’ also have to be taken into account during the reconstruction: the subjective benefit to the users involved could well go in a different direction from that anticipated in the concepts and objectives of the particular programme. The conditions for conducting the interviews should be such that they allow the users to articulate their perceptions, even if they do not confirm with the programmes' official objectives.

To date, Mayring's qualitative content analysis (2010) has generally been used to evaluate the interview material that is produced in user research. Using qualitative content analysis, Maar (2005) identified micro/meso-level factors that create benefits in the context of aiding the homeless and also established a typology of use behaviour. The studies by Krassilshchikov (2009) and Müller (2013) used qualitative content analysis as an evaluation method, too. While Müller (2013) also illustrated typologies of use strategies by reconstructing conditions that create benefits, Krassilshchikov (2009) focused her analysis on barriers to use, which (could) lead to a breakdown of the advisory process in the context of the educational advisory centre. Only Sanio (2009) analysed six inter-

views by using maximum and minimum contrasts and with the help of Schütze's structural narration evaluation procedure (1983). This enabled him to identify the benefits, particularly in the areas of personnel and materials (cf. Sanio, 2009, p. 203 ff.).

With regard to the use of data collection and evaluation procedures, we are still waiting for user research to open up to further methodologies, so as to make the most of the potential offered by its change of perspective. In this respect, we should consider testing triangulative and multi-methodological procedures, along with more detailed analyses such as *objective hermeneutics* or *documentary methods*. A middle ground could be to use the research paradigm of *grounded theory*. This has not yet gained the same depth of interpretation as the two reconstructive procedures, but its open coding system provides an adequate basis for inductive methods.

## 4. USE AND BENEFITS IN THE CONTEXT OF DRAMA EDUCATION

What possibilities are provided by user research in the very specific context of drama education and the practice of drama education itself? The ambivalence of the term 'benefit' means we will answer this question in two stages. We will look at certain selected sub-dimensions that are relevant in the context of drama education at the process level (4.1) and content level (4.2).

### 4.1 THE PROCESS LEVEL: HOW THE PROGRAMMES ARE USED

When reconstructing the process level, the key question is 'how' the users make use of social pedagogical programmes. In user research a distinction is drawn between use strategies and ways of learning. The term 'use strategies' relates to an action by the user that is directed towards subjectively relevant aspects of the programme, while 'modes of learning' relates to an action "which produces a transformation and expansion of the quality of one's own skills in active execution aided by expert action" (Dolić & Schaarschuch, 2005, p. 101).

Initial empirical studies which reconstruct the process of use (cf. Dolić & Schaarschuch, 2005) conclude that the users selectively use those aspects that seem meaningful to them in light of their subjective relevance structures, and they try to neutralise other aspects which they view as negative or unpleasant. With the aid of such an approach, undesired and/or irrelevant elements of drama education programmes can be reconstructed. The users then adapt them or leave them unused. When describing and evaluating a drama education programme, some users mention the feeling of community that is created during their regular meetings, while others focus on the experience of producing a successful performance. The integration and context of drama education programmes can also create a benefit. Here we think of potential integration into familiar (but obligatory) settings such as school, or the utilization of a voluntarily selected programme in a (still) unfamiliar setting such as an arts education programme run by a theatre. With regard to the reconstruction of learning processes in drama education programmes, it may help to follow the example of Fink (2012) and carry out a framework analysis with video support.

### 4.2 THE CONTENT LEVEL: THE BENEFIT OF THE PROGRAMME

When we turn to a reconstruction of the content level, the key question is which potential benefits the users gain from social pedagogical programmes. According to Hirschfeld (2009, p. 74), this involves distinguishing "between the benefit of submission and the benefit of self-determination", always bearing in mind the historical, social and cultural specifics and the contradictory nature of subjective needs. The users gain many – supposed or assumed – benefits from the programme, but they do not necessarily correspond to the actual benefits. Therefore user research always includes relevant subjective and institutional contexts in order to be in a better position to investigate subjective benefits as a first step, and the conditions that promote or limit benefits as a second step.

In the first step, the subjective practical value of the programme for the user is systematically assessed. Drama education programmes do not take place in a vacuum but are always set against a complex background of relevant factors. It is not only the case that a benefit in terms of content is always linked to relevant subjective and institutional contexts. It is only when the subjective practical value is first contextualized against a background of social and institutional normative basic assumptions and the objectives that are commonly associated with the particular programme that it is then possible to analyse in more detail the independent benefits that the users identify with respect to their current and future lives. The ongoing discussion on the pros and cons of drama education projects within and in collaboration with schools can also be supplemented by empirical evidence that shows the significance of the institutional framework for the users – and not for the school's management, teachers, drama educators or artists. For research into the practice of drama education, the connectivity to self-efficacy could also be established with the recognition and attention aspects that, according to Oelerich and Schaarschuch (2005b, p. 89), are part of the personal dimension of the benefit. Self-efficacy has been the subject of a number of impact studies.

In the second step, the focus of the research turns to the conditions and limitations under which drama education programmes create a benefit, through the analytical integration of the provision *relationship* in the provision *context*. From an analytical point of view, it is possible to reconstruct the factors that produce benefits that have an impact on the constitution of benefits and non-benefits. This is linked to the assumption that the perspective of the users does not represent reality, but that this still has to be uncovered and is embedded in institutional frameworks and social contexts. Therefore the conditions that foster benefits, which favour the creation of a benefit, and the factors that limit benefits, the restrictions and barriers that compromise or prevent the generation of a benefit, can be subjected to an empirical analysis. This also prevents a sole attribution that is only directed at the subject. By reconstructing the conditions that foster and limit benefits, it becomes clear that benefits always have to be viewed in relation to the social world. When, for example, users say that they have primar-

ily developed skills by taking part in drama education programmes that they believe are relevant for their professional lives, this is reflected in the social significance of work. It is clear that their own assessments are always contextual, that is to say, always constituted in social and institutional terms. However, this does not mean we should not reveal all the users' evaluations and interests, but should rather take these into account when identifying a (potential) benefit.

## 5. CONCLUSION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS OF USER RESEARCH WHEN CARRYING OUT STUDIES ON DRAMA EDUCATION

We have described the challenges that empirical research faces in the context of the practice of drama education. To date, this area has been dominated by the question of impact. Previous studies in the field of drama education have therefore set up their research to identify causal and correlative means-to-an-end relationships. But they have neglected the fact that there is a learning process that can be found somewhere between project goals and project impacts. It is not only influenced by institutional and social conditions, but also by subjective learning types. These parameters often have a very complex relationship with each other, which makes it all the more difficult to untangle and reveal the multi-causal relationships of cause and effect.

The perspective of user research offers an opportunity to turn academic attention to the practice of drama education. The intended transfer effects are no longer studied, but the drama education programmes have to be evaluated from the perspective of user research in order to see the extent to which they provide the users with 'programmes' that are 'useful' in their daily lives. Therefore, it is closer to a social pedagogical understanding of a profession for which an orientation towards the subject and everyday life provides the basis of action. In this way it is closer to the users themselves and to what it means to them to take part in a drama education programme.

In terms of process orientation in the practice of drama education, user research also provides food for thought by giving the content and process levels equal weight in the analysis. It explicitly integrates the conditions that initiate or foster a potential benefit and the limitations and barriers that may counteract it. The differentiation between 'how' and 'under what conditions' a potential benefit can arise or be thwarted also opens up the option of studying and comparing different ways of learning and use strategies.

However, user research does not fully illuminate the blind spot of impact studies, the social (authoritarian) conditions and limitations that surround the subject status. It differentiates between the various analysis levels and so takes into account the micro, meso and macro levels. But the analytical problem that users' descriptions of benefits and non-benefits are already embedded in ideas of social norms, in authoritarian structures and in current discourse on benefits still remains largely unresolved at the micro-level of generated data material.

There is also no answer to the question of why users end their participation early or make a prior decision not to participate – at least in the way the data is collected at present. So it is difficult to come up with alternatives to existing programmes. It may be useful to investigate not only the (non)-realised benefits of participation in drama education programmes, but also to ask non-users or users who have stopped participating why they did not take part or ended their participation. This would open up the option of taking a critical look at existing drama education programmes in terms of their intrinsic practical value by reconstructing the factors that limit benefits and considering how they can be improved in the future.

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# IMPRESSUM

Hochschule Düsseldorf  
University of Applied Sciences

Fachbereich Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften  
Münsterstraße 156  
40476 Düsseldorf

Informationen zur Publikationsreihe:  
<http://soz-kult.hs-duesseldorf.de/forschung/publikationen/Seiten/studiesinsocialsciencesandculture.aspx>  
ISSN 2509-6958

Studies in Social Sciences and Culture. Aus der Forschung des Fachbereichs Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften der HSD, Nr. 6  
DOI 10.20385/2509-6958/2020.6  
URN urn:nbn:de:hbz:due62-opus-21273

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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Zitation:  
van Rießen, Anne & van den Brink, Henning (2020): From impacts to benefits: User research as a change of perspective for studies on the practice of drama education (Studies in Social Sciences and Culture. Aus der Forschung des Fachbereichs Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften der HSD, Nr. 6). Düsseldorf: Hochschule Düsseldorf. Verfügbar unter: <https://doi.org/10.20385/2509-6958/2020.6>



