

## Danish University Colleges

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## **Esports teaching as a pedagogical approach to socialisation in Specialised Youth Education**

### **12. Inclusive Education**

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#### **Research topic/aim**

There is an increase in the number of young people in Denmark, who experience school refusal and are unable to attend regular youth education. Since 2017, several at-risk youth (age 16-25) have been offered an alternative called Specialised Youth Education (Særligt Tilrettelagt Ungdomsuddannelse or STU). Several of the STU students have low well-being and/or suffer from stress and anxiety. Approximately 25% of the STU students are diagnosed with disorders such as ADHD and autism. In this paper, we will look into esports programmes at three STUs, where students participate in social gaming activities through multiplayer games such as League of Legends, Counter-Strike or Valorant. We have observed esports teaching and conducted interviews with both the teachers and the municipal study counsellors, who document the students' progression. In this way, we aim to answer the following research question:

How is esports teaching organised at STU, and what does educators and counsellors experience as the primary outcomes of the esports programmes?

#### **Theoretical framework**

Drawing on the theoretical framework of scenario-based education (Hanghøj et al., 2018), we understand educational gaming as the enactment of scenarios, which involve an interplay of different knowledge domains and practices. In the case of esports teaching at STU, this includes disciplinary domains (e.g. STU and esports curricula), pedagogical domains (e.g. teacher-student relations), game-specific domains (e.g. performing as team leader in a game), the students' everyday life domains (e.g. their out-of-school knowledge and experience with specific games) as well as the students' possibilities for further education or internships, which are mandatory for STU students. Moreover, our analysis is informed by microsociological theories on gaming

interaction and gaming norms (Goffman, 1961; Deterding, 2013) in relation to the esports teaching at the STUs. In this way, we will describe how the gaming activities create a structured framework for participation, where the students assume different roles and engage in specific forms of communication and collaboration through the games being played.

### **Methodological design**

The study is based on field work and observations at the three STUs conducted in 2023. Moreover, we have conducted interviews with 6 STU teachers and 6 study counsellors in order to map their perceived outcomes of the esports programmes. All the interview data has been transcribed and coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

### **Expected conclusions/findings**

The preliminary findings indicate that the esports programmes offer meaningful frames for participation for the STU students as it provides them with a safe and structured learning environment. In this way, the esports programmes help the students to become socialised into the learning community of the STUs, which may serve as a gateway to future activities - e.g. internships, friendships, or other educational activities at the STU.

### **Relevance to Nordic educational research**

The use and outcomes of facilitated social gaming (esports) to create inclusive learning environments described in this paper will be of relevance to understanding gaming practices in the Nordic countries among young people at risk. This will provide insight into how and why facilitated gaming may help to socialise young people at the margins of society.