

ECER 2016 Symposium Proposal

Enacting Policies: How does Leadership influence student learning in distinguished contexts

Paper: "Learning from the best"-Leadership in schools which won the German School Award

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This paper deals with the relevance of leadership in schools and the influence of leadership on student learning. First results of a qualitative study done in schools, which won the German School Award will be presented. Within the past years school governance in the German-speaking countries has moved towards output orientation and changed the agenda in schools towards improvement of student learning. Schools as organizational units and their autonomy has become more important in this process (Fend, 2008). If we want to understand the role of principals and their influence on student learning in this reform process we have to find out about how they enact these policies (Ball et al., 2012). Success stories of student learning as well as high quality teaching and leadership are sometimes found in unlikely places, and it takes some effort to draw attention to the innovative forms of enacting policies. The current state of research in this field is dominated by quantitative approaches (e.g. Leithwood et al., 2010). The project findings in this paper seek to fill this research gap by adding the results of a qualitative research design focusing on policy enactment in schools and the influence of the processes involved on student learning. The first part of this paper offers insight into the German School Award, a system-wide school improvement program launched by the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Heidehof Foundation in 2006. In the last decade, the Award has become a strong and respected voice in the world of education in Germany. Its main goal is to support schools to become learning organizations based on six quality areas: academic achievement, dealing with diversity, quality of teaching and learning, responsibility, school culture, and school as a learning institution (Schratz et al., 2014). In the second part of the paper, first results from fieldwork in 30 award winning schools will be presented in the form of vignettes. A triangulated research design was adopted in each school by conducting semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers and students, observing school life and doing document analysis during the school visits. The experiences of the observations are captured in vignettes, which are dense narratives of poignant experiential moments (Schratz et al., 2012). The analysis of the semi-structured interviews is based on grounded theory (Strauss, 1991).

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