



The First Decade of Asian Research on School Leadership in a Global Context 拾載以來的全球脈絡亞太學校領導研究

Development in Schools in Difficult Circumstances in Germany: The Role of School Leaders in Change Processes

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Objectives

This paper explores development processes in ten schools in difficult circumstances, located in a large city in Germany, which took part in a school turnaround project initiated as a public-private partnership between the school authority and the Foundation. The paper focuses on identifying positive changes in the participating schools over a five-year period which is the lifetime of the project and discusses interventions and conditions for school development and change.

Theoretical Perspectives

During the last decade, increasing attention has been paid towards schools which are defined as “failing” or “low” – or “underperforming” (cf.), and “schools in difficult circumstances”, which also includes a focus on the school context in terms of low SES, high degree of migration etc. in combination with dysfunctional characteristics of the school organisation (e.g. Baumert, Stanat & Watermann, 2006; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). The paper builds on research on school improvement and change with a particular focus on “School Turnaround”, which can be seen as an educational policy initiative aiming to change and improve the performance of those schools (e.g. Reynolds et al, 1996) as well as the role of school leaders and system leadership in change processes (Fullen, 2006; William, 2006).

Methodological approach

The project draws on a mixed methods and longitudinal design. For the analysis in this paper we concentrate on the qualitative data which included three rounds of semi-structured interviews with actors in the participating schools (school leaders, teachers, support staff, and students) and the local school governing system (superintendent) as well as school development coaches.



The qualitative analysis focuses on creating meanings and structures of organizational realities seen from multiple perspectives in the school system (Connelly et al, 1999) taking into account that different stories are positioned and presented from the perspective of individuals and groups with certain intentions at a specific moment in time (Eisenhart, 2000). A focus on stories is emphasised because they can be used to establish a picture of the past as a guide to organizational change, but also to organizational conservatism and maintenance.

Results

In general, a well-functioning and strategic school leadership is a main key and important condition for change and improvement. In all schools, except one, there has been a change of principals, either right before start of the project or during the second and third project year. We identified positive changes with respect to school leaders' role in intensifying cooperation among staff and with external partners. Sustainable change and development require systematic work and differentiated support from authorities, in particular with respect to decisions on the selection of school leaders and backing school leaders' work.



References

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