

9th ERNAPE Congress in Lisboa September 2013

Parent Involvement – the practice of teachers in lower primary schools in Switzerland

Martin Straumann, Jan Egger, Jürgen Lehmann

supported by SNSF

Research in Switzerland

Neuenschwander, Markus et al. (2005): The education styles of the families and the social background have a direct impact on the performance of the students (marks)

Lanfranchi, Andrea (2002): The success of immigrant children at school: Effects of early child care as transitional space.

Egger, Jan & Straumann, Martin (2012): The social context of the school and the management style of the principle have a influence on the practice of parent involvement.

Lehmann, Jürgen (2012): The standards of Epstein et al. of parent involvement are translated into German and explained in a journal for teachers in German speaking countries

School System in Northwestern Switzerland (Cantons AG, BL, BS and SO)

- Schools are guided by principles or school directors (two levels) that administer the school(s) by a performance agreement and a global budget
- The principal establishes an overall concept and a school program. In some Cantons, the schools establish written contracts with the parents with rights and duties of teachers, students and parents.
- The cantons have a quality management program with external evaluations of the schools every four years.
- Infrastructure and the buildings are in the responsibility of the communities based on norms and standards for the rooms by the canton
- Kindergarten of two years is compulsory and is part of the public school system, administered by the canton

Research plan and methodology

- The project uses qualitative methods like open interviews with teachers and natural data on schools (letters to parents, contracts with parents ...)
- We have done more than 40 interviews in eight schools in two different cantons that vary in relation of the size of the school, rural or city schools and the social and socio –economic context (migration)
- We make interviews teachers with at least six years of professional experience that teach the classes 1 to 3 in primary schools and the principals of the schools.
- We reconstruct the latent patterns of the narration ; we write case studies that are classified in different types.

Overall tendencies I

- Teachers stay with the classical approach: One meeting at the beginning of the school year with many information about the objectives for the students
- Talks with parents about school achievement, marks and promotion at spring time. Parent involvement is a element of school improvement und further education
- Letters to parents when there are special events (excursions, school projects)
- Teachers mention the overall concepts of the school as a marketing factor; little implementation and little concrete practice
- Unclear role of parent involvement: in the school program parents are welcome in the school but some teachers say, that parents are not so welcome in the classroom. Parents stay out of the classroom and have no explicit pedagogical expertise. Fear of interference in curricular or pedagogical matters.

Overall tendencies II

- Parents have the duty to participate in school meetings and discussions with the teacher about school matters. Generally they should not be involved in home-work of their children. They are not partner for the learning process of the student.
- High absenteeism of parents when the socioeconomic status of parents is low or when they don't understand or speak German language.
- High involvement of parents with high SES about school programs, education and homework of students
- The degree of professionalization of teachers what concerns p. i. is low; some of them have little strategies and little concepts to solve problems with parents.
- Transfer of school problems with students or parents to *social workers* (in the school), *teachers for special needs* (in every class)



Social Types of teachers practice: methodological remarks

- The interpretation of case studies is not per se generally valid
- The individual case is interpreted on the background of school culture and the social economic context of the school
- We found little diversity in the social attributes of the interviewed teachers: Normally they are women, come of the Swiss autochthone population, many teachers work part-time in a model of job-sharing (who is responsible for p.i.?)
- The interviews are anonymized und literally transcribed to texts
- The method of objective hermeneutic is a method of qualitative social research, which we use to look at the general attitudes and the habitus of teachers

Social Types of Parent Involvement-strategies of teachers (preliminary results)

- Type Z** **SES low, urban, school based, social benefits for p.,
foreign language of families**
- Type D** **SES mixed, agglomeration, the strategy is individualized,
coaching of parents to have better results in school**
- Type R** **SES high, agglomeration, school based, rules are
negotiated, educational values and respect**
- Type L** **SES high, rural, individual, educational problems with
children are treated out of school, learning in the school**
- Type ...** **perhaps we will find other types**

Type Z: urban context / 60 per cent of families with a migration background

- The local school has a formal concept of parent involvement
- Parents are allocated to schools by contracts with written duties
- Children that do not speak German are socialised in out- of-school day-care centres, where they do their home work and learn the German language
- The strategy of the school is centred to the learning of the children and the social concepts that are needed to support children with learning deficits
- Peacemakers and school culture of mutual respect of students and student – teacher relations are important

Type R: Agglomeration, SES high, full-time teacher

- Traditional standards of meetings with parents and standards talks in spring in relation with promotion and marks
- Very bad school culture in the past with no mutual respect and permanent curricular demands and critics of instruction in the class
- The principle organizes evaluation meetings with parents and proposes a code of conduct for parents and teachers.
- The school creates a council of parents and works out a contract with terms of conduct
- The school program is oriented to the improvement of instruction and learning of the students.
- The council of parents proposes meetings with external experts when problems occur in behalf of education, values and non accepted behavior

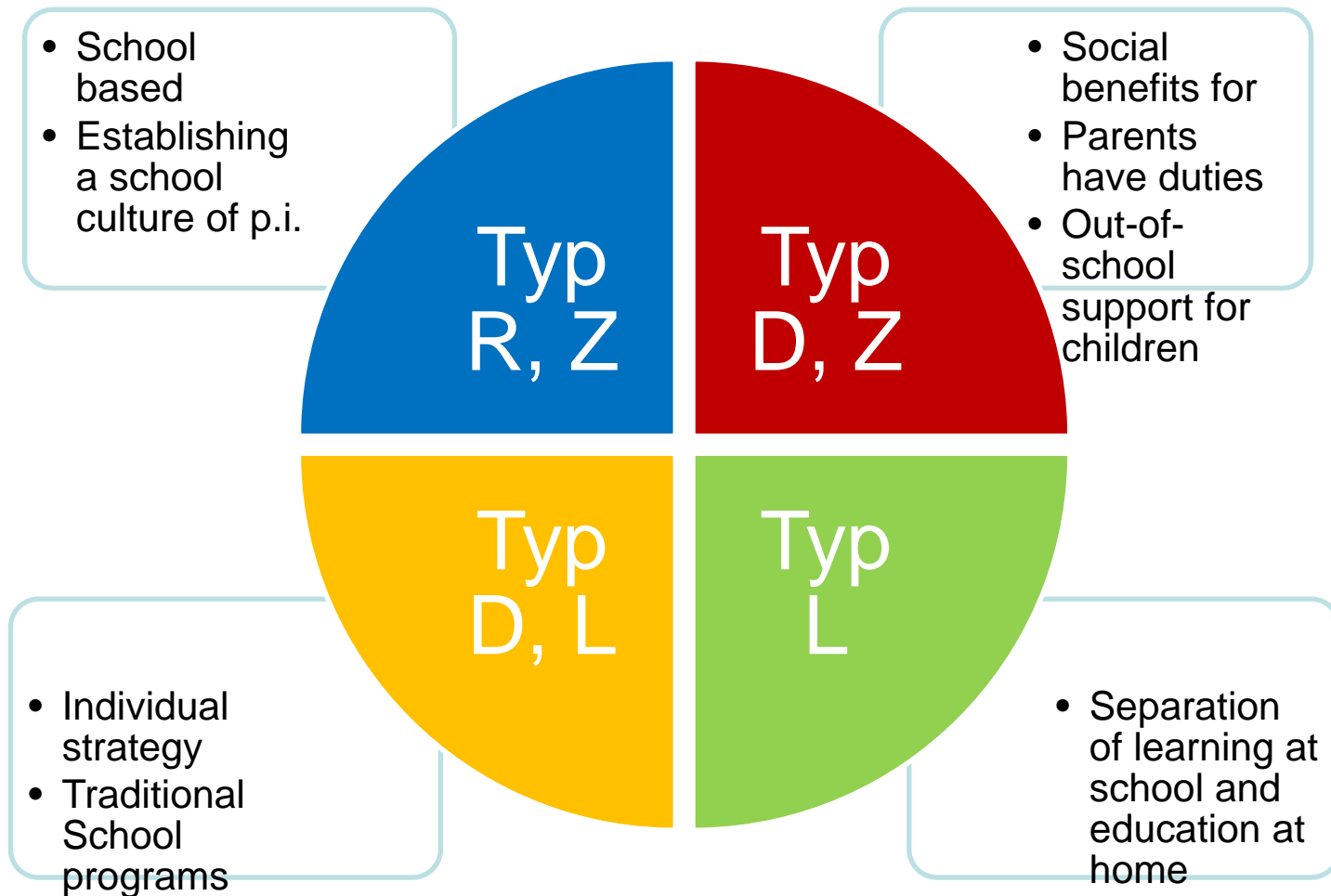
Type D: Agglomeration, SES high/ low,

- Teacher with high degree of professionalization –further education as a coach for learning processes
- Individual strategy, that is imposed to young or new teachers that collaborate
- High degree of differentiation. Concept that is oriented to the learning of the student. Educational or relational problems of the family are fended or not treated, but when the children has learning problems the teacher coaches also the family (extravagating strategy of the teacher?)
- The teacher organizes meetings for parents with educational problems and is also the expert that give the lecture
- But: The teacher has an tendency to interfere with social problems of the family, the colleagues don't have the time to do that the same way

Type L: rural community, SES high, part-time teacher

- Teachers have very traditional concepts of p.i.. They talk with parents only about the school , the instruction and the achievements of the students
- The part-time teacher argues that the partner is more fit to talk to the parents. She don't like these talks and specially not short-time talks when parents pick up the students at the school
- Teacher has a family at home and has little time for talks with parents. Twelve o' clock she goes home for cooking a meal for here own children at home.
- Educations problems with students are treated in the rural community on a informal way ("I see the mothers all day in the shopping center").

Social Types and sociocultural school context



Conclusions

- **Written programs and written contracts with parents are not enough**
- **Schools need to establish a school culture with mutual support of teachers and parents that are collaborating**
- **The role of teachers, parents and children must be clarified by talks or conferences in the school**
- **The strategy of school improvement follows the types and the four factors found. Schools in a rural context need different approaches than schools in a big town with social problems or schools with families with high SES**

Transfer and diffusion of the results in the Schools (next year)

- Feedback on the research results (types; case studies; excerpts of interviews)
- Voluntary:
School improvement: development of specific school culture of supporting the teachers in difficulties
- Concentrating the activity of teachers on the learning of the students (and the family background)
- Clear role standards for teachers and school social workers
- Enlargement of the strategies: parenting, communication strategies, establish a parent council with clear competences, monitoring the homework of students; partnership with the community

Discussion

Thank you for your attention

martin.straumann@fhnw.ch

Solothurn, Switzerland