Organisational Change in German Higher Education: The Emergence of Interdisciplinary Structures in Teaching Innovation

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Policy Problem

- Growing demand for equal access at all levels of education (Eggins, 2014)
- Inclusion and heterogeneity at German schools
- “Schools for all” (Schule der Vielfalt), co-teaching of students with different needs; no more special needs’ schools (Schwag Weiss, 2013)
- 30% (secondary) to 35% (primary) students with migratory background

- Need to adapt curricula for teacher training in universities to new societal demands

Objectives and Research Questions

- Understanding the processes of organisational change towards collaborative culture and interdisciplinary structures in teaching innovations at German universities
- (How) does organisational change towards interdisciplinarity take place at German universities which implement teaching innovations for inclusive teacher education?
- (How) do academics collaborate in order to build teaching capacities for inclusive education?
- Which factors inhibit or promote change towards interdisciplinarity?

Theoretical considerations

Universities as Specific, Complex Organisations
- Different organisational components, cultures, and interests
- Multiple, often-conflicting roles and identities
- Variety of stakeholders
- “Loosely coupled systems” (Weick, 1976)
- “Organised anarchy” (Cohen et al., 1972)

Disciplines and Disciplinary Boundaries
- Decentralised, fragmented disciplinary structures
- Lack of communication and collaboration
- “Academic tribes & territories” (Becher & Trowler, 2001)

The Implementation of Innovations in Universities

- Top-down vs. bottom-up approaches

Theories of Organisational Change

- Organisational Change
- Alteration or introduction of ideas, structures, processes, or behaviours in an organisation (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977; Dampmour & Evan, 1984; in Bess & Dee, 2008)

Models of Organisational Learning: Linear vs. Interactive
- Single- and Double-Loop Learning (Agyris & Schön, 1978)
- Structures: goals, policies, plans, authority
- Culture: norms, values
- Outcomes (Consequences of actions)

Theory of Structuration

- Structure as continuous process
- Structure and action are inextricably linked
- Interaction replicates structures
- Only collective agency has the power to transform social systems (Giddens, 1984)

Methodology

- Ethnographic, single case study
- Theory triangulation
- Data triangulation:
  - Participatory observation
  - Targeted data collection: Interviews (strategic actors), focus group discussions (young researchers) – repeated at different project stages
- Other materials: Documents (e.g. protocols and proceedings, curricula and syllabuses), evaluation results, ...
- DoProfiL as a case of teaching innovation in German higher education system

- Reflection of the implementation of innovations among universities within the project:
  - Involvement of rectorate and administration
  - Involvement of professors and their research groups with individual projects

Interdisciplinarity, innovation, and inclusion: Where is the link?

- Interdisciplinarity is the interaction among two or more different disciplines [...] (which) may range from simple communication of ideas to the mutual integration of organising concepts, methodology, procedures, epistemology, terminology, data, and organisation of research and education” (OECD, 1972, p. 25-26)

The Role of interdisciplinarity for inclusion
- Interdisciplinarity promotes the capability of empathising with multiple perspectives and stakeholders and tolerating ambiguity and complexity (Haynes, 2002)
- Interdisciplinarity in higher education can help to establish multicultural and inclusive pedagogies designed to ensure that all students can succeed (DasZure, 2010)

The Role of interdisciplinarity for innovation in organisations
- Intra-organisational linkages facilitate organisational learning (OECD, 1999)
- Interdisciplinary teams act as drivers of change: Linking top-level strategic innovation with bottom-up innovation (Holley, 2009; Sa, 2010, in Dee & Lieyits, 2016)

The Role of interdisciplinarity for innovation in teaching innovation
- “Loosely coupled systems” (Weick, 1976)
- Implementation of innovations evokes less decision-making processes
- Decentralised, fragmented disciplinary structures
- Other materials: Documents (e.g. protocols and proceedings, curricula and syllabuses), evaluation results, ...
- Participatory observation
- Targeted data collection

Literature