

## 'Talent Schools' in North Rhine-Westphalia: Aims, Opportunities and Challenges of a 6-Year Study

**Authors :** Laura Beckmann, Sabrina Rutter, Isabell Van Ackeren, Nina Bremm, Esther Dominique Klein, Kathrin Racherbäumer

**Abstract :** Current evidence demonstrates that schools in socially disadvantaged contexts are often characterized by lower school performance and lower educational qualifications among the student body, compared to schools in more privileged socio-spacial contexts. At the same time, national and international findings on schools with structural and social challenges show that certain school and classroom development strategies, as well as human and material resources, can significantly contribute to improved school performance of students. The aim of this contribution is to present a 6-year mixed-methods study (Talent Schools in North Rhine-Westphalia), which is designed as a school experiment addressing the well-acknowledged inequality of educational opportunities in the German school system. Started in the year 2019 and funded by the Ministry for School and Education of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the study targets schools in socio-spatially disadvantaged areas, which have increasingly been the focus of both public debate and educational policy. In the German-speaking countries, however, there is little knowledge available on the structure and design of complex strategies for school and classroom development that describe successful approaches to the further development of schools in disadvantaged locations in a process-oriented manner. Given these shortcomings, the present study aims at a longitudinal analysis of school and classroom development processes within 60 'talent schools', whereby concrete micro-progressions within individual schools are documented and aggregated to general processes that may either impede or promote development. The main research question is the following: With the help of which strategies and (teaching) concepts, with which use of resources and with which forms of cooperation can schools contribute to the development of student achievement, including educational qualifications and transition rates in education and employment? Thus, the 'talent schools' may serve as examples of how social background can successfully be decoupled from educational success at schools with special structural and procedural challenges. The major chances and challenges of this project will be discussed.

**Keywords :** educational inequality, school development, student achievement, mixed-methods study

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