Research project: APrA – Achievement: A Social Practice in Primary School. An International Comparative Analysis on Germany and Italy.

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Abstract

The research project "APrA" investigates comparatively how achievement and achievement differences are produced within discourse-practice formations in primary school teaching, in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (Italy) and in the Ruhr area in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). These education systems differ greatly in the stratification, in Italy there is an inclusive school system since the '70 while in Germany there is a selective system both emphasizing meritocratic principles. These fundamental differences and similarities are key aspects of this comparative study.

In the research project we assume that achievement is socially constructed and shaped by educational institutions in which inequity-relevant dynamics such as classism, racism, sexism and ableism can intersect. Thus, from primary school onwards, students are confronted with hegemonic expectations that influence their roles.

At the same time, education systems internationally strive to strike a balance between promoting high achievement and minimising socio-economic inequality. Hence, discourses on achievement are shaped by international agendas, but vary from country to country (Kaiser & Seitz, 2023). In Germany, achievement seems to be associated with performance and selection, whereas in Italy the focus seems to be more on the development of individual competences, but also on social comparison.

The qualitative research project:

– Reconstructs teachers' perceptions of achievement through narrative interviews
– Conducts ethnographic classroom observations to understand how achievement and ability norms are created
– Analyses educational policy discourses related to achievement to contextualize institutional influences