

Statement 1 towards the Preliminary Research Report of LAS

The report of the LAS team is an impressive manifestation of successful research work accomplished by scientists from different disciplines and countries. The report offers sophisticated theoretical perspectives as well as in-depth empirical analysis, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. I hope that the results of the report will be vividly discussed in the scientific and teacher community.

In scientific discussions we benefit most from criticism. For this reason I would like to reduce my following comments to aspects of the report which I find problematic, unclear or which need to be criticized. I have xx points to make.

1. In the introduction to the report, the authors adopt a rather system-theoretical approach to the school, mainly based on Luhmann's late work on the education system. Although I do think that this approach helps to disburden educational theory from normative and moralistic burden, I wonder if Luhmann's organization-theoretical emphasis on decision and hence on communication doesn't blur other aspects of school-life equally important for language acquisition? Interaction, in particular, should be given more importance both in the theoretical outline and – as I will touch upon later – in empirical analysis too. In the introduction interaction during instruction is only mentioned as something “decision-based not least because of the uncertainty of everything that happens, while decisions serve to reconstruct the irretrievable ‘eventness’ of educational interaction in terms of evaluation, grading, relocation, or the like.” (p. 4) I do think that an action-theoretical approach to interaction would have served the aims of the researchers.
2. In the section on the “description and conduction of methods” the authors distance themselves from methodologies which are “oriented towards the evaluation of teachers’ didactic and pedagogic strategies” and go on to say: “But with the main question of LAS research being how children practically learn to read and write in the classroom, didactics and pedagogy were only of interest in terms of what the pupils make of it, not regarding normatively acceptable or unacceptable teaching methods.” (p. 26) In this regard the researchers underpin that “each action comprises the clues as to how it has to be interpreted by the participants ..., so everything that happens ‘makes sense’.” (p. 28) I very much agree with this methodological approach (although I would rather have chosen different methods for qualitative data analysis). However the lesson analyses in Germany, especially in the 1st grade class, are, to my opinion, rather an evaluation of the teacher's pedagogical action than a sociological analysis of how children practically learn to read and write. To give just one example, on page 201 the authors write that all the examples given “show that the teacher lacks phonologic awareness and hence is not able to convey it to the pupils” (p. 201). The teacher is often criticized, e.g. for an “arbitrary and often even careless” handling of time (p. 202), and for being “often inconsequent regarding standing rules” (p. 209). Although I do think that in an evaluation study such criticism of the teacher would be in place, I would suggest that such evaluative judgment be based on

a comparative background. As a reader I would like to know what the standards or contrasting cases are on which the negative evaluation of the 1st grade teachers is based.

3. A rather sociological analysis of the teacher's interventions and the pupils' learning activities would need more interaction analyses. (As I have mentioned before the report tends to underestimate the importance of interaction in its theoretical section too.) Indeed the meaning of any teacher intervention can only be interpreted by taking into account the pupils' reactions too. Unfortunately the research especially on the 1st grade class lacks such interaction analysis. For the 7th grade, however, we find one sophisticated interaction analysis on page 266-7 where the researchers scrutinizes how the teacher interferes when a pupil gives a wrong answer.
4. The section concerning the "comparison of mono- and bilingual pupils in German class" is very interesting. It reveals that there are only very few meaningful differences between mono- and multilingual pupils the empirical difference between "assuming homogeneity" in the 1st grade class and "creating homogeneity" in the 7th grade, which itself is a very meaningful and intriguing result. Given the overall objectives of the project this point could be elaborated on further. When doing so the authors might wish to bring more clarity as to the nature of their comparison. On the one hand the comparison is conducted as a quantitative, statistical inquiry. On the other hand this inquiry is based on very few cases. How far are the results generalizable, e.g. as the researchers do when they compare between the 1st and the 7th grade ("Very tentatively appraised, these findings point to the fact that potential dissimilarities between mono- and bilingual pupils are rather extended than neutralized in the course of literacy acquisition ...", p. 293-4)?

Statement 2 towards the Preliminary Research Report of LAS

1. When reading the country reports I was sometimes confused as to what was the purpose of the whole investigation. But when I read the Comparative Lesson Analyses, the topics which were elaborated and the peculiarities which were revealed became more and more interesting and intriguing. I think it is an important achievement of the report that it reveals the positive and negative aspects of literacy approaches in both countries.
2. The authors make the differences between first graders in the Turkish and the German class room very clear. I very much appreciated the idea that in the German classroom the transition from child to pupil is important whereas in the Turkish classroom the people are directly treated as pupils. However, other contrasts seem to be over-emphasized. When the authors write that in the German classroom the teacher maintains a "relationship on equality", this is both not supported by the empirical evidence and contradicts all studies on the soft symbolic violence enforced by teachers.
3. The comparisons are prone to be reflected with theoretical ideas and concepts. For example, the different strategies of teachers concerning class surveillance and imposing authority, abiding to rules etc. could be reflected with Goffman's concepts of role ambiguity etc. It seems to me that the strict rules in the Turkish classroom don't really

make the pupils aware of the ambiguities of roles, whereas in the German case roles sometimes seem to be so ambiguous that it is even difficult to discern any role at all. This is only one example for the variety of opportunities for which the authors may wish to provide more theoretical insight and reflection.

4. As in the previous mentioned case of over-emphasized or suppressed role ambiguity, there are quite a few points in the comparison where would normatively wish to have the German and the Turkish pedagogical approach combined. This is also the case with the process-focused German approach (which sometimes lacks any results) and the result-oriented Turkish approach (which overlaps the process character of literacy learning).
5. Unfortunately the comparisons are only carried out within one grade. I do think that the empirical material would also allow some conclusions concerning the contexts of the respective schools if one would change the tertium comparationis.
6. However it is still an unsolved question whether what is termed “Turkish” or “German” really pertains to the national context. The empirical basis for comparisons (one school in each country) is far too small to say anything about the national contexts. If at all the authors should include stronger references to other (comparative or case) studies which would back their findings.
7. Smaller questions: A. Are languages other than German forbidden in the classroom, during lessons or in the whole school premises? B. Irregular school attendance may coincide with poor school facilities in the LAS school in Turkey. However school attendance in village school is poor as well, although village schools may have less difficulty in accommodating many children. Is there a gender difference in school attendance?