

**Regional OECD/CERI Seminar of German Speaking Countries:
„Development and Implementation of Educational Innovations as a Consequence
of Educational Monitoring, Educational Reporting, and Comparative Studies of
Student Performance – Opportunities and Limitations“**

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In German speaking countries, international assessments of student performance resulted in a number of innovations that aim at improving the quality of educational systems. These include regular educational monitoring and educational reporting activities. It is expected that such measures can help to identify target points for interventions which, in turn, will help to optimize the system. Translating findings from educational monitoring into innovations, however, is not a trivial task. It is impossible to conclude directly from the observed patterns of results where reforms should be introduced. Similarly, it is unclear under which conditions intended innovations can be implemented, in what way they will change educational practice, and to what extent they will actually yield the intended effects. In addition to intended outcomes, policy and practice based on educational monitoring can also have negative side effects, such as when monitoring results in a narrowed focus on those goals of educational systems that are relatively easy to measure. Moreover, international assessments of student performance may promote a culture of innovation that is largely reactive and may thus undermine the capability of education systems to initiate and implement innovations from within.

The regional OECD/CERI seminar for German speaking countries, which was held in Potsdam from the 25th to the 28th of September 2007, aimed at analyzing the relationship between educational monitoring and educational innovations. The seminar entailed presentations and panel discussions as well as visits of various educational institutions (see <http://www.bildung-brandenburg.de/4859.html> for the complete program).

Figure 1 shows the system of interrelationships that was considered during the conference. The discussions focused on five interfaces highlighted in the figure with bold arrows.

1. *From standards to school and instructional practice*

In a number of forums within the conference, participants discussed the question how data on educational systems and individual schools, which are generated with different methods, can be used to improve the quality of schools and instructional practice. This question was considered to be one of the most pressing issues, which is associated with a high degree of uncertainty. As empirical research is lacking in this area, there is hardly any sound evidence on the relationship between standards and performance data on the one hand and schools and instructional practice on the other.

2. *From measured results to policy-relevant knowledge and policy decisions*

A second focus of the discussion was the question how data can be translated into policy-relevant knowledge and policy decisions. In this context, participants also analyzed the relationship between educational research and educational policy, noting that data obtained from monitoring systems, from educational research, and from educational reporting almost never imply clear-cut, concrete conclusions. Decisions in education have always been and will continue to be decisions associated with a high degree of uncertainty which have to take normative considerations into account. Nevertheless, the *evidence* that educational research generates should help to ensure that policy decisions are increasingly well-founded. This requires evidence of high quality, which can be promoted by open calls for tender for research projects, transparently regulated access by the scientific community to existing data sets, and the consistent application of scientific standards for publications. The relevant stakeholders have to process the findings generated by research, which presents an increasingly challenging task as the pool of available data, analyses, and results is growing. Representatives of all three countries participating in the seminar agreed that the link between educational research and educational policy needs to be improved.

3. *From policy decisions to implementation*

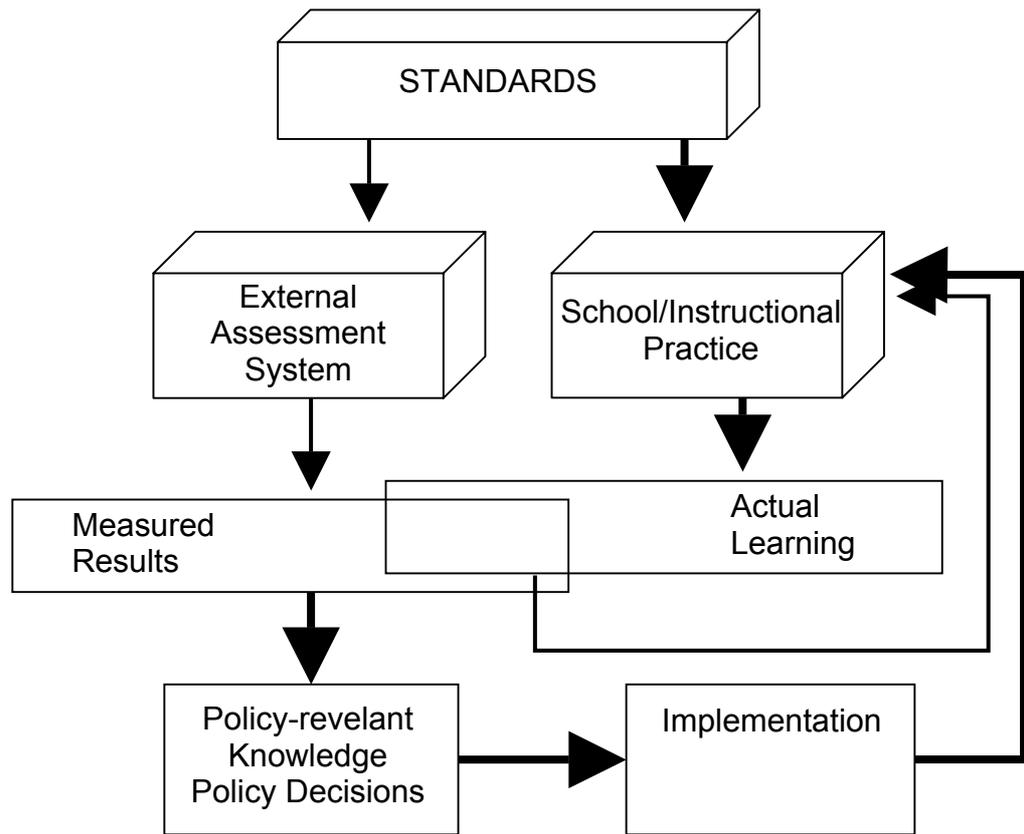
Another challenge that was discussed at the conference is the implementation of policy decisions. Several presentations described the complexity of this transfer in detail. They stressed the importance of involving stakeholders at the various levels of the system in

an iterative reform process, such that a sense of ownership emerges. The goal must be that the implemented measures make sense to all groups involved.

4. *From implementation to schools and instructional practice and to learning outcomes*

The extent to which one can expect that the implemented changes will, in fact, have an effect on schools and instructional practice was discussed in the seminar as well as the extent to which changed schools and instructional practice will, in fact, improve students' learning outcomes. This discussion distinguished between actual and measured learning outcomes, which should be modified in the intended direction, yet not by simply teaching to the test (unless the tests are "intelligent" such that they can be considered "worth teaching to"). In order to identify effects on the levels of schools and the system, change sensitive measurement tools are necessary. It is largely unclear, however, how much instruction needs to change for student performance to improve notably. Thus, it is quite conceivable that the current reform efforts may occasionally lead to disappointments.

Figure 1. Accountability and Outcomes.



adapted from Herman (2005)