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Policy Discourses in school texts and events

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Background

This paper traces policy enactments in school texts and events. It uses the case studies of 'ordinary schools' from the 'Policy enactments in secondary schools' research project (see symposium outline) to focus on the four schools as specific sites of policy articulation.

Research Questions

The paper addresses the question of how key national policy discourses are presented and played out at school level - one of the key questions policy makers ask of education researchers.

Methods

This paper draws in particular on material we have collected in the form of observational notes from schools' events and meetings (Senior Leadership team meetings, continuing professional development and INSET events, whole-staff meetings, departmental meetings, behaviour forums, etc.) and school level texts (that is policy texts and policy materials produced within the case study schools, including those materials on the schools' intranets).

Frame

The concern here is to see the 'play' of key policy discourses in and across these texts and events - that is, notions like 'learning', 'behaviour for learning', 'standards' and 'performance', 'leadership' - and particular policy initiatives like 'personalised learning' and 'Every Child Matters'. The paper will explore the way in which these discourses articulate educational issues at school level - providing ways of talking about and thinking about schooling - and in some cases the way in which the discourses are muted, transformed or deconstructed within the everyday practices of school life and set over and against, or integrated into, existing discourses - a heteroglossia.

Research findings

The paper will acknowledge that policy discourses should not be considered in isolation; rather, they act upon and influence one another in an act of intertextuality. There is a need to bear in mind (and in relation to other papers in the symposium) that the social effects of discourses are dependent upon the audience accessing, comprehending and using them.