

## Wer hat was zu sagen?

### Interview mit Melanie EHREN

(Institute of Education, University of London)



#### Dr. Melanie Ehren

Studium an der University of Twente (NL), wo sie an der Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, department of Educational Management 2006 ihren PhD machte. Danach Tätigkeit an der School of Media and Design, Rotterdam, Assistant Professor an der University of Twente, Visiting Scholar an der Columbia University, New York und an der Harvard University, Boston. Seit 2012 Senior Lecturer am Institute of Education, University of London.

Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen im Bereich von Effekten und unbeabsichtigten Konsequenzen von auf Standards basierenden Schulreformen, Rechenschaftslegungssystemen und Schulinspektionen auf Schulentwicklung und das Lehren und Lernen in Schulen.

Bei der 6. Qualitätsnetzwerk-Konferenz am 1.12.2014 in Wien wird sie eine Keynote halten (siehe [www.qualitaet-in-der-berufsbildung.at](http://www.qualitaet-in-der-berufsbildung.at)).

**ARQA-VET: Dear Ms Ehren, could you please tell our readers in a few sentences something about your work at the University of London?**

#### Melanie Ehren:

I'm a senior lecturer at the Institute of Education, doing research on evaluation of schools, high stakes testing and school inspections. In my research I particularly look at the impact of these three topics on improvement of schools, and also try to understand why some systems have an impact and/or also lead to unintended consequences. A recent project on school inspections (see [www.schoolinspections.eu](http://www.schoolinspections.eu)) I coordinated provided some interesting insights on this topic, showing how inspection systems in different countries have a different impact and emphasizing the importance of the context and education system in which these systems operate. Inspection feedback seems in some countries (particularly with new inspections systems) to be key mechanism for improvement, while in other countries (that have long standing inspections) it is the way Inspectorates of Education set expectations about good education (e.g. through their standards) that motivate improvement of schools. In a new project I will be coordinating a new EU research team to look at the impact of newer inspection models; e.g. models that have to adapt to education systems where schools now work in networks of schools to improve their practices. Additionally I also coordinate and teach on a Master's degree 'Evaluation, Inspection, and Educational Improvement' which supports participants (e.g. school inspectors and school staff involved in evaluation of their school) in enhancing their academic understanding of some of these topics.

**ARQA-VET: In your signature it says: "The Institute of Education: Number 1 worldwide for Education, 2014 QS World University Rankings". In your opinion: What makes The Institute of Education number 1?**

#### Melanie Ehren:

I think the IOE is a great place to work, with many colleagues of high standing who do an excellent job in research and teaching. Having the opportunity to work with such a great variety of colleagues from many different parts of the world and areas of expertise has been very inspiring. I am very pleased with this ranking as it suggests that our students also experience this. However, as rankings

and league tables are a big part of my own research I know that performance indicators are often biased and no absolute measure of quality. If we were to drop on the list we are still the same great institute and such small changes in ranking, although they have a big impact on how we are viewed, are relatively meaningless to me.

**ARQA-VET: Can you outline some recent findings of (your) research concerning factors of quality of teaching and learning in schools?**

**Melanie Ehren:**

I don't study the quality of teaching and learning as such, but particularly focus on how testing and systems inspection impact on teaching and learning in schools. In the recent EU-project I mentioned we found that school inspection systems particularly affect the school organizational conditions of high quality teaching and learning, such as the school's innovation capacity (cooperation between teachers, leadership in the school) as well as the extent to which schools engage in school self-evaluation. Improvement of these conditions are expected (mainly by Inspectorates of Education) to support improvement of quality of teaching and learning, and are supposed to lead to improved student achievement. Our recent project however did not support this notion as we found little evidence of improved student achievement.

**ARQA-VET: At our conference on December 1<sup>st</sup> you will be one of the keynote speakers and we will hear from you about the effects of a quality management system (like we have it with QIBB in Austria) on teaching and learning in schools. We do not ask you to answer this question right now but for today it would be interesting to get an idea how you will address this question.**

**Melanie Ehren:**

External and internal evaluations of schools are part of many education reforms across Europe. Such evaluations are expected to support schools in identifying key issues for improvement, while highlighting the strengths they can maximize. Across Europe there are many traditions for and approaches to internal and external evaluation of schools, which are embedded in different quality assurance, accountability and school inspection systems. Understanding the impact of evaluations on improvement of schools requires an understanding of how evaluations are embedded in such systems, as well as the mechanisms explaining improvement from school evaluation. This keynote will address these issues as well as provide an overview of evidence on effects of internal and external evaluations.

**ARQA-VET: Our final question: Is there something you like specifically on Austria?**

**Melanie Ehren:**

I was fortunate to be invited by Herbert Altrichter a couple of years ago to teach for a couple of weeks at the Johannes Kepler University in Linz. I spent the weekends cycling along the Danube and really enjoyed the beautiful landscape.

*Thank you very much for the interview!*

*We are looking forward to December to have you here at our conference.*