Abstract: "What counts? Whole school Education for Sustainable Development and teacher professional learning"

Rachel Bowden

This keynote examines how monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can meaningfully support whole-school Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and teacher professional learning. Drawing on a qualitative case study of a rural school in Germany, and making connections to wider school-based professional development programmes, the talk shows how ESD becomes powerful when rooted in teachers' professional judgement, local priorities, and strong community networks. The study highlights how coaching, collaborative cultures and planning tools help staff make existing practices visible as ESD, strengthen partnerships, and expand learners' opportunities to connect local experiences with global sustainability issues. At the same time, the findings reveal the limitations of standardised, output-oriented indicators for capturing the relational and contextual nature of whole-school change. The keynote argues that indicators should instead focus on processes—such as participation, reflection, collaboration, and engagement with ESD concepts and networks. Such process-based approaches position M&E as a form of professional learning and support meaningful, locally grounded school development.

Bio

Rachel Bowden is an educational researcher and project manager, who specialises in education for sustainable development, multilingual education, teacher education and whole school development.

CV

- 2025- ongoing Research Associate, Hochschule Zittau-Görlitz
- 2022 –2025 Research Associate (project coordination, teaching, research, student advising), TU Dresden, Centre for Teacher Education and Education Research
- 2021 –2023 Research Associate (literature review, curriculum and textbook analyses, policy brief), University of Bristol
- 2016 – 2020 Research Consultancy (during PhD), including Translators without Borders / UNICEF, University of Graz, UNESCO East Africa, Rwanda Education Board
- 2014 –2015 Research Assistant / Project Coordination, TU Dresden
- 2011 –2013 Project Manager, British Council Malaysia
- 2008 – 2010 Senior Teacher / Academic Manager / Teacher Trainer, British Council Nepal & India
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