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Changing the way social inequality in education is treated in France and Germany
***Schule macht stark* (2019) and *Les contrats locaux d'accompagnement* (2020) as**
contrasting examples of layering

Summary

France and Germany are among the OECD countries where social origin most strongly affects educational achievement. While the structural causes of this phenomenon have been widely studied, the institutionalization of its policy treatment and the room for manoeuvre available to policymakers to bring change in these two contrasting education systems remain underexplored. This dissertation addresses this gap through a comparative analysis of two recent policies targeting schools in disadvantaged areas: *Schule macht stark* in Germany and *les contrats locaux d'accompagnement* in France. Drawing on process-tracing, the analysis of documents and 50 interviews, and grounded in neo-institutionalist theory, this research shows that these policies exemplify layering: strong veto players constrained policymakers to implement change through the addition of experimental initiatives rather than through reform of existing policies. These shifts affected policy orientations—toward greater efficiency in France and greater equity in Germany—policy instruments—via the strengthening of New Public Management—and governance levels—with the involvement of the federal tier in Germany. In France, changes were rapid but short-lived, marked by the political instrumentalization of experimentation. In Germany, they were slower but more enduring, supported by academic expertise. In both cases, broader initiatives—*Conseil national de la refondation* and the *Startchancen-Programm*—have continued these trajectories, illustrating the relevance of the layering approach.