School self-evaluation
for school improvement:
what works and why?

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School improvement: international reviews of best practice

Working with partners including the Department of Education at Oxford University, the Centre for Equity in Education at the University of Manchester, the University of Glasgow, the University of Nottingham and the Hong Kong Institute of Education, CfBT Education Trust has commissioned a series of reviews of international literature. These reviews cover a range of topics related to school improvement including assessment for learning; the inclusion of students with special educational needs; effective teaching practice; school self-evaluation; and successful school leadership.

The idea that schools can impact positively on student outcomes is a crucial driver in the rise of interest in school improvement research and practice. These reviews highlight international examples of best practice in order to effect change and identify how effective school improvement manifests itself. It forms a useful tool for schools and school leaders, but also acts as a lesson for policymakers in terms of what works around the world.

This review focuses on: **School self-evaluation for school improvement**

School self-evaluation can be a fundamental force in achieving school improvement and this review establishes what the key debates are in relation to school self-evaluation, what principles and processes are associated with it, and what the implications are for school self-evaluation as a means of leading school improvement. The review also incorporates a framework for conducting self-evaluation and case study examples from systems and schools that have previously undergone the process.

The other four reviews in this series focus on:

From exclusion to inclusion

With a specific focus on children with special educational needs (SEN), this review addresses the forms of classroom practice that can help all children to participate. The review particularly focuses on elements of inclusive education and the implications for schools and school leaders.

Effective teaching

Teachers are one of the key elements in any school and effective teaching is one of the key propellers for school improvement. This review is concerned with how to define a teacher's effectiveness and what makes an effective teacher. It draws out implications for policymakers in education and for improving classroom practice.

Successful leadership

School leaders are under considerable pressure to demonstrate the contribution of their work to school improvement, which has resulted in the creation of a wide range of literature which addresses leadership in the context of school improvement. This review pays particular attention to issues including transformational leadership, instructional/pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership.

Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning – where the first priority is to promote learning – is a key means of initiating improvement. The features, strategies and principles underpinning assessment for learning form the basis of this review.

CfBT is a world authority on school improvement. We work directly with schools and governments improving education outcomes through evaluation, training and professional development programmes. This series of reviews fits into our aim to develop evidence for education and supports our goal to provide school improvement programmes which are evidence based.

Contents

Executive summary

School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning. The process can be located on a number of continua that define the exact nature of the process and reflect the context in which it is occurring. These dimensions include: summative-formative; internally-externally driven; and whether self-evaluation is conducted as a top-down or bottom-up process. Furthermore, schools should reflect on their context and the appropriate position and blend elements to optimise the impact of school self-evaluation on pupil and professional learning.

 In terms of school improvement, teachers and school leaders are the key change agents for improvement and self-evaluation is a necessary but insufficient ingredient to stimulate school improvement. Five phases are outlined for school improvement activity:

- **Phase 1** – specific intervention and the highlighting of the importance of culture in any change process
- **Phase 2** – focus on teacher action research and school self-review
- **Phase 3** – building on the emerging school effectiveness knowledge base
- **Phase 4** – scaling up reforms
- **Phase 5** – systemic reform.

School self-evaluation should be conducted within a coherent framework and underpinned by a set of structures that support systematic processes to collect a range of data from diverse sources and inform action to improve pupil and professional learning.

The evidence within this review suggests that if individual contexts can create supportive environments, school self-evaluation has an important role to play in supporting pupil and professional learning.

Introduction

The emergence of the school effectiveness movement[1] has provided growing evidence that schools can, and do, make a difference to academic outcomes, and ultimately the life chances of schoolchildren. The recognition that schools can impact positively (and therefore negatively) on student outcomes has also supported the rise of school improvement research and practice. These two related fields have made a considerable contribution to our understanding of the factors associated with effective schooling and the processes linked to improving them.

Policymakers around the world have drawn on these research findings to develop policies to intervene in schools in order to raise educational standards. Recent examples of policies have adopted a zero tolerance approach[2] and include No Child Left Behind and Race to The Top in the United States, and the National and City Challenge programmes in England. Policymakers have also listened to the arguments of academics and researchers calling for improvements to be made from within schools.[3] Policies designed to support internally generated improvement can often be traced back to the traditions associated with Kurt Lewin:[4] action research, the development of professional practice, and school self-evaluation for school improvement. The latter is the focus of this review.

The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of school improvement research and practice and in particular the processes and principles associated with school self-evaluation for school improvement. Specifically, this review seeks to:

- offer an overview of school effectiveness and school improvement research and practice, and school self-evaluation
- highlight the key debates associated with school self-evaluation
- highlight the key principles and processes associated with school self-evaluation for school improvement
- reflect on the implications for leading school self-evaluation for school improvement.

This review is structured around the above four areas and each section concludes with key ideas and questions for reflection. In addition there are two appendices. The first offers a framework for self-evaluation and the second contains three contrasting vignettes of self-evaluation in different contexts.

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[1] Teddlie and Reynolds (2000); Sammons (2007).
[2] Sammons (2008).
[3] Barth (1990); Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994); Stoll and Fink (1996).
[4] Lewin (1946).

School self-evaluation for school improvement: what works and why?

Introduction

School effectiveness (SE) researchers have tended to focus on exploring differences between more or less effective schools from a positivist perspective. The research methodology has often involved quantitative measurement of a range of parameters associated with educational performance, attempting to assess the size of school effects.[5] A second common feature of effectiveness studies has been to identify characteristics exhibited by more effective schools.[6] As the knowledge base at the school level has increased, researchers have turned their attention to various aspects of effectiveness including the quantification of school effects for different groups of pupils and the stability of school effects over time.[7] More recently, researchers have investigated the differential effectiveness of departments[8] and contemporary research in this field has taken the classroom level as the unit of analysis, choosing to focus on teacher effectiveness.[9] Most recently, SE researchers have become preoccupied with studying variations in effectiveness at different levels within the system, particularly within school variation.[10] A full review of SE research can be found in the literature, particularly in relation to equity.[11]

Parallel to the development of SE research, a second related approach to school performance also emerged. School improvement (SI) research and practice has evolved, with, until recently, little communication between proponents of the different educational theories. Thus, over time, two distinct movements within this field of educational research and ideology have started to emerge. Although intrinsically related, they clearly have their own histories and traditions.

In contrast to SE research, the SI movement has tended to consider schools as social organisations while inquiring into the processes associated with improvement. The successful implementation of change has underpinned much of the work in this area and in contrast to SE research this has usually involved a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to change, locating power and control with those actually tasked with securing improvements. The methodologies relied upon to achieve these aims have been largely qualitative, often using case studies to illustrate initiatives that have worked at a particular level within a specific school rather than generating large datasets.[12]

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[5]   Gray (1981); Rutter et al. (1979); Tymms (1992).
[6]   Purkey and Smith (1983); Rutter et al. (1979); Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995).
[7]   Smith and Tomlinson (1989); Nuttall et al. (1989).
[8]   Harris, Jamieson and Russ (1995); Sammons, Thomas and Mortimore (1997).
[9]   Muijs and Reynolds (2002).
[10] Reynolds et al. (2001).
[11] Sammons (2007).
[12] Reynolds et al. (1996).

The separate traditions of school effectiveness and school improvement[13]

In the early 1990s the separate traditions of school effectiveness and improvement research were distinguished in terms of various broad features. School effectiveness research (SER) was seen to focus more on the whole school level and the ways schools operated as organisations, and school improvement (SI) on teachers' work and school processes. In addition, SER gave more attention to the use of quantitative data and student outcomes while SI was more focused on qualitative data and stakeholders' perceptions of change. Moreover, SI was seen as a journey with the focus on how change happened, while SER was seen to be concerned with a specific feature of change measured in terms of progress in student outcomes and the destinations of schools (whether they could be categorised as being effective). Finally, SI was seen to promote practitioners' classroom knowledge, while SER was concerned with defining effectiveness characteristics of schools and equity. Of course this set of contrasts has altered over the last thirty years, reflecting the evolution of the two fields and attempts to bring them together. In particular SER has studied different levels (classroom/teacher, department) in addition to the school as a whole, and used data sets for successive cohorts to investigate improvement over several years, while SI studies have shown much more interest in using evidence of student outcomes and perspectives.

What is school improvement research and practice?

School improvement research and practice is concerned with making schools 'better' places for students, teachers and the wider community,[14] and practice has tended to rely on the engagement of teachers through continuing professional development. This approach has often drawn on the principles of inquiry, reflection and self-review as a spur to improvement.[15]

The term 'school improvement' is commonly used in two ways. As noted above, it can be used as a common-sense term to describe efforts made to make schools better places for students; alternatively, it can be used in a more technical sense to describe the processes that contribute to raising student achievement.[16] Definitions relating to school improvement have evolved to reflect an increased focus on student achievement and capacity building. For example, an early definition from the 1980s International School Improvement Project (ISIP) defined school improvement as:

a systemic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions, and other related internal conditions, in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively.[17]

[13] Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993: 44).
[14] Reynolds et al. (1996).
[15] Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994).
[16] Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994).
[17] Van Velzen et al. (1985: 48).

By the mid-1990s researchers[18] had drawn on their experiences of researching, and working with, schools to develop a tighter definition focusing on the school's capacity to manage change and enhance student outcomes:

… a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. In this sense school improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching and learning processes and the conditions that support it. It is about strategies for improving the school's capacity for providing quality education in times of change, rather than blindly accepting the edicts of centralised policies and striving to implement these directives uncritically.[19]

The principles of improving student outcomes by attempting to develop organisational culture and capacity have become central to the efforts of contemporary school improvement research and practice.[20] Increased weighting on student outcomes and capacity building researchers[21] have ensured continued commitment to this definition. It continues to be widely used both within the field, and by policymakers, decades after its introduction to the literature.

In addition (and in many cases in contrast to the school effectiveness movement) the school improvement movement has argued that improvement and the capacity to improve come from within rather than beyond organisations. Therefore, proponents of school improvement have tended to view improvement as a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to change, thus putting students and teachers at the core of improvement efforts. In a review of research on 'what works in school improvement', researchers proposed a multilevel approach for schools facing challenging circumstances, which in the first instance asks schools to understand that (among other things):[22]

• every school can improve
• every individual in the school has a contribution to make to improvement
• schools should help themselves and guard against creating dependency
• everyone in the school should be learning from others.

The same research also stated that securing leadership at headteacher and leadership team level, prior to gaining staff commitment, and resources are important components of successful programmes of improvement.[23]

Essentially, teachers and school leaders are the key agents of change.[24] It is here we see the importance of inquiry and school self-review as a driver for school improvement.

[18] Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994).
[19] Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994: 3).
[20] Barth (1990) MacBeath (1999); Brighouse (2000); Clarke (2000); Harris (2002).
[21] Hopkins et al. (1994).
[22] Potter, Reynolds and Chapman (2002: 251).
[23] Potter, Reynolds and Chapman (2002: 250).
[24] Fullan (1991); Hopkins et al. (1994); MacBeath (1999).

The phases of school improvement

School improvement research and practice is a relatively young field of inquiry, yet it has made significant progress in a short period of time. Since its inception in the 1970s five phases have been outlined for school improvement activity:[25]

- **Phase 1** – specific intervention and the highlighting of the importance of culture in any change process

- **Phase 2** – focus on teacher action research and school self-review

- **Phase 3** – building on the emerging school effectiveness knowledge base. It sees the school as the unit of change. Approaches address both organisational and classroom improvement and the increasing emphasis on the importance of school leadership.

- **Phase 4** – scaling up reforms. Development of large-scale professional learning communities offers one way forward to reinvigorate individual schools and educators and recommit them to the process of improvement.

- **Phase 5** – we are seeing the spread of the knowledge base globally and at the same time learning more about achieving school improvement at scale: systemic reform.

While these phases are helpful in understanding the broad development of the field, they should be treated with caution. They should not be viewed as a recipe for policymakers and practitioners to wade through, while attempting to move their system, schools and classrooms from one phase to another. They should not be treated as linear or hierarchical; rather they should be seen as broad and overlapping phases with the expectation that most systems will see activity from all phases in action in the field. With these thoughts in mind it is no surprise that some strands of activity from the earlier phases continue to be powerful drivers for change in the most advanced educational systems around the world. For example, a researcher looking at Canada refers to the importance of cultural change and inquiry in transforming 5,000 schools in Ontario.[26] Internationally, many other countries including Australia, the UK and Japan have engaged in various forms of action research, lesson study and school self-review to support the school improvement process. These processes now permeate more education systems than can be mentioned in this review. They have not been superseded by phase 3, 4 or 5 improvement activity. Rather they have become recognised as powerful levers for change and become part of the infrastructure for self-renewal and sustained improvement.

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[25] Hopkins et al. (2011).
[26] Levin (2009).

Similar to those describing the five phases of SI, another researcher has argued self-improvement is multi-dimensional in nature.[27] She also argues self-improvement must include three types of self-evaluation to serve the dual purposes of development and accountability:

- **Macro self-evaluation** – which focuses on the school as a whole; in other words, the 'big picture'. It is concerned with the extent to which the school is using an intelligent approach to maximising its overall effectiveness as a learning community.
- **Means-ends self-evaluation** – which focuses on the extent to which school-wide plans for improvement are not only strengthening management arrangements but are also having a direct impact on classrooms and, more importantly, on pupils' progress and achievement.
- **Micro self-evaluation** – which focuses not on learning outcomes but on the quality of the learning taking place in classrooms.

A multi-dimensional approach to self-evaluation provides a means whereby a school can systematically keep under review a number of elements, including:

- its effectiveness as a learning community
- the effectiveness of its school improvement processes, particularly in respect of their impact on pupils' progress and achievement
- the effectiveness of the learning actually taking place in classrooms.

This three-pronged approach to self-evaluation for self-improvement also highlights the need to work at, and keep under regular review, the relationships between the leadership and management arrangements across the school as a whole and in individual departments or faculties and classroom practice and the interface between the school and its local and national communities.

This section of the review has sought to contextualise school self-evaluation within the related fields of school effectiveness and improvement research and practice. The key ideas and issues for reflection raised in this section are as follows:

Key idea: School improvement is a process, not an event. Teachers and school leaders are the key change agents for improvement and self-evaluation is a necessary but insufficient ingredient to stimulate school improvement.

Issues for reflection

To what extent has school effectiveness and school improvement research and practice informed your system's understanding of the development of an effective education service?

Which phases of school improvement activity do you see in operation within your system, school and classroom?

To what extent do your culture and context facilitate or limit the potential for school improvement? How might any barriers be removed?

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[27] MacGilchrist (2000).

Key debates in school self-evaluation

Introduction

School self-evaluation has become central to school improvement efforts in many educational systems. In some contexts it has been mandated through policy, in others it has been left to individual schools and their leaders and teachers to develop their own approach to the process. There are a myriad of models, frameworks and definitions associated with the processes. Definitions and understanding of the process also vary from country to country and sometimes from region to region within countries. For example, self-evaluation is referred to as appreciative self-inquiry in the USA. A 'self-review' is widely used, often synonymously with self-evaluation. The range of commonly used terms on a continuum from summative to formative has been helpfully differentiated as described below.[28]

- **Audit:** summative stock-taking of the situation.
- **Quality assurance:** systematic, usually external audit for accountability purposes.
- **Collective review:** based on the principle of 'the sum of the parts is exceeded by the collective whole'. Seen as analogous to self-evaluation in early educational literature. Involves taking stock of current practices, what practices take place in other institutions, the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.[29] More formative in nature.
- **Self-review:** tends to be synonymous with self-evaluation. A comprehensive overview rather than in-depth investigation into one area. Tends to be summative but can be formative.
- **Self-assessment:** again, often used synonymously with self-evaluation. Involves an examination of the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained by pupils rather than focused on the processes involved in self-evaluation. Both summative and formative.
- **Inquiry:** commonly used in North America. Appreciative inquiry is a more open-ended process, intending to identify the strengths of the organisation within its own frame of reference. Essentially formative in nature.
- **Research:** sometimes used as a synonym for inquiry. Often involves a range of stakeholders including student and teacher researchers. Can be either formative or summative.
- **Self-evaluation:** is the term with growing currency in many countries. It is a formative process, embedded into the day-to-day practices of schools and should be linked to pupil learning and achievement.[30]

As highlighted above, there is a distinction between self-review and self-evaluation. Self-review is a process of gaining an overview of school quality and effectiveness, (essentially summative in nature) and self-evaluation is viewed as a more selective and formative in-depth process that forms part of, and may influence, self-review. In addition, some countries think of self-evaluation as an audit or quality assurance –which are in fact summative approaches to reviewing schools' strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, to avoid these confusions, in this review we draw on MacBeath's (2008) formative definition of self-evaluation:

Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning.[31]

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[28] MacBeath (2006).
[29] Brighouse and Woods (1999).
[30] MacBeath (2006: 58).
[31] MacBeath (2005a: 4).

The term 'self-inspection' has also gained popularity in a range of contexts. The summary below highlights some of the perceived characteristics of self-inspection and self-evaluation. To some extent this presents a rather simplistic and controversial dichotomy that provides a rather negative view of the value of self-inspection by schools and offers an idealised view of self-evaluation, but it serves to highlight perceived differences in the emphases of the two strategies. The extent to which self-evaluation can be viewed as time-saving has been questioned.

Contrasting different emphases of self-inspection and self-evaluation[34]

Self-inspection	Self-evaluation
Top-down	Bottom-up
A one-off event	Continuous
Provides a snapshot	Offers an evolving picture
Time-consuming	Time-saving
Accountability-focused	Improvement-focused
Based on a rigid framework	Flexible and spontaneous
Uses existing pre-determined criteria	Creates relevant criteria
Can detract from teaching and learning	Improves teaching and learning
Avoids risks	Takes risks

The self-evaluation process has been described as a process for helping schools improve, which should be shaped by themselves, and integrated into their routine management systems.[35] Furthermore, it is argued this should be a collaborative practice involving stakeholders' views and should incorporate annual updates to reflect on the impact of the school's actions on its pupils. It makes sense that schools should regularly ask themselves questions about how they are doing and what could be done better. However, below the surface of what appears a sensible, straightforward approach to diagnosis, insight and understanding followed by action for improvement and review, there are a number of other factors at work. These issues raise a number of tensions and dilemmas that make the terrain associated with self-evaluation both complex and sensitive. The first issue, the purposes of self-evaluation, is often less than transparent and at times contradictory. The second, the issue of control – whether the process of self-evaluation is located internally within the organisation or externally within the system, and third, whether self-evaluation is seen as a top-down or bottom-up process, can both be understood better as a result of work on inspection and self-evaluation at the University of Innsbruck in Austria.[36] The fourth issue relates to how these elements interact, and what the appropriate blend of these factors is that maximises the potential for school improvement. These four issues form the basis of the key debates articulated within this review:

- What are the purposes of self-evaluation?

- Should the process be internally or externally driven?

- Should the process be seen from the bottom up or the top down?

- What is the appropriate blend of these elements?

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[32] Ferguson et al. (2000).
[33] MacBeath (2010).
[34] MacBeath (2005a: 46).
[35] Chapman (2008).
[36] Schratz (1997).

Each of the debates does not exist in isolation; rather they are connected in a complex and multifaceted tangle. Each of these issues will be discussed in turn below.

What are the purposes of self-evaluation?

The first fundamental debate centres on the purposes of self-evaluation. Are the purposes to generate personal and professional development and school improvement, or to regulate and monitor practice and standards? This is a simple question that is the cause of much discussion across many education systems and often raises strong opinions and much confusion. For example, there is evidence to suggest those undertaking self-evaluation in English schools are unclear about the purposes of self-evaluation. Interviewees in one study cited various purposes of self-evaluation as:

- preparation for inspection
- raising standards
- professional development
- building school capacity to respond to and manage change.[37]

The desire to improve is an essential human and professional responsibility[38] and for the purposes of this review we focus on school self-evaluation for school improvement. However, in a performative culture, national and global contexts and additional forces come in to play.[39] Policy imperatives for accountability (for example the New Relationship with Schools[40] in England), and economics – in a system where educational outcomes are used as a proxy for economic well-being, via PISA and information from the OECD – can lead to discomfort and lack of clarity relating to the purposes of self-evaluation. Some dilemmas associated with the terrain are described below:

Few, [national systems] if any, have come to terms with the divergent purposes that inspection and self-evaluation serve; nor have they succeeded in marrying improvement and accountability. Owing to the impact of globalisation and international comparative performance tables, in all OECD countries difficulties in this relationship persist and live in uneasy tension.[41]

Three further drivers have been helpfully identified, and it is argued these are often interlinked with 'competing logics'.[42] These drivers help to bring some clarity to the possible purposes for self-evaluation:

- **Economic logic** – self-evaluation is cheaper than expensive external inspection frameworks particularly where money is devolved directly to schools.
- **Accountability logic** – that schools must provide proof to key stakeholders (i.e. parents and the local community) as well as to the government that they are providing value for money. This has become increasingly important in the English context, as budgets are being devolved to schools.
- **Improvement logic** – it is seen as obvious that in order to know how to improve, a school must be able to evaluate where it is, what it needs to improve, and what indicators will suggest that it has achieved its aims.

[37] NCSL (2005).
[38] MacBeath (2005a).
[39] Gleeson and Husbands (2001).
[40] DfES and Ofsted (2004).
[41] MacBeath (2005a: 29).
[42] MacBeath (2008a).

However, these logics are not mutually exclusive and they may create tensions depending on how they are interlinked. For example, where accountability is driven by external factors such as competition between schools, league tables, teachers and staff may see the process of self-evaluation as ritualised and not as meaningful or relevant in terms of real school improvement or their professional development compared with other high-stakes accountability mechanisms including external review, performance management and the publication of student outcome data.

The key tension residing within this debate relates to the relationship between self-evaluation, accountability and improvement. For some,[43] the concept of the audit society is important. Here, self-evaluation can be used as a mechanism to hold teachers to account by evaluating their work and monitoring their practice and performance. This form of panoptic performativity conforms to a policy-driven orthodoxy of school improvement.[44] For others self-evaluation is an opportunity for professional dialogue and collaborative development to build on previous achievements.[45] In a sense these issues are the same side of the coin. How self-evaluation and indeed external inspection is perceived has been related to school contexts.[46] We know school leadership has an important role in shaping school cultures[47] and it is a logical extension to assume school leadership also plays an important role in how self-review is experienced and perceived by those involved in a similar way to how those subjected to external inspection perceive the process.[48]

Is the process internally or externally driven?

A second key debate related to the purposes of school self-evaluation revolves around the issue of control and whether the driver of the process is located internally within the school or mandated by an external agency.

In many education systems around the world, including England, academics, teachers and trade unions have been calling for self-evaluation to be at the heart of school improvement; effectively, schools should be improved from within.[49] The influential book *Schools must speak for themselves*[50] argues that external inspections fail to get to the heart of what a school is truly like, and that the primary goal of school self-evaluation should be to help schools develop and improve through critical self-reflection. The book further claims that teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills to be able to evaluate the teaching and learning in their own classrooms and that an external review would then be welcomed in order to enhance and support good practice. In effect this would leave external review as a validation process for school self-evaluation.

Some education systems have attempted to mandate self-evaluation as part of the process of school improvement. In England central government launched a *New Relationship with Schools*[51] in an attempt to refine and link internal self-evaluation to external review. This placed the concept of self-evaluation at the core of the Ofsted inspection process. David Miliband,[52] the then Secretary of State for Education, outlined this new relationship as a form of 'intelligent accountability' that would deliver:

[43] Power (1994).
[44] Perryman (2007).
[45] Brighouse and Woods (1999); Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994).
[46] Chapman (2006).
[47] Prosser (1999).
[48] Earley (1996).
[49] Barth (1990).
[50] MacBeath (1999).
[51] DfES and Ofsted (2004).
[52] Miliband (2004).

- *effective and ongoing self-evaluation in every school, combined with*
- *sharper edged, lighter touch external inspection and an annual school profile to complement performance table data*
- *a simplified school improvement process in which every school uses robust self-evaluation to drive improvement, and produces a single school improvement plan based on a smaller number of DfES output measures. Every secondary school will have access to a dedicated school improvement partner with whom they conduct a single conversation.'*[53]

This shift in focus, combined with changes to the inspection system, created a self-evaluation framework that examined:

1. characteristics of the school
2. views of learners, parents/carers and other stakeholders
3. achievement and standards
4. personal development and well-being
5. the quality of provision
6. leadership and management
7. overall effectiveness and efficiency.

However, in its early days, this shift in emphasis towards self-evaluation was viewed with some suspicion. Writing in 2005, MacBeath (both a proponent and critical voice of self-evaluation and its applications) commented:

While in many countries school inspection has traditionally been the path to quality assurance it is now seen as more economical and growth promoting to put evaluation in the hands of schools themselves. With off-the shelf inspection models it is a small step for schools to adopt a ready-made self-inspection approach as opposed to a more organic self-evaluation.[54]

In addition, the driver for the process was seen to be located outside of schools as they quickly became adept at completing self-evaluation forms (SEFs) – sometimes with guidance from hired consultants,[55] which formed the starting point of a school's inspection.[56] However, an evaluation of the impact of Ofsted's work found that eight out of ten headteachers said that inspection complemented self-evaluation.[57] The study noted that, for example:

In effective primary schools, where performance management has been introduced successfully, evaluation connects well with established policies for monitoring, appraisal and evaluation. Teachers have specific targets for improvement, linked to the progress made by pupils during the year, which provide them with a clear understanding of what needs to be done. The process is supported by effective professional development. In such schools, performance data are collected and analysed comprehensively. Relevant comparisons are made with similar schools, trends are identified and challenging targets are set.[58]

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[53] Miliband (2004).
[54] MacBeath (2005b: 5).
[55] MacBeath (2008b: 34).
[56] Drake (2008: 16).
[57] Matthews and Sammons (2004: 44).
[58] Matthews and Sammons (2004: 77).

Inspection and the identification of areas for development can act as a 'major catalyst for improvement'.[59] The main intentions of the 'high challenge, high support' model during the early and mid 2000s of targeted interventions for schools deemed as failing were based around reducing inequality and increasing as well as maintaining confidence in the public education system. Evidence was drawn from educational research, in the areas of school and teacher effectiveness and school improvement:

… developing approaches to work with schools emphasised access to best practice and high quality professional development, good performance data and clear targets. Improvements in pay and conditions, attempts to raise professional esteem and additional support staff in schools, more resources and better buildings were intended to address problems of recruitment and retention to the profession and support the standards drive.[60]

In a study of how schools in special measures sustained their performance and improvement, Ofsted found that besides being supported by strong leadership and putting in place measures to improve the school climate such as setting high expectations for behaviour, schools appeared to have developed 'effective systems for self-evaluation'.[61] These factors are particularly important for schools in challenging contexts.

The SEF has been abolished by the current coalition government in England.[62] This received a mixed response: some school leaders have structured their whole school self-evaluation process around the SEF, while others have felt compelled to use it because the inspection agency expected them to do so; some school leaders never used the SEF and relied on their own internally driven self-evaluation processes.[63]

Although the SEF was officially abolished, Ofsted has maintained a strong focus on promoting self-evaluation in England and inspectorates and education departments elsewhere also promote this (for example Scotland and Ireland).

In its recent guidance Ofsted argued that a self-evaluation summary is likely to be most effective when it is:

- concise and succinct, captures the key points and, where relevant, identifies sources of evidence or more detailed evaluative material
- evaluative rather than descriptive or repetitive, and captures succinctly the impact of the school's actions on the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety
- a working document which is regularly used to inform governors of the school's improvement activity and is updated as part of the school's self-evaluation processes
- developed by, and used to inform, leaders, including governors and middle leaders as well as senior staff
- linked to part two of the *School inspection handbook*, and to the *Subsidiary guidance* so that strengths and weaknesses are set out in relation to pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching, behaviour and safety, the school's provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and, where relevant the effectiveness of the sixth form, which together can then provide a picture of the school's assessment of its overall effectiveness
- linked to school improvement planning, and identifies areas for improvement
- an indicator of the success of the school's actions in tackling issues identified at the previous inspection.[64]

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[59] Sammons (2008).
[60] Sammons (2008: 655).
[61] Ofsted (2008).
[62] DfE (2010).
[63] MacBeath (2008a).
[64] Ofsted (2013).

Who controls the process of self-evaluation, and where the control is located, seems to be an important factor contributing to how schools interpret and construct the process and ultimately the extent to which self-evaluation contributes to school improvement and/or the regulation of schools.

Top-down or bottom-up?

Irrespective of the purposes of inspection, or whether the drivers are located internally within the school or externally within the wider system, how the process is played out on a day-to-day basis is of vital importance. Is the process viewed as the preservation of the school principal and senior management team or is it owned by the wider school community – particularly teachers and pupils? Where on the continuum of top-down to bottom-up should self-evaluation processes be located?

The former General Teaching Council (GTC) of England has argued that schools should have increased responsibility for their improvement, and this needs to be facilitated by a greater emphasis on their own professional accountability rather than that of external forces. They also claimed that since the balance of power is so heavily weighted in favour of inspectors, and the penalties for failure are so high, a genuine partnership between the two is unworkable. As a result of this situation the GTC[65] proposed a three-tier model:

- Rigorous, qualitative self-evaluation involving all key stakeholders. This allows different perspectives to be gathered, and creates a learning environment where the process of evaluation aids the school's development as well as a wide sense of ownership for the process and agreed criteria.

- The involvement of external advisers in the processes of self-review: appropriate examples would be advisory teams, consultants, academics acting as a 'critical friend' as well as the stakeholders in the school community. Peer evaluation could be part of this process.

- An external evaluation model that appraises a school's performance in the context of its own development plan, reliable comparative school data, and the degree to which school self-evaluation is integrated with overall school planning and review processes.

The GTC model incorporated a number of perspectives. From the outside, some would seem to be 'top-down' while others are by nature 'bottom-up'. The first two forms of activity (self-evaluation and critical friendship) can be experienced as 'bottom-up' by those involved in the process. However, the third strand of external validation of the self-evaluation is likely to be experienced as 'top-down' in nature.

How teachers perceive the external inspection process can be shaped and influenced by the school context and leadership.[66] It is likely this will also be the case for school self-evaluation. For some teachers in some contexts the experience will be viewed as organic and developmental and essentially 'bottom-up'. For others it may be viewed as a 'top-down' process, devised by senior managers for senior managers to check on quality. Therefore, school leaders have a duty to communicate the exact nature of the process and to build appropriate trusting relationships to conduct school self-evaluation as a positive developmental process where teachers and students are placed at the centre and have control and ownership. This is likely to build a consensus that (a) self-evaluation is a positive activity to engage in and (b) it is essentially a 'bottom-up' process led by students and teachers to promote their own learning. Only when this can be achieved will school self-evaluation fulfil its aims of promoting student and professional learning.

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[65] The General Teaching Council (2004).
[66] Learmonth (2000).

What is the appropriate blend of these elements?

The debates outlined above highlight some of the key tensions involved with promoting professional and student learning through school self-evaluation. In one sense they offer alternative perspectives, but caution is needed here. They should not be viewed as mutually exclusive alternatives; what we have is a set of false dichotomies. Each debate should be viewed as a relative position on a continuum. For example, we are not dealing with purposes that involve either accountability or development; life cannot be simply divided into summative or formative action. The drivers for self-evaluation are not located either outside or inside the organisation; there are drivers located externally and internally. Likewise self-evaluation is not either 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' in nature, rather a combination of the two.

Those involved in school improvement have been characterised as 'hawks' and 'doves'.[67] The 'hawks' argue that school self-evaluation is an easy, soft-centred option which can result in navel-gazing and lacks the objective hard edge that external evaluation brings to a school, by shirking difficult questions and judgements. On the other hand the 'doves' argue that for improvement to be embedded within the school, it must be owned by the very agents of change tasked with generating the improvement rather than with those outside of the organisation who will only experience resistance to change and subversion of their interventions; yet another false dichotomy.

Most accept there is, or should be, a link and blend between school self-evaluation and external review; in many systems they inform one another.[68] The key questions are: 'Where should an organisation place itself on each dimension to optimise the impact of school self-evaluation on professional and student learning?' and 'What sort of relationship should there be between school self-evaluation and external review/inspection?'

Taking each question in turn, firstly, where should an organisation place itself on each dimension to optimise the impact of school self-evaluation on professional and student learning? Here a school should consider a number of key issues at three levels, the 'macro', the 'micro' and the 'meso' level, or put simply, the system, school and classroom level and the interaction between each level. The school improvement literature[69] highlights a multitude of possibilities for consideration. We highlight four key areas that would seem to be worthy starting points:

- **The structures and processes in place:** to what extent do the structures and processes that are in place within the system, school and classroom *promote the conditions* for an internally driven, bottom-up approach to self-evaluation to promote student and professional learning?

- **The strength of leadership:** to what extent does the leadership of the system, school and classroom *have the appetite for* an internally driven, bottom-up approach to self-evaluation to promote student and professional learning?

- **Relationships and politics:** to what extent are the relationships and politics across the system, school and classroom *secure and trusting enough to promote* an internally driven, bottom-up approach to self-evaluation to promote student and professional learning?

- **Capacity for change and improvement:** to what extent is the capacity for improvement within the system, school and classroom *at an appropriate phase of development to ignite and sustain* an internally driven, bottom-up approach to self-evaluation to promote student and professional learning?

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[67] Mortimore and Whitty (1997).
[68] Learmonth, (2000); Ferguson et al. (2000).
[69] Harris and Crispeels (2006); Reynolds et al. (2001).

If those tasked with developing school self-evaluation systems reflect on the issues outlined above, rather than creating a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach to school self-evaluation, different contexts will lead to the development of school self-evaluation systems tailored to their unique blend of circumstances at a particular time and therefore maximising the potential for pupil and professional learning. This is a far more sophisticated approach to developing a self-evaluation process than taking a ready-made package off the shelf and trying to make it fit a particular context.

Moving on to the second question: the relationship between school self-evaluation and external review, research provides some helpful insights into three models for school self-evaluation:[70]

- **Parallel:** two systems (internal and external evaluation) run side by side, each with their own assessments and criteria
- **Sequential:** external review body follows on from the school's self-evaluation and uses it as a focus for the inspection
- **Cooperative:** where external agencies and schools cooperate to develop a common approach to evaluation

Each model tends to fit with a particular policy context. In quasi-markets and highly centralised systems, given the existence of competing accountability and improvement logics it would seem unlikely that the cooperative model could exist without the 'external' auditor evolving into a critical friend or learning partner.

In this section we have discussed the key debates associated with school self-evaluation. The key ideas and issues for reflection raised in this section are as follows:

Key idea: School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning. The process can be located on a number of continua that define the exact nature of the process and reflect the context in which it is occurring. These dimensions include: summative-formative; internally-externally driven; and whether self-evaluation is conducted as a top-down or bottom-up process. Furthermore, schools should reflect on their context and the appropriate position and blend elements to optimise the impact of school self-evaluation on pupil and professional learning.

Issues for reflection

To what extent does your organisation engage in self-evaluation?

How do different members of the school community experience the process?

Where would you locate your school's self-evaluation process in terms of internally or externally driven, for accountability for improvement?

Given the current context, is this an appropriate blend for your organisation?

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[70] Alvik (1996).

Key principles and processes associated with school self-evaluation for school improvement

Introduction

Much academic research and theoretical writing exists on school review; there is still a need for a set of practical suggestions on how to go about it.[71]

In the 1994 publication *School review and inspection*, a range of processes to support school review (or what we class as school self-evaluation) were outlined in very practical terms. Over a decade and a half later there is a plethora of evidence and guidance about the principles and processes associated with school self-evaluation for school improvement.

Much of the self-evaluation guidance suggests the process should be part of an ongoing process of outcomes-focused review in schools and integrated with the systems for managing and developing provision and practice. Guidance also recognises that self-evaluation is not a task for school leaders alone. While they will be responsible for coordinating the process, there are other groups who should be included in it if their position as stakeholders in schools is to be taken seriously. In the English system the principles of self-evaluation are described as:

- *rigorous self-evaluation helps schools to improve; it should not be undertaken solely for the purpose of inspection*
- *schools should shape for themselves a process that is simple and integrated with their routine management systems*
- *schools must listen to and do something about the views of their stakeholders*
- *the school's recorded summary of its self-evaluation process (Ofsted's self-evaluation form) should be updated at least annually and include information about the impact of its action on learners; assertions and lists of initiatives are unhelpful.*[72]

The purpose of this section of the review is to draw together the key principles and processes associated with school self-evaluation. As we have indicated, schools across many systems have become familiar with different models of the process ranging from audit to self-evaluation. Specifically, this section covers the following themes pertaining to self-evaluation:

- Developing a framework for self-evaluation
- Developing a structure for self-evaluation
- Participants in self-evaluation
- Using data for self-evaluation
- Making use of external perspectives in self-evaluation

[71] Woods and Orlik (1994: 39).
[72] DfES and Ofsted (2004: 4).

Taking each in turn:

Developing a framework for self-evaluation

It is widely accepted that self-evaluation should be guided by a framework that articulates desired outcomes and clear aims for developing practice. These will be underpinned by a rationale for *why* these particular outcomes and developmental aims are important. Some schools may have a clear and well-developed vision of organisational purpose. For others, however, devising a self-evaluation framework provides the opportunity for members of the organisation to reflect on what it is they are trying to achieve.[73]

To a greater or lesser extent the nature of the education system will inform the exact approach taken by schools. Schools in most educational systems are required to operate within a national policy framework and this necessarily affects the goals that they set and their plans for service delivery. Historically, much of the emphasis in evaluation has been on using attainment evidence to judge pupils' standards of achievement, and identifying targets for improvement.[74] Much of the support for self-evaluation in the English context (from the 1998 Autumn Package onwards) has focused on providing data analyses to help schools' evaluation within this tradition. In many systems national policy also provides a strong steer for school improvement strategies in the form of guidance on good practice, curriculum strategies and targeted funding streams.

In this context, schools have tended to adopt the inspection regime's frameworks for evaluation. For example, the Ofsted framework to support self-evaluation has been used by many schools in England because ultimately each school is required to relate their review of outcomes and their planning to the key themes set out in the inspection framework, and judged accordingly. There is, however, no prescribed model for evaluating the quality of school provision, which is made clear in official guidance:

Ofsted does not prescribe any particular approach; schools are free to summarise the outcomes of their self-evaluation processes in a way that best suits their own circumstances.[75]

The introduction to Ofsted's latest guide to preparing a self-evaluation summary reads:

Ofsted recognises the importance of self-evaluation as a crucial part of schools' ongoing cycle of review and improvement planning. A self-evaluation summary is an important tool in this process, which enables schools to draw together an evaluation of different aspects of their work leading to an evaluation of the quality of education provided by the school overall. There is no fixed time in the year when a self-evaluation might be completed. This will depend on the individual circumstances of each school.[76]

In England schools are free to adapt the Ofsted model, devise their own framework or to adopt one of a range of alternatives that have been developed to support whole-school evaluation, including various models and examples which can be found in self-evaluation literature.[77]

[73] Chapman and Gallannaugh (2008).
[74] Gray and Wilcox (1995).
[75] Ofsted (2013: 1).
[76] Ofsted (2013: 4).
[77] MacBeath (2005a: 36-45).

While schools operate within a national policy context that emphasises some common objectives, internationally there has been a shift towards school-based management and greater levels of autonomy. Even in some of the most centralised systems there are a few indicators that this may be changing. As highlighted in the 'Key debates' section of this review, there are also numerous contextual factors, unique to individual schools, that will require distinctive context-specific responses to self-evaluation. This situation of increasing autonomy combined with a greater appreciation of the importance of context-specificity would suggest self-evaluation frameworks should reflect local conditions and priorities. Guidance from Ofsted suggests ways in which this might occur in practice:

It is helpful to first describe the circumstances of the school and then to summarise the evaluation outcomes under the following broad headings:

- *pupils' achievement*
- *the quality of teaching*
- *pupils' behaviour and safety*
- *the leadership of, and management in, the school*
- *where relevant, the effectiveness of the sixth form*
- *where relevant, registered early years provision and/or boarding provision,*
- *the overall effectiveness of the school including the promotion of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.*[78]

So it seems that the nature of the system and the levels of autonomy experienced by schools will influence the extent to which the framework for evaluation is adopted or internally generated to fit a specific context.

Developing a structure for self-evaluation

Opportunities for self-evaluation can often arise spontaneously, for example as teachers experiment with new practices in the classroom. In such cases of self-evaluation to inform strategic development, there needs to be a structured and systematic process, underpinned by an overarching structure. Structuring self-evaluation is the focus of this section.

Levels of evaluation

Developing a structure for self-evaluation provides a set of themes related to educational priorities that help to guide school review and planning. However, these themes will resonate in different areas of school activity, and it is important to take this into account when structuring a self-evaluation process. Self-evaluation, therefore, needs to be informed by a simple organisational model which helps to focus it on these different areas of activity. Integrated with the overarching themes, such a model provides a structure that can be used as a starting point for planning evaluation activities. There are different ways of doing this. One view offers the idea that the focus of self-evaluation may be described in terms of circles with the pupil at the centre and evaluation processes rippling out to the classroom, the department, the school and the community.[79]

[78] Ofsted (2013: 5).
[79] MacBeath (2005a).

Another possibility for structuring self-evaluation can be drawn from the *Index for Inclusion*.[80] The *Index* is a set of materials to support schools in a process of inclusive school development. It presents the conceptualisation of school self-review on three interconnecting dimensions concerned with school cultures, policies and practices:

Figure 1: The three dimensions of the Index[81]
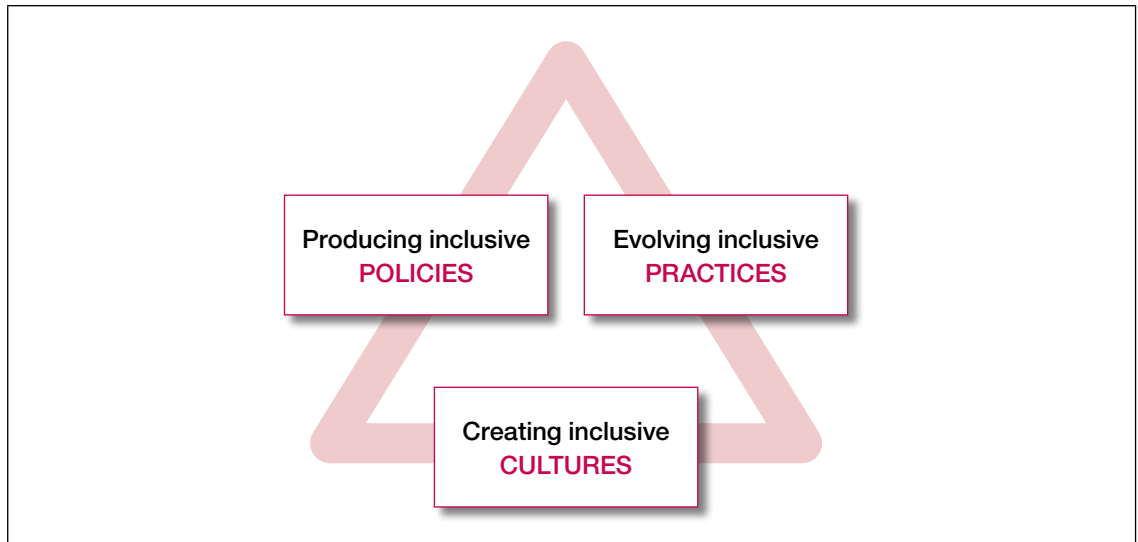
Timescales

Alongside the different zones of activity with which self-evaluation is concerned, there is a temporal dimension which needs to be taken into account. Research carried out by Ofsted to identify the common features of best practice in self-evaluation found that there was a clear yearly cycle of activities.[82] These involve:

- a review in July or September of the previous year's performance based on attainment data, predictions and value added data and the identification of strengths and areas for improvement

- using information about the quality of teaching (for example from observations) to refine priorities within improvement plans

- setting targets for individual pupils – termly, half-yearly or annually

- rigorous monitoring of individual progress (weekly or fortnightly in most primary schools, half-termly or termly in secondary schools) and intervention (for example, by providing additional support) where pupils were not making predicted progress

- alongside this, assessments of the quality of teaching and learning through observation (at least once a year in secondary schools, more often in primary schools) and providing support for development, for example through mentoring schemes.

[80] Booth et al. (2000).
[81] Adapted from Booth and Ainscow (2011).
[82] Ofsted (2006).

The same research found that some aspects of self-evaluation took place over a longer period than others, for example the evaluation of ethos and culture. This reflects the fact that some outcomes take longer to emerge than others and that change can take place at different rates. Changes that take place over the longer term may be some of the most important strategic developments in schools and are likely to be complex, involving multiple strands of action and taking place in a variety of contexts. This presents challenges for schools in terms of finding mechanisms for evaluating these processes.

A theory of change approach to self-evaluation

One possible approach to the evaluation of longer-term developments is the *theory of change* approach.[83] This is designed to address two problems of evaluating complex, long-term developments:

1. Long-term outcomes from initiatives or strands of development may only become apparent after the evaluation is complete.

2. In complex situations, it is often difficult to know which actions are producing what effects, particularly where an initiative or strand of development takes place alongside many other initiatives and changes in practice.

The principle of the Theory of Change approach is that it is possible, even in a complex situation, to predict a sequence of activities and events that will lead to some final outcomes. Leaders responsible for an aspect of school development begin by clarifying the theory of change underpinning it, that is: what the aspects of the current situation are that need to be changed; what the intended long-term outcomes of the initiative are; what the step-by-step changes are that will, in the long term, lead to those outcomes; and how those changes can be monitored. The intention is that the process of clarifying this theory of change is useful in ensuring that development remains sharply focused. At the same time, monitoring the step-by-step changes gives an early indication of whether intended outcomes are likely to materialise and makes it easier to attribute those outcomes to actions. If necessary, a theory can be revised and adjusted where expectations of what can be achieved along the way in the shape of intermediate outcomes are not actually fulfilled. Previous research in the context of extended schools has illustrated this approach in practice where complexity not only involves developing multi-strand initiatives, but also working with partners across professional boundaries.[84]

Participants in school self-evaluation

The responsibility for educational quality rests firmly with the school principal and the senior leadership team. In the past this has tended to create a situation where school self-evaluation was carried out with little or no consultation of the school community. This is changing: recent developments across many systems have included the participation of a wider range of stakeholders.[85] This is a positive shift, as a wider range of perspectives is likely to offer more detailed and complex insights into the depths of the organisation.[86]

All members of a school community may be subjects of and participants in self-evaluation. As subjects they need not be involved in the process. Pupil outcomes, for example, may be reviewed in relation to performance targets by school leaders, without any input from pupils themselves. However, pupils' perspectives may be invaluable in helping to explain, for instance, the pattern of outcomes across different teaching groups. Here we consider some of the different stakeholders likely to be able to make a contribution to school self-evaluation, the roles they can play and ways of supporting their participation.

[83] Connell and Kubisch (1999).
[84] Cummings, Todd and Dyson (2007).
[85] MacBeath (2005a).
[86] Hopkins (2000).

Teachers

Learning outcomes and pupil development more generally are crucially dependent on what happens in classrooms. Teachers' perspectives on practice in their own classrooms, on the conditions that support or impede learning, on environmental barriers and facilitators and a host of other factors can therefore make a vital contribution to school self-evaluation. In order for teachers to contribute, however, there needs to be a route for them to do so and a way of helping them to articulate their perspectives. The most obvious way of facilitating this is through group discussion, where teachers may both report and discuss information, with the view of distilling some key messages as a collaborative activity. Opportunities could be provided during regular group meetings or through a collective forum (for example departmental meetings or school improvement groups (SIGs) convened specifically for the purpose of self-evaluation for school improvement).

Other staff groups

Other staff groups can contribute to self-evaluation in a variety of ways, for example in relation to specific areas of provision. Recent concern about the nutritional quality of school meals, for example, has prompted many schools to evaluate this aspect of their provision, and catering staff will have a vital perspective on this. Below is a report of a headteacher's view of the role of learning support assistants:

'A headteacher described learning support assistants (LSAs) in his school as the 'candid camera' of learning and teaching because they often enjoy a continuity with pupils but are witness to a range of different teachers and teaching styles. This may, in some schools, be a hidden treasure which leadership does not consider calling on, or because LSAs do not feel confident enough, or are not encouraged enough, to express their viewpoint. In a climate of self-reflection and mutual trust the LSA perspective has much to offer by way of adding a further element to the recounting of the school's learning story.'[87]

Pupils

Pupils are directly affected by school decision-making and planning and there is increasing recognition of their right to be heard as part of this process. Experience of involving pupils in self-evaluation is growing, and there is a body of research that suggest ways in which their participation may be supported. This is based on the recognition that:

- pupils have a detailed knowledge of what happens in individual classrooms and therefore a particularly valuable perspective on the conditions of teaching and learning
- there is increasing emphasis on enabling pupils to become reflective learners, which supports their role in self-evaluation.

Pupil participation in self-evaluation may be assisted, for example, by structures such as school councils, which serve as a forum for consultation. Alongside this, there are many strategies at classroom level that teachers may adopt as a means of engaging pupils in evaluating what goes on.[88]

[87] Macbeath (2005a: 32).
[88] For details of research and practical examples see Arnot et al. (2003); Fielding and Bragg (2003); and MacBeath et al. (2003).

Parents

Routine contact between parents and school staff can occur in a range of situations, including face-to-face conversation, by telephone and at parents' evenings. All occasions provide an opportunity for the exchange of information between home and school, and parents can offer particular insights into pupils' learning and factors that affect it, for example their responses to homework, the effectiveness of the school's support for home learning and the ways in which the school provides information to parents about how they can support their children. Such feedback may be used more or less systematically in self-evaluation. At the very least, it can support the development of approaches to individual pupils; cumulatively, it may act as a significant lever on the quality of teaching and learning.

Schools also employ more formal mechanisms for eliciting feedback, such as surveys and focus group consultation. Parent councils are a relatively new way for schools to encourage more parents to get involved in school life. They are informal forums where parents are able to raise issues, be consulted on school policy and give their views. The recent Education and Inspections Act (2006)[89] places a new duty on governing bodies of trust schools, where the majority of governors are appointed by the trust, to establish a parent council. Other schools will be required under the Act to 'have regard to the views of parents' but will be able to choose how they fulfil the new duty.

In Scotland, the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 is establishing parent councils as the statutory bodies for representing parents in schools from August 2007. The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) has developed a toolkit to provide parents and staff in schools with a practical resource to support partnership with parents, including the development of parent councils.[90]

Using data for self-evaluation

Data are the raw materials of self-evaluation. Collecting data is not in itself self-evaluation; *how* they are collected and used is critical. One way of viewing data is as being at the heart of a process of organisational learning. In this view, data can provide a picture of school development by tracking changes in practice and outcomes linked to those changes. Sharply focused monitoring, based on clear indicators, can help schools to measure the extent to which their practice is effective or not. Data can also stimulate questions about policies and practices. Where a series of actions does not lead to expected outcomes, for example, data can be interrogated to stimulate theories about why this might be. They can also highlight different perspectives and provoke debate about underlying aims. Using data in all of these ways provides a foundation for decision-making and development processes.

Collecting data

Self-evaluative schools are schools where using data to learn about practice is habitual. This may be in very informal ways, for example teachers keeping logs as a means of reflecting on different approaches in the classroom. To maximise the impact on organisational development, however, systematic data collection and analysis need to take place alongside more spontaneous enquiry. This involves leaders coordinating different strands of activity, for example by guiding foci and questions for enquiry so that they relate to overarching school aims and key priorities, and making sure that a range of evidence relating to different areas of school life is generated over time. Alongside this, however, leaders need to be able to respond flexibly as new learning emerges so that it may inform development planning. Leading school self-evaluation is therefore something of a balancing act between maintaining a robust structure and allowing for organic growth.

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89 DfES (2006a); DfES (2006b).
90 Scottish Executive Education Department (2006).

The collection of data is a practical task that needs to be accommodated within the routines of a school day. However, it will not happen without support. Some of this may come from within schools, and some may be available from external bodies, for example local authorities. Support could be in the form of resources to implement particular systems – for collating population and attainment data, for example; it could include training in using or developing data collection instruments; or it might be in the form of opportunities to develop collaborative learning skills using data, for example through mutual lesson observation. Sometimes it is simply a case of encouraging an awareness that data is all around – in the form of routine records, for example, and even remarks in casual conversation.

Different types of data

The following list is taken from guidance by Ofsted and the DfES[91] and suggests some of the evidence that may be drawn upon in school self-evaluation:

- Monitoring and interpreting current attainment data, trends over time, and other performance indicators for key stages, subjects and groups of learners, including the use of both national attainment data and data which take into account the context of a school

- Gathering and considering the learners', parents', teachers' and other stakeholders' views and perceptions about the quality of the school's provision

- Checking that targets for learners, staff and the senior team are challenging but achievable and achieved

- Evaluating the quality of learners' personal development, written and other work

- Tracking the results of individual learners' progress and attainment

- Observing and evaluating teaching – including the evaluation of how well the evidence gathered is used to bring about improvements in performance

- Evaluating the best available local and national comparative data on finance, staffing, attendance, and exclusions

- Evaluating the impact of extended services, including day care, on the learning and well-being of learners

- The results of monitoring undertaken by governors, including the impact of performance management

- Reports from the school community and external agencies involved in the work of the school and with individual learners

Data presented in the form of research papers and reviews may also act as useful sources of external perspectives during an evaluation cycle. A randomised study was recently conducted into the impact of different approaches of school self-evaluation (SSE) on student attainment. Results indicated that the three groups that applied some form of SSE yielded better results than the group that did not apply any SSE mechanisms. A more interesting finding, however, was that of the three SSE-related groups, the group that saw the highest improvement in student attainment had been asked to develop SSE mechanisms based on a specific theoretical framework. In addition, they were given the opportunity to take decisions and devise action plans using evidence and materials derived from educational effectiveness research (EER).[92] This study provides further support to the idea that evidence-based strategies can help to improve the quality of education. It has been said that 'as a rule, schools which do the kinds of things the research suggests make a difference, tend to get better results (however these are measured or assessed).'[93] The author goes on to stress that while these are 'tendencies' and not 'certainties', research evidence tends to be right particularly if supported by *professional assessments*.[94]

[91] DfES and Ofsted (2004).
[92] Demetriou and Kyriakides (2012).
[93] Gray (1990: 214).
[94] Gray (1990: 214).

Making sense of data[95]

'Data analysis' sounds like a technical process and sometimes it is. That is one reason the Department for Education and local authorities (school districts) in England support schools by carrying out their own analyses of attainment data and providing the results for schools. Schools themselves may have the capacity to carry out some complex analyses, but this capacity is likely to be concentrated among a small number of people. There are, however, some general principles that can be applied in many situations to help make sense of information that has been assembled for a particular evaluative purpose. These include:

- clarifying any factual information – where there are discrepancies, identifying ways of obtaining further data

- being open to the unexpected – where data reveal unexpected results, being prepared to rethink approaches

- being aware of existing assumptions – where data does not confirm some preconceptions about practice, being open to questioning these

- taking account of different viewpoints – where data reflects different viewpoints, being prepared to consider the merits of all of these, whether majority or minority opinions

- being alert to patterns – where a pattern seems to be emerging, deciding what further data are needed to explore and possibly validate this

- being ready to consider the implications of evaluation for action.

Taking action

A crucial element in school self-evaluation is the step following data analysis, which is taking action based on its key messages. The link between evaluation and action is clearly highlighted in guidance, particularly the way that rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning can lead to the clear identification of priorities for improvement.[96] While action involves setting targets for improvement, it also involves working out how these can be achieved, for example through staff development. Support for development may be offered at individual, team or institutional level. It is important, however, that it is offered in a climate in which there is a collegiate approach to learning and in which personal responsibility for professional development is viewed as an integral aspect of the roles of all staff.

It is also crucial that participants are kept informed of action taken following an evaluation process to which they have contributed. Establishing what has been termed in guidance produced by the NCSL (National College for School Leadership[97]) and the SHA (Secondary Heads Association) as a *'genuine communication loop'* helps to build trust and a sense of purpose surrounding such processes. It can also make it more likely that stakeholders will be prepared to engage in school self-evaluation in the future. Sometimes it may be necessary to explain to participants why their suggestions for development have not been taken up. Although this may not be a comfortable process, providing them with a reason for this may at least reassure them that their suggestions have not simply been ignored.

Also, different phases of the self-evaluation process can present different challenges. Recent research conducted in Belgium indicated that the interpretation of feedback received, from making a diagnosis based on a particular set of results to discussing the causes and devising suitable actions, is not a straightforward process. The researchers proposed that for practitioners to know how to use feedback constructively, a degree of knowledge in interpreting policy and research evidence may be necessary, and so professional development and external support should not be neglected.[98]

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[95] See case study 3 in Appendix 2 for an example of the use of data.
[96] See, for example, DfES and Ofsted (2004); Ofsted (2006).
[97] On 1 April 2013 the National College merged with the Teaching Agency to form a new agency named the National College for Teaching and Leadership. This new agency states two key aims: to improve the 'quality of the workforce' and to help schools 'help each other improve' [http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk].
[98] Verhaeghe et al. (2010: 185).

Making use of external perspectives for self-evaluation

The role of critical friend needs to be carried out with sensitivity. While it will be important to raise questions, this needs to be done in a constructive way. The role has been described in the following terms:

In carrying out this role, the critical friend will:

- *listen, hear, observe*
- *learn (about school culture and goals)*
- *demonstrate positive regard for, and sensitivity towards, the school and its community*
- *help to identify issues and make creative suggestions to help the school become better at what it does*
- *offer sources of evidence and expertise*
- *work collaboratively in exploring alternative approaches*
- *encourage collegiality, including the sharing of ideas among teachers and schools*
- *offer a thoughtful critical perspective on learning, culture or leadership as appropriate*
- *be honest, accessible, flexible, discrete, friendly, patient, communicative, and accountable to schools.*

The critical friend will not:

- *assume a directive role*
- *offer solutions to problems, or provide quick fixes*
- *rush to judgement, make assumptions or judge without substantial evidence*
- *pretend to know the school better than those in the school*
- *have hidden agendas*
- *impose agendas of his or her own*
- *undermine the authority of others*
- *use school data without consent*
- *compare invidiously with other schools*
- *cause problems.*[99]

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[99] MacBeath (2005a: 45).

Networking

Critical friendship can take a collective and collaborative form, particularly through school-to-school networking activity. Networks may be established for a range of reasons, for example to support coordinated development in local authority school clusters, or as a result of participation in particular projects or initiatives.[100] The National College for School Leadership's[101] Networked Learning Communities programme has been one vehicle for testing collaborative approaches to school self-evaluation. Networks have adopted different starting points: some have taken the structure of the Ofsted self-evaluation framework (SEF) as a prompt for whole-school evaluation, others have begun from a more specific learning focus. From the experience, participants have concluded that collaboration adds value to self-evaluation in the following three ways, by:

1. *establishing an environment of trust and confidence which is conducive to providing appropriate support and challenge, enabling rigorous peer review and validation*

2. *providing a locality in which the data can be shared and pooled to provide comparative benchmarking information and sites of further study*

3. *acting as a resource for schools to make sense of their self/peer evaluation data to establish priorities, plan strategies and support the implementation of necessary work.*[102]

In this section we have discussed the key principles and processes associated with school self-evaluation. The key ideas and issues for reflection raised in this section are as follows:

Key ideas: School self-evaluation should be conducted within a coherent framework and underpinned by a set of structures that support systematic processes to collect a range of data from diverse of sources and inform action to improve pupil and professional learning.

Issues for reflection

To what extent is the participation of different stakeholders in school self-evaluation supported in your school?

To what extent is there a clear framework for self-evaluation in your school? What is the underpinning structure and how does it relate to a strategic framework for self-evaluation?

To what extent is development planning in your school currently informed by data? What types of data are analysed and from what sources?

To what extent does your school currently access external perspectives to support self-evaluation and development planning?

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[100] Chapman and Hadfield (2010).
[101] As of 1 April 2013 known as the National College for Teaching and Leadership.
[102] NCSL (2006).

Reflecting on school self-evaluation for school improvement

Introduction

This review has contextualised school self-evaluation for school improvement by locating the process within the related fields of school effectiveness and improvement research and practice, summarised some of the key debates surrounding school self-evaluation and highlighted a number of key principles and processes associated with school self-evaluation for school improvement.
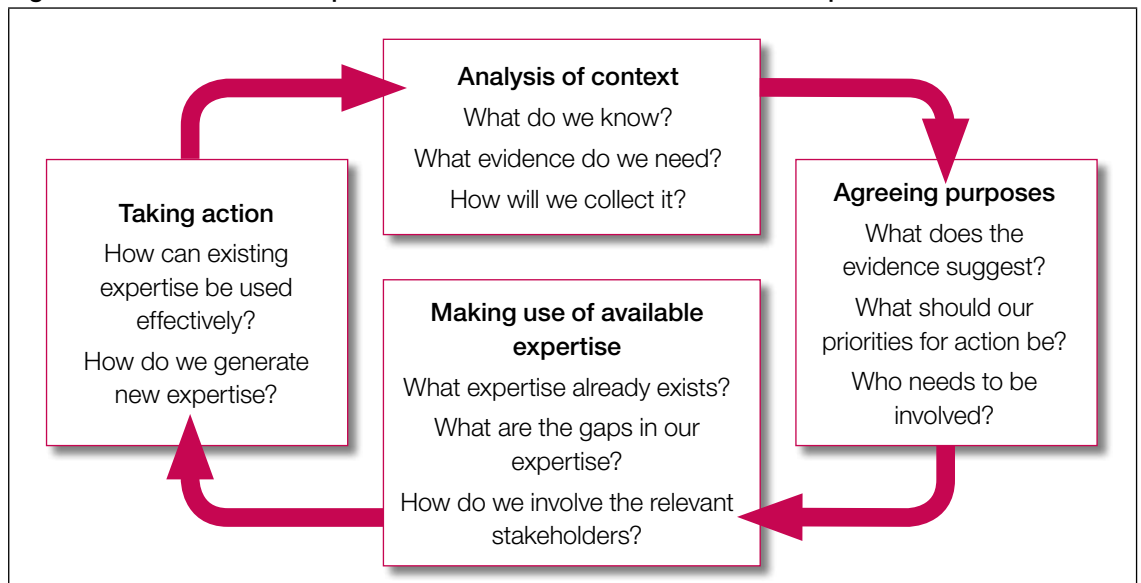
In this final section we reflect on the importance of understanding context and strong leadership in developing a successful approach to school self-evaluation for school improvement. Without these two key components it will be difficult to develop school self-evaluation that will make a difference to the work of those involved in educating our children and ultimately their experiences and outcomes in our schools.

School self-evaluation for school improvement: a case of understanding context and securing strong leadership?

This review has argued that context plays an important role in the development of frameworks, structures and processes for self-evaluation for school improvement. Those tasked with developing the self-evaluation process require a detailed understanding of their context at a range of levels, from the whole system to the school, and indeed to individual classrooms if an appropriate mechanism for school self-evaluation is to achieve a strong 'fit' with those involved with the process.

One feasible approach would be to develop a framework to support a highly differentiated school self-evaluation rather than invest in an established programme or intervention. In a similar vein to a framework for collaborative networking, a self-evaluation framework of this type would not only need to be sensitive to contextual and cultural diversity, it would also need to focus on developing the ability to facilitate meaningful conversations between those involved in the self-evaluation process, to generate and validate new knowledge; and encourage participation to support the generation of trusting relationships between those involved. This framework consists of four interlinked elements, each with its own set of issues for consideration:

Figure 2: Towards context-specific school self-evaluation for school improvement[103]

Analysis of context
What do we know?
What evidence do we need?
How will we collect it?

Agreeing purposes
What does the evidence suggest?
What should our priorities for action be?
Who needs to be involved?

Making use of available expertise
What expertise already exists?
What are the gaps in our expertise?
How do we involve the relevant stakeholders?

Taking action
How can existing expertise be used effectively?
How do we generate new expertise?

[103] Chapman (2008).

The above framework is a heuristic one which underpins a process of context-specific school self-evaluation with the ability to impact on pupil and professional learning. However, while the use of a framework of this type is helpful, using the framework in isolation is insufficient for success. Leadership of the process is a second key message that emerges from this review.

How the process of school self-evaluation is led and managed is vital to its success. Leadership and management actions are likely to determine how staff perceive the process, how they engage with the process and also to influence the action and outcomes of the process. The key challenge for leaders is to manage staff expectations and perceptions. If this can be achieved successfully, engagement, action and outcomes are likely to follow. The successful management of expectations and perceptions will be dependent to a large extent on establishing strong professional relationships within a climate of trust where risk-taking and collaboration support a culture of openness at all levels within the organisation. Highlighting the importance of establishing a culture receptive to critical review and improvement it was commented that:

'If success at individual and school level is to be assured it follows that everyone in the school community carries some form of responsibility and accountability. That is most likely to be realised in practice if people's expectations of each other are understood and if there is a climate in the school which is receptive to critical review and improvement at all levels.'[104]

Others have highlighted the importance of school leadership in school self-evaluation that promotes school improvement.[105] Taking a different perspective, they argue strong leadership is a consistent factor in self-evaluation activities regarded as having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and student outcomes. It was also found that sustaining momentum and achieving success was more likely when:

• there was active support from the school's leadership team

• the change or initiative connected to other current school developments

• staff learning strategies included: a) lesson observation with developmental feedback, and b) modelling teaching with subsequent time for reflective discussion

• staff were able to gain a fuller picture of the context in which they were working.[106]

Strong leadership for self-evaluation does not equate to hierarchical autocratic leadership. The more leadership is dispersed throughout the organisation, the more likely the process is to be viewed as bottom-up and owned by teachers. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) in England argues that teachers support self-evaluation if it supports their own needs and agendas rather than those of the inspectorates.[107] It is further claimed that: *'A critical measure of school improvement is the capacity of teachers to be leaders and shapers of education.'*[108]

This view has received support[109] and it was further argued that maintaining student achievement rises when teachers focus on their own practices. In addition a focus on specific student outcomes is regarded as a central feature of what are described as highly effective school improvement programmes, and indeed self-evaluation. Leaders have an important role to play in managing evaluation processes, which is claimed to be generally supported by teachers. However, if these are imposed and rigid and formulaic, rather than embedded and organic, a meaningful process of professional development can become undermined by evaluation and become school self-inspection, with the headteacher becoming the primary inspector.

[104] MacBeath (1999: 151).
[105] Bubb and Earley (2008).
[106] Bubb and Earley (2008: 5).
[107] NUT (2005).
[108] MacBeath (1999: 151).
[109] Harris (2002).

In conclusion, the NUT summarises the importance of understanding context and securing strong leadership to stimulate a bottom-up approach to self-evaluation for school improvement, which is internally driven and owned by teachers:

'Teachers' judgements need to be at the centre of assessment and evaluation. The evidence from countries which have adopted 'bottom-up' self-evaluation is that such approaches have contributed to high levels of achievement for the vast majority of young people. Where teachers 'own' assessment and evaluation, standards go up, not down.'[110]

The evidence within this review suggests that if individual contexts can create supportive environments, school self-evaluation has an important role to play in supporting pupil and professional learning.

[110] NUT (2005: 38).

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Appendix 1: A framework for self-evaluation

Extensive work in the area of school-self-evaluation has been carried out by one researcher in order to outline a framework based on a series of key questions.[111] We have drawn on this framework not to offer a blueprint or example of 'best practice', but rather as an attempt to provide a helpful set of questions to stimulate reflection and discussion within schools. It is anticipated that where these questions ignite discussion they might support the development of a framework for self-evaluation which is fit for purpose in a given context.

1. Why are we doing this?
A discussion among key stakeholders in the school (including teachers, parents, governors and pupils) to clarify the aims of the self-evaluation process. In doing so it creates ownership of the process by all involved, rather than being perceived as an externally-driven process.

2. Who is this for?
Teachers tend to see the audience for effective self-evaluation as the school itself, having teaching and learning at its core and directly impacting on the pupils. Where an external audience is perceived (for example, inspection agencies) as the key audience, the focus changes to one of accountability rather than improvement.

3. What is the best structure?
Self-evaluation occurs organically within schools, departments and classrooms as naturally occurring experiments. In order to widen and 'infuse' the whole process as a school policy, a framework needs to be developed to formalise the process.

4. How are we to judge?
External pressure can lead to an over-reliance on performance data in the form of test or exam results as indicators of improvement. However, while quality of teaching and learning or school cultures and ethos (seen by many as real indicators of school improvement) are less easily measured, it is possible to do so through peer or pupil evaluation, or by conversations with external agencies acting as critical friends. In this way the ownership of the self-evaluation process lies within the school and begins to consider improvements made beyond a narrow set of attainment-based indicators.

5. What do we do?
Self-evaluation can be seen as an 'event' rather than a process where stakeholders make a judgement on each criterion. However, where self-evaluation is embedded within the school, it is an ongoing process in the life of the classroom and wider school which can be evidenced through diaries, examples of work etc.

6. What are the tools for the job?
Simple evaluative tools have a tendency to be used more effectively. For example, in evaluating pupils' understanding, a thumbs-up or thumbs-down response, as to whether the pupils have understood what they are trying to learn may be as effective as a more complex tool.

7. What does the final product look like?
While school self-evaluation efforts may be written up in reports for various audiences, it is essentially a formative process; therefore there is no final product or easily defined end-point.

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[111] MacBeath (2005a: 19-21).

Appendix 2: Examples of practice.
Three case studies: a tale of two systems and one school

Introduction

Over the last 20 years there has been a notable change in the way education systems are being organised around the world. A general policy shift moving towards a centrally accountable yet devolved responsibility and control of schools (to a local or even school level in some countries) has led to increased emphasis on school self-evaluation.[112] This has been particularly evident in more economically developed countries; however, as policies travel across systems and continents we are seeing a shift in emphasis in less economically developed countries too.[113] Another researcher argues that this proliferation in the interest of school self-evaluation is fuelled by concerns about international comparisons ranking countries by standards-led educational indicators. He describes this as *'a logical extension of an international move to devolve decision-making to local school level, as much a political and economic motive as an educational one.'*[114]

In a study of self-evaluation practice in Europe, it was reported that the most common objective of self-evaluation policies was:

'to ensure and enhance educational quality and improve schools using a two-sided approach to accountability: a so-called government approach as well as a market-based accountability approach.'[115]

The diversity of models of school self-evaluation in operation is also highlighted. These range from what are described as a restricted view of self-evaluation, focusing purely on a school's outputs to a much broader perspective where the school's input, internal processes and performance are evaluated at multiple levels, including the whole school and classroom.[116] In the three case studies below, the first (in Hong Kong) and the second (in Australia) also highlight the range of models of self-evaluation that have evolved in different systems. This is not surprising and to some extent reassuring, particularly if the models are tailored to the specific nature and needs of individual contexts. The third case study drills down to offer a practical example of how data can be used to inform self-evaluation within a school.

Case study 1: Hong Kong – a case of centrally controlled self-evaluation and accountability

This study of school self-evaluation reforms in Hong Kong highlights some of the contradictions in a model of self-evaluation for school improvement which is internally led but subject to external review based on rigid and inflexible standards.[117] In 1997, the Hong Kong government introduced a system of school-based management. This removed the government's central responsibility for school quality assurance and placed this responsibility within schools through self-evaluation, involving a range of stakeholders including parents and teachers. It is noteworthy that this shift is part of a trend in the Asian region and in other developed countries to make leaders responsible for school improvement. Responsibility for the validation of this policy lies with HK Education Bureau (EDB) who conduct external reviews to validate school self-assessment (SSA).

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[112] Hofman, Dijkstra and Hofman (2009).
[113] Mugenyi and Chapman (2009).
[114] MacBeath (2005a: 36).
[115] Hofman, Dijkstra and Hofman (2009: 48).
[116] Hofman, Dijkstra and Hofman (2005).
[117] Ngan, Lee and Brown (2010).

Before conducting SSA, schools report to stakeholders on plans including school aims and development focus objectives. SSAs are completed every three to five years in accordance with the EDB quality assurance framework, performance indicators and SSA tools. Put simply, schools are now responsible for carrying out tasks previously undertaken by external bodies. The researchers argue that this has not led to school self-evaluation for improvement but to school self-inspection.

Their study found that school principals have negative attitudes to the reforms and feel the processes do not present a fair and accurate evaluation of their school. Furthermore, they note the processes are not sensitive to the unique features and characteristics of each school and that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach, with no consideration given to context, limits the potential for school improvement. One school principal involved in the study articulated frustration with the one-size-fits-all approach:

'Why can't each school have its own agenda, culture, characteristics? Why is it necessary to follow the only one method?'[118]

The majority of school leaders perceived the policies to be contradictory – on the one hand promoting school-based management, on the other subjecting the school to strict central control measures, a common tension referred to in the 'Key debates' section of this review. The researchers conclude that, instead of empowering schools, the top-down and externally-driven approach is:

'… insensitive to the complex variation in school needs and issues which affect improvement and effectiveness.'[119]

In addition, they argue that teachers are being put under increasing pressure and the policies are creating excessive stress and workload for both teachers and students – including additional administrative tasks for teachers. One headteacher reported the following:

'… we understand clearly that we are not 'engaging in our honest work', it's ridiculous. Teaching is work, which a teacher should devote oneself to as it influences students directly. But we have to handle a lot of administration work and many superficial documents. Why should we hang a banner? For advertising? We might feel suffocated because of excessive reforms. How much time then could be left for teaching preparations?[120]

The Hong Kong government stated its aim was to increase *joyful learning*. However, the researchers also reported that the standards and assessment requirements undermined the progressive pedagogy which could potentially lead to school improvement, and instead seemed to lead towards increased drilling of pupils to pass assessments.

The study concluded that respondents felt oppressed by policies they saw as detached from their individual aims.

'We conclude that our respondents felt oppressed by policies which, in reality, differed greatly from their intended goals. The policies were not seen as enhancing learning, but rather as creating even greater concerns about the survival needs of schools… The respondent principals knew they must work hard in dealing with the quality assurance process; however, they saw this as survival, not improvement.'[121]

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[118] Ngan, Lee and Brown (2010: 39).
[119] Ngan, Lee and Brown (2010: 40).
[120] Ngan, Lee and Brown (2010: 41).
[121] Ngan, Lee and Brown (2010: 43).

Rather than enhancing learning, the principals felt removed from policies and the policymaking process and described a *sense of disempowerment and detachment. This is indeed of great concern as successful school improvement practice is generally associated with school practitioners and leaders developing a sense of empowerment and autonomy over the different stages of planning and implementation.'*[122]

The research team point to the contradictions in this form of policy being used to promote school improvement:

'Recent research has indicated that Hong Kong teachers are strongly committed to using assessment for improvement but this belief was opposed to using assessment to demonstrate school quality.'[123]

The story of devolved self-assessment for school improvement tied to tight, centrally-controlled accountability measures in Hong Kong, contributes to identifying serious policy implementation problems in introducing school evaluation and assessment policies which are externally led, top down and linked to accountability measures.

Case study 2: Victoria, Australia

Assisted self-review
In contrast to the Hong Kong model is the 'assisted self-review' model used in Victoria, Australia, which, while placing the vast majority of the school improvement process within schools and their communities themselves, has features of external verification to authenticate the school's improvement and assessment plans.*[124]

The researchers in this study argue that the policy context within Australia needs to be taken into account when considering the assisted self-review model. The state of Victoria is not subjected to national policies regarding education and has its own emphasis regarding the respective roles of self-evaluation and external control, based on a system developed to balance accountability with school development.

Schools compare their data with that of comparison schools, and there is an element of parental choice and the market within the system. However, the authors maintain that this is relatively low key compared to state education policies and the professional ethos of teachers. Schools have charters, but unlike the US model of Charter Schools which are focused on 'standards' and outcomes, they reflect the priorities of the education department. There is also a strong trade union influence which, it is argued, consolidates teachers' positions at the heart of the education system and thus school improvement efforts.

[122] Bubb and Earley (2008).
[123] Brown et al. (2009: 43).
[124] Ferguson et al. (2000).

Two thirds of schools in Victoria (state schools) use the 'assisted self-review' model, which involves three stages:

1. The school charter is formulated by the school in consultation with parents, within the stated guidelines. The charter includes the school context and profile and identifies the school's aims and goals including priorities and improvement aims, as well as the expected outcomes. Within this, the roles and responsibilities of the school, parents and parents are laid out. Standard goals include those relating to; curriculum, educational environment and the management of financial and physical resources. Student outcomes and curriculum provision are expected to be covered. This charter is seen as a public declaration of the school's priorities over a period of three years.

2. There are two (annual) phases of internal assessment where the school evaluates its processes and outcomes, including external assessments at school-leaving age (18) alongside teacher assessments of pupils progress in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. In addition to this, pupils' attendance, welfare and 'destinations' are analysed. Staff's professional development and attendance are assessed, and at a whole-school level, curriculum development (including subjects and courses offered), parental satisfaction and staff opinion are part of the evaluation process. Staff-raised issues are seen as key to this as it helps set the agenda for future actions.

3. The third part, which is known as the Triennial Review, involves an external verifier, either from a university or another state-approved agency. A review meeting is held at which the school presents its data, its analysis of the data generated and proposed future actions and priorities. A single 'verifier' questions the evidence and offers advice about priorities.

The outcome of the three-part process is the formulation of a new school charter for the following three years in which new developmental issues arise and other priorities continue.[125]

The researchers argue that this model of evaluation incorporates the set of three 'competing logics'[126] discussed earlier. It is more economic than an externally-led process (such as that in England), makes the schools accountable both to the communities they serve and to the state via comparative data, and embeds within it an improvement logic underpinned by staff and whole-school engagement in the three-year cycle.

Case study 3: Using data to inform the development of practice – an example

The following example is based on a study of the development of inclusive schools, which was part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research Programme.[127] The study followed 25 schools over a period of three years as they sought to reduce barriers to participation and learning. The school in the example, a primary school in an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage, focused on developing teaching and learning approaches to better meet the needs of all its pupils.[128]

The initial aim of its project was to improve writing through the development of children's higher-order thinking skills. Two teachers began by trialling new questioning techniques with a Year 2 group and investigating their impact on children's learning. Gradually this work was extended to other teachers and other year groups, and supported by investment in training and resources. The teachers originally involved in the project began to explore new avenues of development, in particular the introduction of philosophy into the curriculum.

[125] Ferguson et al. (2000).
[126] MacBeath (2008a).
[127] Economic and Social Research Council UK grant L139251001.
[128] Chapman and Gallannaugh (2008).

The account of development in the school is provided from the perspective of one of the teachers most closely involved. It describes the way that action evolved and grew from an initial focus, explains how action and evaluation were integrated during the course of the development process, and highlights the learning at its heart. Although the example is of practice in a particular primary school it has wider applicability.

Identifying a focus

We identified barriers to learning during an evaluation day where we were looking at the problems we were having with raising standards, particularly in writing. One of the things we said was that we thought a good deal about our poor children and what they couldn't do, but not so much about the other children and what they could do. That was when the focus on higher-order thinking skills came out. Some children seemed to be able to manage higher-order thinking, whereas the rest of our children were working at a rather literal level. Like most schools, we'd had a lot of literacy intervention programmes – ELS, RR, BRP – strategies that had been particular to this group or that group, but I suppose we were looking for something we could do that would benefit all of our children. We'd also had some training input on thinking skills techniques and there were some of us who realised the potential of these.

To get things going, the headteacher and I decided which members of staff to involve in the project. We chose people who would be capable of disseminating the work in school and who would be likely to be committed to the project. We planned to begin the thinking skills work with the Year 2 cohort, but we also wanted to extend it eventually into other classes. Two of us were timetabled to take a 'thinking skills' lesson with Year 2 once a week, and we decided to begin by exploring new questioning techniques. We would alternate our roles, so that each week one of us would take the main responsibility for lesson delivery, while the other would support them and be able to observe the class.

Collecting evidence

Evidence was important for knowing we were on the right track. It was also important for convincing other members of staff that we were. In the first year we collected evidence of the kinds of questions teachers were asking and we used a taxonomy of thinking skills to analyse them. The first time we did this after a lesson we found out that the questions I had asked had mainly required 'lower-order' thinking to answer them. Because we looked at this and rethought what we were doing, by the time we next collected evidence the situation had changed. I remember that very clearly because I thought, 'Oh! I've only asked one evaluation question, and this isn't good enough, and I need to be really challenging them to think at this higher level.' Then I started to plan my questions much more clearly and I created a sheet for other people on how to plan, using the higher-order thinking skills list we had. Of course, we also wanted to know what impact the changes were having on children's work, and we collected evidence of that as well. You have to have clear criteria as to what you are looking for, so when you get to a particular stage you can ask, 'Has this child's writing changed? If so, what has brought about this change? If not, why hasn't it?' We developed a list of features by which to judge children's writing in terms of their thinking and so we were able to track development over three years.

In the second year we were getting quite confident about our own questioning skills and we became more interested in recording children's answers to questions and their own questions. The children seemed to be picking up on what we, the teachers, were doing, almost as if we were modelling how to ask higher-order questions, but we needed to see what was happening much more clearly. We collected fascinating evidence of changes in the language and discourse of the classroom. It was so exciting observing the questions the children asked each other, the maturity of their talk generally and the respect they showed to one other.

External perspectives

The project created links between us, the university and the LA [local authority], and as a result researchers were able to support us by carrying out some of the classroom observations. The feedback from observations helped to give us direction. The LA was very supportive in financing teacher release and facilitating links with other schools as well. Again, it made us ask ourselves, were we on the right track? Was there something going on in another school that we could learn from to support our children?

Keeping moving

At the beginning there was this fear, we thought, 'We've got no resources, we don't know how to do this, where do we start?' When we did get started and developed confidence, particularly by the second year when we'd got together a bank of strategies that we could use, we were off and we knew there was no going back. The Year 2 attainment results in the first year helped, they were the best ever (and they're continuing to be the best ever, which is lovely). The main problems we faced were to do with the logistics of it all. As the project went on, those of us originally involved set up new teaching partnerships to model the strategies, and there had to be a lot of thinking around releasing people to work alongside others. But we didn't allow anything to stop our work, because there was no teacher who didn't come to value it.

We reviewed every thinking skills lesson. Because there were always two of us involved in a lesson, after it we were able to talk about what had happened and where we should go next. There were also particular milestones we got to where we thought we needed to move on. I can remember in the second year thinking, 'Hang on, every time we do this thinking skills work we get to a point where we're bordering on philosophy and we don't know how to do philosophy and we need to train up on that.' The scale of the project changed as well, although we did take things very gradually to begin with. With hindsight, we might have got the whole staff involved more quickly, but early on that seemed difficult because of absences and people moving on. Latterly though, it's been like a tree branching out. Three of us were like the trunk with others joining us. At the same time as we expanded the partnerships, others were aware that we were doing the project and when we disseminated the work at staff meetings, showing evidence and encouraging others to get on board, we were addressing the whole school. So people who hadn't been directly involved in partnerships were also learning about the project and some of those took on the thinking skills work independently.

Making sense

Our understanding of barriers to learning changed through the project. Before we started we were thinking about links between underachievement and language deficiency. When you're talking about language deficiency you tend to get bogged down in the detail of the grammar or vocabulary that children don't know, but we came to realise that that wasn't what the problem was in our school. It wasn't children's vocabulary and so on, it was getting them to use the language that they do have, to express what they need to express. We challenged children to use language to its fullest extent because they had to reason, explain and justify and manage all the other tasks we asked them to do in their thinking skills and philosophy work. In doing this we became skilled in different teaching techniques, and realised the importance of different ways of learning, particularly through oracy. And we saw the impact of this in all sorts of ways, in children's written work, in their oral skills, in their confidence, in the positive ways they were working together. We sometimes get new teachers or supply teachers in school who think our children can't do much because of the area they are from, but we tell them it's not the case.' [129]

Questions
- In your view, what are the key learning points from this example?
- How might they inform self-evaluation practice in your school?

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[129] Chapman and Gallannaugh (2008).