Evaluation and inspection in a polycentric education system

Evaluation and inspection practices include the internal evaluations and inspections in/of single schools/service providers that are part of the network, as well as any peer review, external evaluation and inspection activity of the network of schools/service providers.

The definition of internal evaluation used to guide the case studies is of *a process of purposive evaluation of school practices which provides insights into the educational experiences of students, as more than those measured by test data* (Simons, 2013). It is variously termed: internal evaluation, (school) self- evaluation, self-review, data use, data- based decision making, inquiry, internal accountability. Internal evaluation is carried out solely by staff internal to the school and these may be groups of teachers and/or other members of staff, school leaders or designated project staff (Nevo, 2001). 'Data coaches' may work, as employees of the school, with teams to facilitate the interpretation of data and in using it to plan changes to teaching approaches. Schools may also work with external partners, such as a research partnership or a school district/local authority or employ a 'critical friend' or external data coach to give support in the design of internal evaluation, the interpreting of evidence and to prompt reflection and planning for improvement. However, internal evaluation is distinguished from external types of evaluation in the fact that members of the school's professional personnel are in charge of the evaluation. External evaluations would, on the other hand, see an external authority (e.g. Inspectorate of Education) decide on evaluation criteria, collect data on school performance and report evaluation results.

We are interested in the <u>frequency</u> of both internal and external evaluation activities of both single schools in the network as evaluations of the network itself, as well as the <u>methodology, valuing, and user involvement</u> in/of all these evaluation activities.

- Methodology involves the collection and analysis of empirical data for the study and judgment of particular aspects of social life. A distinction is often made between quantitative methods, using (quasi)experimental methods to analyse if a treatment or program is effective in bringing about desired effects and to explain and predict effects, and qualitative methods that aim to improve understanding and meaning. Each approach comes with a range of theory, instruments and conditions for appropriate designs.
- Valuing and judging involves the making of value judgments about the quality of some object, situation or process (p.80). There are a number of ways to make value judgements. The first approach focuses on making a final judgment of pass or fail where multiple-outcome judgements feed into a single value statement of a programme's worth. Such an approach generally uses a quantitative, planned and purposeful approach where data and statistics and (ideally) a comparison between a control and experimental group is used to inform a final judgement. The second approach includes a comparison of similar entities where the evaluator determines the appropriate criteria for which judgements are to be made and presenting judgements on those set of criteria. The third approach is 'goal-free' in which the evaluator assumes the responsibility for determining which program outcomes to examine, rejecting the objectives of the programme as a starting point.
- User involvement: which stakeholders are involved in which phase of the evaluation (e.g. the definition stage in which the goals, processes, resources of an evaluation etc. are specified, the installation stage which aims to identify discrepancies in the implementation of the program, the process stage in which the extent of attainment of short-term outcomes or enabling objectives are determined, and the product stage which aims to determine the attainment of terminal or ultimate objectives).

Within this variable we are specifically interested in polycentric models of inspections of networks of schools and/or service providers and how they develop over time in response to school networks. These indicators are summarized below and outlined in detail in Ehren et al (submitted):

Table 1. Shifting roles and working methods from single school inspections to 'polycentric inspections'

Dimension	Continuum 'Monocentric' inspections of single schools – 'Polycentric' inspections of networks of schools/service providers	Specific practices of 'polycentric inspections'
Methodology • Who defines methodology and standards? • What is the object of evaluation?	Explaining and predicting – Interpretation, understanding and validating knowledge	Agenda (e.g. standards) for inspection is (also) set by schools and stakeholders Inspection schedules include visits to all schools/stakeholders at the same time Inspection framework includes standards to evaluate network activities and effective cooperation between schools/stakeholders (looking at power balances and checks and balances and openness to external stakeholders and knowledge), inspection of dynamics in the network There is a connection between individual school inspections and inspections of networks, such as when evaluation of individual school performance takes into account their role in the network, or when network performance takes into account the quality of individual schools in a way that would strengthen high quality network-level outcomes (and not corrupt collaboration such as when inspections enforce meaningless collaboration). Thematic inspections: topics for an annual or thematic report are decided on by stakeholders in the system (e.g. representatives of schools, networks)
Valuing • Who defines evaluation criteria for pass/fail? • Who is valued?	Single value judgment (pass/fail) – Grading 'critical competitors' Evaluator values – Evaluator facilitates the valuing by stakeholders Planned and purposeful – Goal-free, flexible and adaptable to stakeholder needs	Valuing is focused on analysing, validating and disseminating good practices of how to improve student achievement (describing why the good practice worked for the host school, how the host school created process knowledge -'this is how we did it'-, and making explicit the theory underpinning practice -'these are the principles underpinning why we did it and what we did')
Use/User involvement • Role of stakeholders in (use of) inspections	Involvement of primary decision-makers – Involvement of wider group of stakeholders	Inspection feedback is given to all schools/stakeholders in an open forum and agreements are made about a shared agenda for change; feedback is targeted to, and adapted to relevant actors

• Consequences of inspection assessments	Schools/network as end users of evaluation findings - Involvement of stakeholders in definition, process, product, cost-benefit analysis stage	Intelligent consequences which include removal and/or inclusion of partners in/out of the network, shifting partners to other networks (where they better fit), follow-up with other stakeholders in the system on the support they should provide to the network. Consequences and interventions go beyond sanctions and rewards of individual schools and include intelligent techniques (e.g. information sharing, persuasion, targeted monitoring) to improve the functioning of the network (both in terms of structural and relational contingencies, such as strength and density of ties, quality of knowledge sharing) Inspectorate shares information from individual school inspections with the network (authority) Inspectorate ensures that there is a follow-up of inspections (of both schools and networks) in the system, potentially also by other stakeholders (e.g. Ministry, local authority), an example are the 'regional methodological councils in Sofia
Positioning of the Inspectorate		Status and main functions of Inspectorate and the extent to which they are part of the network (e.g. who has authority over setting agenda/standards, and deciding on judgements and consequences) Inspectorate is independent of Ministry Inspectorate has legislative remit to inspect networks; Legislative power to inspect networks and clear legislative framework for inspections on the network level. Inspectorate builds network capacity : provides information in annual report on functioning of network Interplay between individual school inspections/inspectors and inspections/inspectors of networks (knowledge exchange between inspectors). Indicator on interplay between individual school inspections and inspections of the network: communication of results from individual schools to the network (by the Inspectorate), formal sharing of results from individual school inspections with the network authority, follow-up embedded in the frameworks, knowledge management by the Inspectorate in scheduling and assessing individual and network of schools. Inspectorate builds capacity of networks on a country-level: e.g. through an annual report which provides an overview of networks and effective and ineffective arrangements, and provide suggestions to improve functioning of school networks.

External (socio-economic and cultural context of network and Inspectorate: - Political: ideological stance and pragmatic stance (power, resources, accountability) - Cultural: social (relationships, values, communication, involvement and engagement) - Structural: government, process, mandated, choice)[1]		

More information:

Ehren, M.C.M., Janssens, F.J.G., Brown, M., McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. (submitted). Evaluation and decentralised governance: the case of inspections in polycentric education systems. *Journal of Educational Change.*

Ehren, M.C.M. and Perryman, J. (accepted). Accountability of school networks: who is accountable to whom and for what?. *EMAL*

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[1] See Chapman et al (July 2015). Knowledge into action in education: research and development project; final report.