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**Collaborative Evaluation –
Learning Process or Symbolic Action?**

**A longitudinal case study exploring the consequences
of participation in an organisational self-evaluation
process**

Høgskolen i Lillehammer 2001

Forord

Denne forskningsrapporten bygger på et tre-årig forskningsprosjekt som er finansiert av Norges Forskningsråd og Høgskolen i Lillehammer.

Formålet med undersøkelsen har vært å utvikle og implementere en intern deltaker- og læringsorientert evalueringsmodell med det formål å undersøke evalueringsprosessens muligheter, barrierer og dilemmaer samt få en forståelse av mulighetene som en mer desentralisert, deltakerstyrt modell for skole-evaluering har, hvor samarbeid og involvering er sentrale kjennetegn. Forskningsprosjektets målsetning har vært å utvikle kunnskap om hvordan evaluering som institusjonell, langsiktig virksomhet kan bidra til kompetanseutvikling og læring i organisasjoner.

Rapporten er en bearbeidet utgave av et paper som ble presentert på forskningskonferansen ECER 2000, the Annual Meeting of the European Educational Research Association, Edinburgh, september 2000. Forskningsutvalget ved Høgskolen i Lillehammer har finansiert konferansedeltakelsen, og jeg takker for muligheten jeg fikk til å delta på denne konferansen.

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Sammendrag

Skoleevaluering og skolebasert vurdering har vært sentrale tema som har utfordret både skoleadministratorer, skoleledere og lærere i Norge så vel som i andre land. Denne utfordringen har resultert i utvikling av nye evalueringsformer basert på mer demokratiske og deltakerstyrte modeller for skolevurdering. Denne forskningsrapporten bygger på et tre-årig forskningsprosjekt "Ledelse og organisasjonslæring – en studie av selv-evalueringprosessen i skolen". Rapporten presenterer en strategi for en slik deltakerstyrt evalueringsmodell benyttet i grunnskolen i Norge og noen resultater fra forskningsprosjektet. Resultatene bygger på case studier av 8 skoler hvor skoleledelsen og lærerne ble fulgt hele perioden. Det empiriske materialet er basert på observasjon, kvalitative intervju og en survey distribuert etter 3 år. I rapporten drøftes ulike sider ved skolenes selv-evalueringssjess og resultatet av dette arbeidet.

Emneord: evaluering; organisasjonslæring; skoleutvikling; selvevaluering; skolebasert vurdering

Abstract

School evaluation has been a central issue in education that has challenged administrators and teachers in Norway as well as in other countries. This challenge has resulted in development of new forms of evaluation based upon more democratic and collaborative approaches. This report presents a strategy for school-based, collaborative evaluation for primary and secondary schooling in Norway and some of the findings from a three-year case study of Norwegian schools implementing a self-evaluation process where school-leaders and teachers take charge of the evaluation process in their school and make it their own. The research data was collected over a three-year period and contains material from interviews with school leaders and teachers during this period and results from a survey at the end of the 3-years period . The data provided a rich context for investigating the nature, consequences and the supporting conditions school-based, collaborative evaluation required to secure self-evaluation as an ongoing and meaningful part of educational practice.

Key words: evaluation; organisational learning; school development; collaborative evaluation; school self-evaluation; school-based evaluation

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Collaborative Evaluation – Learning Process or Symbolic Action?

A longitudinal case study exploring the consequences of participation in an organisational self-evaluation process

1. Introduction

Today, school evaluation has been a central issue in education that has challenged administrators and teachers in Norway as well as in other countries. This challenge has resulted in development of new forms of evaluation based upon more democratic and collaborative approaches.

The report presents a strategy for school-based collaborative evaluation for primary and secondary schooling in Norway and some of the findings from a three-year case study of Norwegian schools implementing a self-evaluation process where school-leaders and teachers take charge of the evaluation process in their school and make it their own.

There has been an extensive rhetoric connected to this approach to evaluation. But what does actual practice look like? What impact does school-based evaluation have upon school development and educational practice? What are the barriers and potential for critical inquiry and organizational learning when participants take charge of the evaluation process and make it their own? Does this approach to evaluation hold its potential to enable schools gaining increased insight into their own educational and administrative practice, and as a consequence, raising the school organization's ability to learn from its own practice?

The present study, 'Leadership and Organisational Learning in Schools' is part of a larger research project 'Leadership, Evaluation and Development in Educational Institutions', sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council (Indrebo et al., 1993). The purpose of the study is to develop our understanding about the potential for a decentralized collaborative and participatory approach to evaluation, in this project called school-based evaluation, and to explore both the processes and outcomes of evaluation initiated, conducted and controlled by the local school.

The design is a longitudinal case study approach that employs multiple sources of data. The research data was collected over a three-year period and provided a rich context for investigating the nature, consequences and the supporting conditions school-based evaluation required to secure self-evaluation as an ongoing and meaningful part of educational practice.

In this report I will discuss some of the consequences of this approach to evaluation. The report presents results of the impact of the evaluation process that extends beyond the particular entity being evaluated, having consequences both at the individual and organisational level. The focus will be on the practitioners' perceptions after three years of participation in a school-based

collaborative evaluation process. A consideration of the use of school-based evaluation as an approach to school development and generation of change in schools concludes the discussion.

2. Involving practitioners in the evaluation process: Theoretical approach

Internal self-evaluation is grounded in a theory of school development and change which has evolved from an analysis of past attempts to reform schools. This theoretical basis provided the conditions for development of a notion of self-evaluation built upon a democratic approach moving towards the development of professional rather than managerial interests (see Simons 1987).

Clift et al. (1987) emphasize that the rationale for school self-evaluation is that the most effective means of improving the quality of education provided by the school, is to give the school the responsibility for reviewing their own performance and for carrying out any reforms which seem necessary as a consequence.

One of the assumptions about change which is implicit in this evaluation scheme, is that evaluation as a result of the school's own initiative and motivation is expected to stimulate commitment and support among staff to the findings that evaluations produce. This is regarded as the best guarantee that findings and recommendations will be acted upon. Since all evaluation is aimed at stimulating change, Patton (1978) argues that the power of evaluation lies ultimately in the mobilisation of individual energies for action.

Traditionally, responsibility for evaluation has tended to stay in the hand of external experts who are called in to measure the effect of an evaluated activity and it has been used for administrative purposes rather than professional ones. Today, this position is challenged by various approaches to evaluation that are centred on different levels of participation in evaluation. Approaches that include participation in the evaluation process by organisation members, are represented in various action research and evaluation models (Patton 1978; Stake 1983; Carr & Kemmis 1986; Simons 1987; Guba & Lincoln 1989; Cousins & Earl 1992,1995).

Approaches like 'participatory evaluation' (Cousins & Earl 1992,1995), 'stakeholder-based evaluation' (Guba & Lincoln 1989), and 'empowerment evaluation' (Fetterman et al. 1996) are all forms of evaluation that focus on the active involvement of people in organisations and of those that are influenced by the evaluation process and results. This implies taking into account the 'stakeholders' ideas, models or frameworks for attributing meaning and explanations to the evaluation findings.

Cousins and Earl (1992) have provided a synthesis of the literature on participatory evaluation and organizational learning, concluding that 'participatory evaluation offers a powerful approach to the improvement of educational learning and, consequently, lead to better informed decisions' (1992:411). They present participatory evaluation as an extension of the stakeholder-based model, and provide theoretical support for this approach 'stemming primarily from the view that knowledge is socially constructed and memories are developed and shared by organization members' (1992:387). Their work acknowledges the increasing democratization of evaluation by emphasizing the role of the individual and the organization.

Participatory approaches to evaluation are likely to foster utilization of the evaluation results since they will ultimately make the evaluation more responsive to the needs of the participants (Greene 1987; Simons 1987). This notion is based on the arguments that people deeply engaged in evaluation activities will feel a stronger sense of ownership for the process and results. They are likely to develop firsthand, personally meaningful understanding of the data and are more likely to engage in extended dialogue with colleagues about the meaning of data (Cousin 1995). The objective is to develop collective resources for action. This is in line with traditional Norwegian working culture and values where the ideals of participatory democracy are strongly emphasized (Gullowsen 1971).

This approach to evaluation raises many concerns concerning ethics and political aspects. It represents a recognition of the political nature of the evaluation process (Simons 1987; House 1980). It is an appreciation that evaluation affects many people who have divergent and even incompatible concerns, recognizing the multiple perspectives these interests bring to judgement and understanding. Therefore questions like who has the control of the process, who has access to any evaluation product that emerges and whose interests are served, are important (Simons 1987).

The research project reported here is based upon the conception that participation in an evaluation process as a kind of action research, where school staff frame their questions, develop their own evaluation designs, collect and analyse their data and interpret the meaning of data, provide a basis for critical reflection in the company of colleagues. Evaluation serves as a tool for teachers and school leaders so they can assess their own work critically and reflect upon their day to day experiences. Thus evaluation activities may result in new insight, promoting change both at the individual level as well as the level of the whole school.

These different perspectives suggested to us that meaningful school evaluation should come from enhancing the teacher's role to include systematic inquiry and creating collaborative communities for discussion. Specifically, we came to believe that if the purpose is institutional development and learning, it would be preferable to have groups of teachers collaborating on evaluation projects on issues of joint concern.

In sum, important characteristics of school-based evaluation present in this project are: a clear democratic commitment, the participatory character of evaluation seen as a joint inquiry and learning experience and the importance given to the creation of collaborative evaluation culture in schools. For a more detailed account of the theory that informs this process of school self-evaluation, see Simons (1981, 1987) and Clift et al. (1987). A broad description of the state of research concerning school-based evaluation is also given in the report from a conference at Oppland College in Lillehammer, Norway (Alvik, Indrebo & Monsen 1992).

3. Method

The focus of the study was designed to try (a) to understand the nature and development of self-evaluation within the local school; (b) to explore the extent to which the self-evaluation activities were actually being implemented; (c) to examine the consequences of the evaluation process and (d) to explore how self-evaluating schools may have the potential to become learning organizations.

A case study approach was adopted to enable us to get closer to understanding the complexities of circumstances and actions within an evaluation process and to get a feeling of the perceptions and attitudes of participants concerning the process. A sample of 8 primary and lower secondary schools were chosen for an in-dept study. From each of the 8 schools, the principal and 2-3 teachers had been attending a comprehensive one-year course introducing them to school-based evaluation. The schools simultaneously were supposed to plan and conduct collaborative evaluation projects in their own school.

Multiple data sources were used in the study. Data was selected principally using qualitative methods, including interviews, observation of group meetings, and of discussions, training, group work and formal presentations during the regional training programme, together with document review and analysis.

Another kind of research evidence was collected through survey data from a questionnaire distributed at the end of the 3-year period to all the principals and teachers involved in the participating schools to get an impression of the attitudes and experiences of all those involved in the evaluation process. This survey asked respondents to provide views specific to the evaluation process, the problems met, the consequences and effect of evaluation as well as their personal opinions and perceptions about the activities they had engaged in. Key themes and issues were identified from the qualitative interviews. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions. We received responses from 267 teachers and principals.

The data gave us a basis on which to reflect upon the project and the potential for learning how schools realistically introduce and manage a process of this kind. Some of the data have been discussed earlier in relation to other aspects of the evaluations they derive from (Indrebo 1992, 1994, 1996, 1999; Indrebo et al. 1993).

4. The case for collaborative evaluation: Impact and consequences

Focus in this report is some of the findings from the survey distributed to teachers and school-leaders at the end of the three-year period focusing on their perceptions and attitudes towards the evaluation process and the reported consequences of the evaluation activities both at the personal and organisational level.

In the report I will focus on some critical issues:

- The principals' and teachers' motivation and willingness to be involved in the evaluation activities.
- Structures supporting participation.
- Reported impact and consequences of school-based evaluation.
- Reported problems met engaging in the evaluation activities.

Motivation to participate – the practitioners perception

What factors seem to raise or increase the motivation to participate?

School-based evaluation is an evaluation process designed to increase involvement. In this approach, participation is seen essential to motivation and commitment where a sense of ownership is crucial if the aim of evaluation is improvement of practice.

According to House (1992) motivation remains a central problem for school-based evaluation. The problem is twofold; First, how to convince teachers and others to engage in self-evaluation, an activity where they are likely to face significant challenges and relatively extensive workload demands? Secondly, participation can be reduced to a set of formal procedures and techniques where participation can be said to have occurred without real understanding and commitment . In the survey we wanted to make explicit the teachers' and principals' perceptions and attitudes concerning participation in a process of internal evaluation and continuing local evaluation efforts. We asked questions focusing on their motivation and reasons for involvement in this new activity.

After 3 years, a majority of the teachers seem to be in favour of this innovation. 82% were still supportive to the school being engaged in this form of evaluation, only 1% reported they were very negative. A majority of the teachers and principals identified their experiences as positive and worthwhile.

When asked, most of the teachers reported a change in their attitude towards evaluation during these three years. 34% answered that they had been much more positive to school-based evaluation after having practiced this form of evaluation, 49 % were moderately positive and only 13 % reported not being positive at all.

There were a number of comments expressing the positive nature of their experiences. The arguments supporting a motivation to participate in this activity can be grouped along three dimensions; one concerned with evaluation as a tool for professional and school development, another concerned with the purpose and utility of evaluation for the teachers' daily work, the third was related to giving the students and their parents a voice in schools.

After three years the most important reasons given, were that school-based evaluation gave the teachers an opportunity to be involved in developing their own school, improving their own educational practice, giving them new possibilities for improving the students learning and stimulating teachers collaboration.

The comments from the open-ended questions included aspects such as the possibility to:

- professional self-development through systematic inquiry,
- increase personal competence and awareness of factors relating to classroom teaching,
- learn a strategy usable in the daily work to improve teaching and learning,

- increase discussions concerning educational practice,
- develop a collaborative culture by sharing and discussing problems in common
- encourage wider staff participation in school development and improvement,

- improve the education to their students,
- give the students and their parents a voice in schools,
- inform parents and politicians what is really going on in schools.

Other comments show how some teachers associated evaluation with negative effects and this made them very sceptical about any benefits or potentials of evaluation. Their concerns were mainly associated to doing school-based evaluation:

- is time-consuming,
- will take time and energy away from what is more important; teaching and learning,
- may reveal or generate conflicts among staff,
- will create problems involving the entire staff or a majority of them.

Accountability reasons that had been stressed by different external agencies, educational administrators and educational reform programs concerning school evaluation, were of little importance for the teachers now, contrary to what they had reported three years before. Especially the principals had made the political aspects of school evaluation an important issue in the beginning of the process. They had stressed the importance of developing an approach to school evaluation based on the school's own premises instead of having to adopt external evaluation schemes, with reference to what had happened in England.

One interesting difference was found between teachers' and principals' motivation to participate. While the teachers mainly reported school-based evaluation as a tool for improving their own classroom practice and professional development, the principals' major focus of concern was the importance school-based evaluation would have for developing the whole school and for creating a collaborative working culture.

There was also a difference in the answers between different groups of participants. Not surprisingly, the principals and teachers attending the training course, had initially a more clear idea of why evaluation was important and how they could use it for their advantage. They were more positive about its benefits both for themselves and for their colleagues than the other teachers.

The time issue was emphasized strongly by both the enthusiasts and the more sceptical ones. Many teachers expressed an ambiguity concerning their motivation; on the one hand, interest and curiosity engaging in this kind of activity, on the other, doubts concerning the workload demands, the utility and the risk implicit in a process of systematic inquiry.

But when asked if they would give this activity priority in their daily work, about 68% would do that to some degree while about 30% would not. Another question referred to whether they felt pressure from the school administration to participate in the evaluation process, only 6% had experienced this kind of pressure to a considerable degree while 23 % said they did to some degree. But from the interviews we knew that some of the teachers reported that the pressure to participate was not so strong from the administrative level. The pressure that existed came mostly from their colleagues.

Concerning the utility aspect of doing evaluation, when asked if the work and energy invested had been waste of time and energy, only about 3 % strongly confirmed this statement, while 75.5% strongly disagreed. 39 % of the respondents reported that the evaluation projects they had been involved in had given them knowledge that had been worthwhile and usable, while only about 9 % reported that they did not see any importance of the data collected.

Creating shared meaning and trust

Even the existence of motivation and willingness to participate in an evaluation process is not sufficient to insure an effective collaborative process and its outcome. Observation of the project schools suggests that one critical issue was how school-based evaluation was introduced in the schools. For many schools, this early stage called for a substantial element of information-giving and discussions. The information had to cater people of widely differing levels of knowledge and experience of previous development and project work and with a wide range of attitudes and expectations towards evaluation. For some teachers the evaluation process may have seemed abstract, irrelevant and time consuming. Other teachers felt that this approach covered familiar ground, while others felt the need for more time in training, particularly on methodological skills.

How the schools worked to bring awareness to the entire staff, creating common ground of mutually acceptable, shared meanings in practice, differed considerably. Some schools introduced the evaluation theme by extensive discussions of the aim of an internal evaluation process, the contents and values of such an activity, the need for openness, collaboration and shared critical responsibility in order to make collective sense of the evaluation process and its outcome. In these schools those in charge of the information provided time for discussions, for clarifying details and airing concerns. They expressed great concern for the fact that the evaluation process could generate considerable initial anxiety and concern.

Others started by a period with methodological questions and training, while one or two schools were mainly concerned with the theoretical aspects of school-based evaluation, introducing the teachers to relevant literature and concepts. Two schools handled this issue by inviting the staff to decide what to evaluate with little theoretical input and methodological discussions beforehand. The schools treated the evaluation project as something they knew well and that this approach did not differ much from what they already were doing more informally.

To avoid major resistance many principals when informing their staff, took great pains to explain the project and the evaluation strategy as non-threatening as possible. Evidently, some of them succeeded. The feedback from the majority of teachers after this information and introduction phase was mainly positive. Many of the teachers in the project schools reported that after having received more concrete information and knowledge about school-based evaluation, they had changed their attitudes from initially negative or ambivalent to a more positive interest.

The data indicates that schools where those in charge of the evaluation project, initially paid special attention to the need to have people committed, were more successful in creating a climate for involvement. One way this was done was to allow time for discussions and critical questions to be asked. By extensive discussions of the aims, the contents and values of such an

activity, the need for openness, collaboration and shared responsibility, these schools seem to a larger extent to have created an atmosphere of security and knowledge among the staff. By also emphasizing the utility and purpose of evaluation for the practicing teacher and the constraints and time issues, they gave the individual teacher a sense of the overall purpose of school-based evaluation.

This strategy had two important consequences: one was to increase the knowledge and motivation among the staff and the other to reduce the anxiety. Some training in methods of collecting data was also seen as valuable in reducing anxieties and getting the evaluation project off to a good start. On the other side, this strategy may also bring different values, interests and interpretations into the discussions which make conflicts more open, thereby adding complexity to the already difficult process of self-evaluation.

After 3 years, the lack of knowledge both concerning evaluation methods and evaluation as a theoretical and practical endeavour, still is felt as a considerable problem among one-third of the respondents engaging in school-based evaluation. Only 25 % of the respondents felt the lack of information during the initial stage as a considerable problem (see Table 2).

Findings like these indicate that besides the need to have basic knowledge about school-based evaluation, there is also a need for sufficient flexibility in the information and training strategy to respond to the differing needs of schools and individuals at different stages during the process. Information, training and competence building, creating shared meaning and trust is a longterm process, with different knowledge needs at different stages. It is difficult to learn how to perform evaluation without actually doing it. Nothing is gained by rushing forward; the process has to ripen.

Evaluation teams

Most of the project schools in our study decided to establish internal evaluation teams or 'planning groups' to plan and co-ordinate the evaluation process. These teams usually consisted of the principal and three to four teachers; at least some of them had attended the training courses. These teams were the key disseminators. They were in charge of the process of organizing, co-ordinating and managing the internal process with the rest of the staff as more or less active participants.

The evaluation teams differed considerably concerning the opportunity they provided for discussions among the staff during the initial stage. Some of the teams were quite concerned with the establishment of a positive climate for evaluation activities and for participation. One way to stimulate this process was to introduce the staff to a wide range of issues concerning school-based evaluation with time for clarification of what school-based evaluation may mean and what challenges it presented to the staff. Through these discussions, the teams seemed familiarized with the reform, creating necessary confidence and thus further involvement in the process.

Other teams were placing limitations on discussions among the staff both concerning time available and issues raised. The interviews suggest that the reasons for this may be such as: difficulties in allocating sufficient time for discussions, the team did not stress the necessity of

extensive discussions when starting, resistance and scepticism among the staff, and the problem of involving the staff or a majority of them in these discussions. The results of limited staff discussions in the initial stages seemed to have created a lack of goal consensus and variation in the meaning and purposes that limited the perceived utility of the evaluation and as a consequence reduced involvement of teachers.

The interpretation of data suggests that one critical issue to get teachers involved, is the method of selecting members to these groups. If members of staff serve on the evaluation team on a rotational basis, acceptance and involvement seemed to increase and exclusivity was more likely to be prevented. The process was made accessible to everybody, not just teachers with special functions. These findings illustrate some of the many dilemmas implicit in the relationship between leadership and control on the one hand and involvement on the other. The problems may occur irrespective of whether the principal or other members of staff are assigned the role of leader(s).

Being a member of the school's evaluation team also seemed to have a strong competence-building effect. Teachers reported feeling empowered because they had implemented something they had learned during training and experience, and they felt this was important to them for professional reasons. Beside the competence-building effect, these evaluation teams also seem to widen their members' perspectives. Comments from some of these teachers showed that being a member of the team had broadened their perceptions to embrace issues beyond those of their own classroom, including a leadership perspective. And principals reported becoming more aware of the teachers concerns and problems.

To sum up, these evaluation teams function as an important arena for information and learning, and as a perspective broadening possibility. The critical issue is how and in what way the teams are sharing their experience with the rest of the staff. The data strongly indicates that good communication between the evaluation team and staff is essential for stimulating commitment and participation.

Building structure and support

Unless a structure is created that allows teachers time and opportunity to meet, any evaluation activity is likely to be minimal. One of the consistent findings across the schools, was the problem concerning lack of time, or too restricted time resources. Our material suggests that doing the evaluation, was perceived as extra work to an already full agenda. The evaluation activity had to compete with other work and development tasks. The consequence was that many teachers reported frustration of an increased work load as well as lack of time. It is therefore necessary to organize the activity in such a way that one creates time, forums and structures for what is considered important.

After 3 years, the teachers reported that time and workload were the most severe problems for participation in evaluation activities. About 71 % reported that extensive workload was a considerable problem, while only 1.5 % said that this was a minor problem. About 70 % reported time to be a considerable problem, while about half of the respondents told that competing

demands from other projects, took their attention and energy away from evaluation activities (see Table 2).

In this process, school self-evaluation may have acted as a stimulus for change. Observations from the project schools indicate that to some extent new structures have been created to provide more time for collaboration; meetings are held on a more regular basis and conducted in a more structured manner, and some schools have altered their timetables to allow for evaluation activities (see Table 1).

But the analyses also reveal that if school-based evaluation is to be carried out as a democratic and investigative process within restricted resource frames, it is necessary to limit the size of the projects. The data indicates that schools need advice and experience in the necessity of delimiting what they are going to scrutinize (Indrebø 1994). This process takes time. It also takes time for the staff to get acquainted with the idea of school-based evaluation and to work on the problem of anxiety which is often aroused within such a project. Insufficient time and space for reflection and discussion counteract the central ideas behind school self-evaluation.

To create structures in which school-based evaluation can work, three important aspects have to be considered: to establish a timetable for the different phases of the process, to provide that the collaborative processes are organised in effective ways, and to sufficiently delimit the scope of the project(s). Practical considerations require that the evaluation be conducted within the framework of the school, in line with its constraints, without too much disruption to teaching and learning and with due regard to the needs of evaluation of the school. If evaluation is to facilitate school development and become part of an on-going exercise, it needs to be economical, that is, within the time scope in which teachers and administrators work.

There is also a need for organisational structures that will support collaboration among teachers. Our analysis reveals that this is an important way of ensuring that evaluative tasks are given sufficient priority and much needed status. The analysis of data shows that schools which already had good traditions of collaboration, seemed to find it easier to view evaluation as a collective task. A collaborative culture and structure appears to be an important precondition for creating an on-going evaluation process in schools, but we also observed that school self-evaluation can help to create a culture of collaboration (see Table 1)

Structure is important, but support and trust building is also a matter of concern. Even willing teachers will limit or drop their involvement if they do not feel supported during the process or they do not trust the people involved. This means that trust building, motivating and supporting teachers involvement must be ongoing. In part this can be done structurally. By making regular meeting points a structural part of the evaluation process and two-way communication both on the content of evaluation and on the collaborative process itself, different individuals have a number of possibilities for expressing their concerns.

Here the principal was a key person in the administration and allocation of resources supporting participation with appropriate time for teamwork and release time. Principals that gave high priority to collaborative work created time and structures to further such activities (Indrebø 1999). In many schools, there is a great deal of organisational change to be carried out before self-evaluation can become a collective venture. A certain degree of administrative pressure and

support seem to be essential during this process. Principals detached from the change process make any collaborative evaluation difficult.

5. Ad hoc or systematic evaluation?

Another problem concerns the use of 'projects'. The schools described their evaluation work as 'projects'. The advantage of such 'projects' is that they allowed more time to do the work, bringing together people with the same goal, support and status. By describing their work as 'project' however, there is a possibility that schools see their involvement as an ad-hoc activity rather than as a fully integrated act of school development. The danger is that self-evaluation thus becomes an event rather than a process, without linking their evaluation work to ongoing processes in the school. With the consequence; evaluation of the school takes place as long as the project is in progress, but quickly dies away as soon as the school starts on another 'project'.

The foregoing suggests the need for administrators to plan internal evaluation as an integral part of the organization's strategic plans and development work. Evaluation has to become part of the school's infrastructure of meetings and development plans. If neither the organizational structures nor the evaluation process support a more systematic use of internal evaluation, the danger is that data collection may be fragmented, the results are not used routinely and in the end the evaluation skills will decrease.

The more successful schools recognised the importance of strategies to help maintain and build on the evaluation process. They maintained the evaluation projects vitality and gave priority to evaluation for a certain period of time, learning the skills and the methods.

On the contrary, some schools, while they were doing their evaluation work, maintained their focus on all their other work commitments and other projects they were involved in. The evaluation activity had to compete with other work and development tasks. In the survey 54.2% of the respondents reported "competing demands from other projects" as a considerable problem to engaging in evaluation activities (see Table 2). This strategy increases the danger that the basis for a new undertaking is gradually weakened. Another implication we observed was 'development paralysis' (inertia), a reaction with obvious implications for the evaluation process.

6. Collaborative evaluation - a learning process or symbolic action?

An important idea behind school-based evaluation is that one prepares the ground for development by collecting and reflecting upon data which tells us something about what is going on, what results are achieved and how processes as well as results are experienced and perceived. The critical question is what happens after collecting the data. How do the schools use the new knowledge? What recommendation for specific actions is taken following the evaluation? The observation of schools indicates great differences in the way they were approaching these issues (Indrebo 1994)

The impact on schools of the self-evaluation process is difficult to measure. Placed in a broad analytical framework, the results can be grouped along two dimensions: the implicit and explicit

indicators. Implicit changes can be the awareness-raising effect and attitude changes of being involved in evaluation activities as a first step for action. The knowledge and attitudes the participants develop to self-evaluation during the process, whether positive or negative, have important influence on the possibility of creating a systematic and long-term evaluation process in the schools.

The more explicit and clear indicators of the successful nature of the evaluation process are, first, the completion of an evaluation of a development priority issue. Secondly, the schools in their reports identified implications for action which involved initiating changes at the classroom or school level. Thirdly, the evaluation findings were used and resulted in changes or modifications of the school's teaching and learning practice or organisational structures and routines.

Table 1 presents some of the most important changes reported by the teachers and principals after three years practicing school-based evaluation. These are changes that the respondents reported to be to the better. Very few of the respondents reported that any of the changes and modifications observed were looked upon as negative.

The teachers' perceptions of change reported in the survey, indicate that for them the personal experience and awareness-raising aspect of being engaged in the evaluation process, was a very important result of these activities. They reported increased awareness of factors relating to their own classroom teaching and practice (see Table 1).

They also reported a change concerning collegial relationships indicating that the evaluation process had resulted in new ways of collaboration among staff, more teacher involvement in school development work, higher level of focused debates concerning educational matters, more critical questions concerning teaching and learning were raised among staff. Half to one-third of the respondents also valued that the evaluation activities had increased student involvement in curriculum planning and evaluation and increased parents involvement in school matters (see Table 1).

This consequence both observed and reported in the survey indicate that the process of self-evaluation itself reported to start a process of critical reflection concerning what school, teaching and learning are all about, besides the analysis of their own, specific situation. Results in a broad sense are discussed and explained and a deeper understanding of what possibilities teachers have and do not have to change and improve the situation, is reported.

Other changes reported where school self-evaluation may have acted as a stimulus for change are changes in administrative routines and procedures like: new routines for collaboration and meetings among staff, improvement of action plans, modified program planning, new priorities for time and resources, more delegation of responsibilities and changes in timetables (Table 1).

The most significant problems practicing school-based evaluation reported in the survey, were besides the time and workload issues, lack of knowledge and skills concerning evaluation methods and practice, lack of experience with school development work, lack of supervision and assistance doing evaluation and lack of information during the initial stage of the process. Nearly 37% of the respondents reported that conflicting opinions concerning school-based evaluation among staff had been a considerable problem; 21 % answered that lack of interest among their

colleagues had been a considerable problem, while lack of interest from the school administration / school leaders seem to have been a minor problem (see Table 2).

For many schools, there seem to be a problem connected to the transition from evaluation via reflection to action and development. Energy is often put into the collection of information and the presentation of results, but then the process ends.

The schools that failed were often lacking the understanding of how to put the evaluation results into practice. The objectives of failed evaluation projects were not necessarily wrong. The analysis of such schools shows how various factors were missing or underdeveloped or the evaluation was implemented so poorly that sooner or later the evaluation activity became discredited and disregarded.

The way evaluation findings are treated in the schools provides a clear indicator as to its potential as a learning process. If the findings are given a status as partial evidence and hypothesis in a systematic and continuing process of evaluation and modification, they have more potential for learning and development than if they are given a finite status of objective facts, accepted, acted upon with little debate.

Central to the learning process, is that the school has to develop a strategy for evaluation that are well linked to their planning and management structure and development system. The evaluative procedures have to become a part of the school's infrastructure of meetings and routine. This implies an understanding of the evaluation as a whole endeavour, where information from different evaluations, is integrated in systematic and long-term plans for school development and change.

7. Summary and conclusions

The research data indicates that school self-evaluation seems to hold high potential for developing schools from within. After three years, the majority of schools have made progress, but the need for further development is still evident. The evidence from this study suggests that school self-evaluation potentially can contribute to development and change in schools increasing the teachers awareness of how they can improve their teaching through a process of collective and critical inquiry. This activity also seems to strengthen the norms which make for a more collaborative work environment. Furthermore it offers promise that professional knowledge can be articulated and evaluated by teachers themselves, although more work is needed to persuade the teachers to engage in more in-depth analysis and documentation of their work. At its best, school self-evaluation may extend the collective basis of understanding within the school and thereby provide better learning opportunities for children.

In nearly all the schools there had been some initial resistance to the idea of self-evaluation. This resistance was seldom expressed openly, but was manifest in many subtle ways during the process. But the observed tendency for teachers to adopt a more favourable attitude toward this kind of evaluation after having had some experience with evaluation activities, emerged as a fairly pervasive perception.

The analysis of the schools demonstrate that there is no one approach that will work in every setting. Evaluation occurs within a context. It is important to analyse one's own context since it is within this particular setting that the strategy and the process of evaluation have to be effective. The explicit integration of evaluation practices into the schools and individual staff, can provide a necessary self-monitoring system that keeps everything on the course of improvement. But there is also a need to build in the process of reflection and make implicit evaluation more explicit.

This work also means a change in the working habits of teachers; evaluation need to become a regular and routine part of their daily work. But what is more important, is the need for teachers to believe that there is a need for change and that using self-evaluation and systematic inquiry may help; that the extra work required, especially in getting started, will in the longer-term be worthwhile in making their job easier and more productive. Schools can help fostering working in teams, but it is important to realize that not everyone will be comfortable with this; especially those who have been accustomed to pursuing their roles unchallenged.

Evaluation when viewed within an improvement process, has the potential for becoming a significant tool for learning of individuals and school. How it informs the learning process and the extent to which it is able to do this task, may differentiate between what can be called effective and ineffective evaluation. But the process of evaluation can also be useful in itself, by forcing teachers to ask questions about their practices - Why are we doing this? Is this the best way? What else might be done? The biggest enemy in this process is lack of time to allow it to happen. In the longer run it is important to create flexibility in the teacher's schedule that will allow them to exercise these important functions.

We are beginning to build up an accumulated knowledge of practice of what works. Yet, still there are many unresolved issues. One is the relationship between school and local authorities. Our observation of schools trying to build internal evaluative capability, points to the crucial importance of relationship and support from the local authorities, which for most schools in our study were lacking. As Simons points out: "School self-evaluation is a system responsibility" and the relationship between the different partners in education must be formulated with greater potential for interaction between the partners (Simons 1992:14). Our data indicates that there is a continuum of outside support that is needed, with very little or none at one end to strong and sustained support and interventions at the other.

Another issue to be resolved is the need for documentation of school self-evaluation processes and products and the problem of conflicting purposes: accountability and professional development. In the current political climate it is important to document as far as possible what is going on in schools. This concerns the external - internal issue in evaluation. The challenge is to find a way this can be done without doing harm to the participants, putting the school in a defensive position. It should be recognized that evaluation is potentially very threatening to those whose practice is under scrutiny, so procedures need to be devised in order to protect the most vulnerable. And as Simons (1987) underpin: No genuine change will result if the confidence of practitioners is totally undermined.

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Table 1.
Perception of changes after 3 years practice with school-based evaluation. Surveydata.
Frequency distribution, percent, mean and Standard Deviation of some changes reported
by teachers and principals.

Administration / Structure:

	N	%	Mean	SD
Change in Collaboration/Meeting structures	129	53.3	1.6	.9
Improvement of Action Plans	129	52.9	1.6	.8
Modified Program Planning	101	41.9	1.8	.8
New priority of Time and Resources	86	35.7	1.9	.9
Timetable changes	83	33.7	1.8	.7
Delegation of responsibility	81	33.5	1.8	.8

School learning environment:

The form of collaboration	120	49.0	1.7	.7
More critical questions raised in collegium	114	47.5	1.6	.8
More teacher involvement in develop.work	101	41.4	1.8	.8
More discussions of classroom practice	87	35.7	1.8	.8
More discussions about educational quest.	69	28.4	1.8	.7

Other changes:

Teacher awareness of practice/teaching	159	64.9	1.4	.6
Parents possibility to get involved in school	108	45.0	1.6	.7
Students involvement in evaluation	109	45.0	1.6	.7
Students involvement in plans and curriculum	86	36.3	1.7	.7

(Total number of respondents = 267)

Table 2.

Reported problems encountered in the evaluation process. Surveydata. Percent answering that problems indicated are a Considerable problem (1) and a Minor problem (2)*.

Time /Workload:	1	2
	Considerable problem	Minor problem
Extensive workload	70.8 %	1.5 %
Time doing evaluation	69.7 %	4.8 %
Competing demands from other projects	54.2 %	6.4 %

Evaluation Knowledge:

General knowledge about school-based eval.	32.0 %	6.4 %
Evaluation methods	33.6 %	10.5 %
Lack of experience with school development	32.1 %	10.6 %
Lack of supervision /assistance	28.9 %	20.2 %
Lack of information during initial stage	24.7 %	23.8 %

School culture:

Conflicting opinions concerning school-based eval.	36.8 %	13.0 %
Lack of interest among colleagues	20.7 %	21.1 %
Lack of thrust / openness in the collegium	10.3 %	48.4 %
Lack of interest from the school administration	5.2 %	63.9 %

* Results on a scale ranged from 1.Considerable degree, 2. Somewhat degree and 3. Minor degree.

(Total number of respondents = 267)