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The importance of the concept of self-evaluation in the changing landscape of education policy

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ABSTRACT

Recent decades have witnessed a remarkable rise in the regulation of public services and servants, education being a case in point. External evaluation and inspection has been an important element of this trend. Increasingly, however as the limitations of external surveillance systems have become clear the concept of internal or self-evaluation has grown in importance. This paper explores the concept of self-evaluation in education and gives an account of some of the possibilities and problems associated with it. In particular it is argued that enabling individual schools and teachers to self-evaluate effectively is a complex task that will require help and support from the community of professional evaluators.

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Introduction: the rise of school and teacher evaluation

The growth in evaluation, inspection and appraisal in the public sphere has been driven by influential political ideologies characterised by their opponents as neo-liberalism and managerialism and by their proponents as new public management and much needed reform (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004). This policy direction has been characterised as low trust accountability by critics who have argued that it represents an attack on the autonomy and respect traditionally granted to professionals (O'Neill, 2002). These ideologies and an associated reform agenda have been systematically encouraged by governments, sections of the media and perhaps most influentially by trans-national agencies such as the OECD, the World Bank and the European Union (Martin, 2005). Key words and concepts have come to characterise this agenda. These include choice, accountability, transparency, value-for-money and decentralisation of responsibility for performance to individual professionals and institutions such as schools. These goals when achieved are to be policed through such processes as regulation, quality assurance, quality control, audit, benchmarking, evaluation and inspection (Bottery, 2004).

The impact of these policies on public services has been felt in most countries. In education this has been manifested in the prioritisation by many governments of two key goals namely school autonomy and school accountability. The former involves transferring primary responsibility for pupil achievement from central authority to individual schools and teachers. To achieve this it is required that schools and teachers will become more autonomous, taking greater responsibility for budgets, planning, self-evaluation and professional development. Somewhat paradoxically, however, to ensure accountability in the form of the maintenance and indeed constant improvement of standards, these same schools and teachers are to be the subject of sophisticated surveillance procedures including teacher-proof curricula, increased student testing, benchmarking, inspection and external evaluation. One result of these policies has been that virtually every education system in the developed world and indeed many others elsewhere have been busy creating or where they existed before reforming their school evaluation policies and procedures.

This trend is reinforced by what Spring (2004, p. 65) calls 'inter governmental and non-governmental organisations increasingly playing a role in establishing and enforcing global laws and regulating economic transactions'. Spring uses education as an example, pointing out that organisations such as the World Bank and the OECD are 'advocating specific educational ideologies'. These ideologies he defines as neo-liberalist and suggests that this means encouraging or coercing governments 'to rely on privatisation and the free market for the provision of educational services'. Spring goes on to describe how these ideologies are, paradoxically, leading to more rather than less state control of education in the form of evaluation, inspection, testing, standards and so on, since, as governments reduce their direct provision of public services, they 'focus their concern on the regulation of private markets'.

Several reasons are suggested by commentators for this policy direction. Among them are concerns for economic competitive-

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ness, perceived to be closely linked to educational attainment levels, and the related neo-liberal agenda of making schools more 'accountable and transparent' through the rigorous imposition of testing, competition, choice and evaluation (Thrupp & Willmot, 2003). A second factor in the European context is EU concern with standardising key educational indicators including teacher training, school evaluation and student attainment to enable the mutual recognition of awards and qualifications perceived as key to the freedom of movement of citizens within the Union (Boyle, 2002). Another driving force has been the OECD, increasingly concerned with defining and standardising competences for teacher training, evaluation and student attainment (OECD, 2005). Although both the EU and OECD are still quite a bit away from being able to define let alone legislate common standards of teacher training, school inspection and so on, there can be little doubt that experimental work to date is gradually paving the way in this direction (and in some areas, such as quality assurance and evaluation in higher education, has progressed quite far) (European Commission, 2003). However, in most areas of education progress on standardisation is slow, not only because of the diversity of practise in the various countries but also because it is becoming increasingly obvious that there are no simple solutions to the divisive issues raised by school and teacher evaluation. Nonetheless, the clamour for these policies driven both by the trans-national pressures described above and internally in countries by politicians, pressure groups and elements of the media, continues to grow in many European countries.

Defining school and teacher evaluation and self-evaluation

Before proceeding to explore the above terms, it is useful to note that in the reformed processes of public sector governance they in fact represent a subset of a broader concept, namely regulation. Kells (2002), an influential writer on regulation, describes it as having three components, namely quality assurance, quality assessment and quality control. She contends that the relationship between these processes is key in developing an acceptable yet effective regulatory environment. Kells defines evaluation as part of the process of quality assessment, and sees it as a largely internal function of organisations. Conversely, quality control in the form of, for example, student testing, dealing with complaints and fitness to practice, should be delivered, she argues, through an external, independent mechanism.

Turning to educational evaluation and self-evaluation, definitions of these terms by Scheerens (2002, pp. 37–39) are adopted as being particularly clear and comprehensive. Scheerens defines educational evaluation as 'judging the value of educational objects on the basis of systematic information gathering in order to support decision making and learning'. In defining school evaluation, Scheerens simply replaces 'educational objects' with 'schools'. He goes on to say that external school and teacher evaluation occurs when 'evaluators are external to the unit that is being evaluated'. In contrast, he concludes by defining school self-evaluation as 'the type of evaluation where the professionals that carry out the programme or core service of the organisation carry out the evaluation in their own organisation (this definition also applies where internal evaluators voluntarily make use of external advisors to provide them with support, advice, data gathering and so on)'.

The spectrum of school and teacher evaluation

Given the alleged ideological roots of the growth of teacher and school evaluation as described above one might expect that largely external and quantitative approaches would be increasingly predominant. In fact, the situation is much more complex and ambiguous. As the work of Nevo (2002) shows, there is, in most of Europe, a perhaps surprising emphasis on school and teacher autonomy and on self-regulation and internal evaluation as the best way forward. There are a number of reasons for this seemingly paradoxical situation.

Firstly, the rhetoric of positivism in social science research and the neo-liberal agenda of mistrust of public services and servants while very strong in much of the English speaking world (perhaps excluding Ireland and Scotland) and in the higher levels of the OECD and European Union has very little purchase in many European countries. There context and tradition are still influential in educational policy and teaching and teachers are still highly regarded. As Sugrue (2006) points out, the reductionist rhetoric of much current educational discourse in the English speaking world is of a totally different order to the deeper and broader concepts of education embedded in words such as pedagogic or bildung still influential in much of Europe.

Secondly, even where very vigorous external forms of school and teacher evaluation have developed, as in England, or where teacher evaluation is closely linked to student testing, as in much of the US, there is some evidence that the limitations and side effects (particularly in relation to teacher morale and retention) is resulting in a rethink (Hargreaves, 2006).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, additional complexity and ambiguity is added to school and teacher evaluation by the range of objectives which governments hope to achieve by undertaking it. These certainly include accountability and transparency but also increased local decision-making, the development of an evidence base for practice and as a platform for teacher professional development and school improvement. In an ideal world, school evaluation might be able to deliver on all of these goals simultaneously. In practice, however, what seems to be becoming clear is that these objectives are more competing than complementary. The greater emphasis an evaluation system places on teacher appraisal and accountability the less useful that system is likely to be for school improvement and professional development. This may be because, despite rhetoric to the contrary, teachers will probably fear such a system and may well resist, subvert or sullenly acquiesce as the case may be (for an interesting example of teachers cheating in a high stakes testing environment see Levitt & Dubner, 2005, Chapter 1).

For these and other reasons, in particular the high cost of external inspection systems, the direction of school and teacher evaluation in many education systems is undoubtedly towards internal, school-based self-evaluation. In recent work on school evaluation, John MacBeath states that 'self-evaluation is now seen as a matter of priority in most economically advanced countries of the world' (2003, p. 2). Given MacBeath's championing of the concept of self-evaluation over a number of decades, it might be possible to dismiss this statement as the analysis of a partisan voice in an increasingly passionate debate. However MacBeath's statement has been echoed by a range of commentators from all sides of the school evaluation struggle. At a European level, the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council on European Cooperation in Quality Evaluation in School Education* (2001) clearly argues that improvements in European school evaluation provision are dependent on the enhancement of schools' abilities to evaluate themselves. Specifically the Recommendation calls on Member States of the EU to 'encourage school self-evaluation as a method of creating learning and improving schools' (2001). This analysis is echoed in the recent highly influential OECD report on the future of the teaching profession, *Teachers Matter* (2005). This report sees the development of self-evaluation skills within the education system as being a critical component of the drive to improve educational provision in OECD member states.

A good example of this development is England. It is now quite clear that the evaluation system in Scotland so influenced by the 'schools must speak for themselves' philosophy of MacBeath (1999) is fast replacing the tough evaluation approach for so long synonymous with the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in England. Indeed the then British government minister with responsibility for the area, David Milliband, publicly celebrated the emergence of a new 'simplified school improvement focus, where every school uses robust self-evaluation to drive improvement' (Milliband, 2004, p. 3).

Official OFSTED documents now state that,

> intelligent accountability should be founded on the school's own views of how well it is serving its pupils and its priorities for improvement. This is what is meant by school self-evaluation. (OFSTED, 2004, p. 7).

OFSTED itself together with most Local Education Authorities in England has developed substantial research materials for schools to use in self-evaluation most notably the online 'Self-Evaluation Form' (SEF) (OFSTED, 2005). Other agencies such as the Centre for Curriculum Evaluation and Management (CEM) at the University of Durham which collect data to support school-based evaluation are thriving.

A second example of the rise of self-evaluation is provided by Ireland (McNamara & O'Hara, 2005). The new system of whole-school evaluation, entitled 'Looking at Our Schools' (LAOS) recently introduced is effectively predicated on the concept of schools evaluating themselves and producing 'streams of high quality data' on which to base judgements about quality and plans for improvement (Department of Education and Science (DES) Ireland),

> Ireland is adopting a model of quality assurance that emphasises school development planning through internal school-review and self-evaluation, with the support of external evaluation carried out by the Inspectorate (2003, p. 5).

The model which emerges is remarkably similar to the idea of MacBeath that the role of external evaluation and inspection is merely to ensure that internal systems of evaluation and self-review are implemented effectively – 'a model in which external evaluation focuses primarily on the school's own approach to self-evaluation' (MacBeath, 1999, p. 152).

Evidence-based practice?

The theory of LAOS (and indeed many other self-evaluation based schemes) is that schools and individual teachers will research some or all aspects of practice, make judgements about their performance based on the evidence and present their findings to the visiting inspectors every 5 years or so.

Research carried out by the present authors (McNamara & O'Hara, 2006) shows that this rhetoric is far from the reality and that by and large schools and teachers are in fact for the most part unable to undertake systematic self-evaluative research. It is also evident that the concept of ongoing self-evaluation has not taken hold in schools. Most of what counted as evidence in the schools researched consisted of professional judgments by staff and inspectors largely using existing paperwork such as school policies and plans. This is not to say that such judgments do not count as valuable evidence, only that they are but one of many possible sources of evidence (McNamara & O'Hara, 2004; Thomas & Pring, 2004). The lack of any guidelines in LAOS as to criteria or research methods that might inform judgments has led to what amounts to data-free evaluation in practice. Moreover it is clear that without such guidelines and the provision of training and research support for schools, the situation is not likely to change.

This is hardly surprising. Elliott (1995) notes, in examining why the teacher self-evaluation movement which was much in vogue in the late 1970s and the early 1980s eventually fell on stony ground, that neither training, experience or professional culture had allowed teachers to develop the discursive consciousness necessary to become reflexive, self-aware and thus able to self-evaluate. Teachers he argues are 'methodologically adrift' unsure of what questions to ask, what kinds of data to collect by what methods and how to analyse it when it had been collected. More recently the growing influence of Schon's (1983, 1988, 1995) concept of the reflective practitioner and the rise of action research has resulted in much greater emphasis in pre and in-service teacher education on methodological competence. However, we are still quite a bit away from the goal of such competence being widespread among teachers.

Supporting school and teacher self-evaluation

2004 saw the publication of a comprehensive comparative study of educational evaluation systems within the European Union (EU). Entitled *Evaluation of Schools providing Compulsory Education in Europe* and published by the European Commission under the auspices of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, the report provides a tabular analysis of the multifaceted 'approaches to the evaluation of schools providing compulsory education' within the EU (2004, p. 9).

Table 1 indicates that while very few EU countries have all of the supports possible nearly all claim to have some support for self-evaluation built into their systems of school evaluation. In

Table 1
Supporting measures available to internal evaluation of schools providing compulsory education 2001–2002

	Be fr/de	Be/nl	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK E/W/NI	UK SC	IS	LI	NO	BG	CZ	EE	CY	LV	LT	HU	MT	PL	RO	SI	SK
A	x	x		x		x		x			x		x		x	x	x		x						x	x	x	x	x	x	
B		x				x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x					x										
C		x		x				x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x								x	
D				x			x						x	x	x	x			x				x				x				
E		x								x			x		x	x									x			x			
F		x						x			x			x	x	x	x		x									x			
G								x			x		x	x	x	x			x		x										
H		x				x	x			x					x	x						x							x		x
I													x	x	x		x		x						x						
J		x				x									x																
K		x						x		x			x		x																

A: training; B: evaluation framework and models; C: resource person; D: indicators on the education system (including results); E: research and other publications on evaluation; F: guidelines and manuals; G: website; H: criteria, indicators and procedures used in external evaluation; I: exchange of experience/sharing good practice; J: EFQM good practice model; K: financial support (European Commission, 2004, p. 124).

terms of popularity, the provision of training and resource persons are the most popular interventions across the countries surveyed closely followed by the production of evaluation frameworks and indicators. In commenting on this hierarchy in popularity of support measures the report's writers suggest that, 'support through training personnel ...reflects a long-term investment' (2004, p. 126). This is an interesting insight as it suggests that the creation of genuinely self-evaluating schools is not something that can be done overnight. Rather, it implies a requirement to concentrate on enhancing the skills of the school communities seeking to engage in evaluation over an extended period of time. This process the report suggests will require governments, education departments and other support agencies to offer 'human, financial and material resources' (European Commission, 2004, p. 126) if it is to succeed.

It is clear therefore that a good deal of work on the process of encouraging self-evaluation has been undertaken and some of this is considered in more detail in the next section.

Supporting the self-evaluating teacher: models of best practice

Recent years have seen a range of resources produced at local, national and trans-national levels aimed at supporting schools and individual teachers who wish to engage in a process of self-evaluation. At the risk of over simplification, it is possible to categorise the support mechanisms under two broad headings:

1. External supports designed to facilitate the local collection of data by schools and teachers to enable them to meet the requirements of state mandated self-evaluation systems.
2. Supports designed to engage teachers with the theory and practice of school self-evaluation with a view to their developing their own contextually sensitive models of evaluation.

We will examine some recent initiatives under these broad headings.

External supports designed to facilitate the local collection of data for mandated self-evaluation systems

One of the more interesting recent developments in school evaluation has been the extent to which the English system which had largely concentrated on emphasising the centrality of 'objective' external evaluation has now begun to recognise the necessity of internal or self-evaluation in any comprehensive system for measuring quality in schools. However some authors, most notably MacBeath (2003, 2005), Simons (2002) and Scheerens (2002) would question whether centrally mandated self-evaluation should ever properly be identified with the developmental, improvement focused nature of genuine self-evaluation. Yet in England at a rhetorical level at least there is a strong commitment to,

> introducing a new inspection system which puts more onus on a school to demonstrate that it can diagnose where its strengths and weaknesses are and do something about improving and developing them.
>
> (OFSTED, 2005, p. 1).

At the centre of this change in focus is the promotion of the use of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF). OFSTED claim that using the SEF can enable inspectors to,

> focus inspections on your evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses which helps to make inspection sharper and more helpful while still providing evaluations against a national framework. At the same time, we can lighten the burden of inspection on you.
>
> (OFSTED, 2005, p. 1).

OFSTED encourages schools to use the SEF 'to develop their own process of self-evaluation and to fit the completion of the SEF into their core systems as best suits them' (OFSTED, 2004, p. 7). This is an interesting approach to mandated self-evaluation. The central authority does not provide a prescribed methodology for producing data on which judgments will be made but it does insist that all data produced must fit into a template designed externally to the schools. In addition, OFSTED is clear about the elements that make up an effective self-evaluation. According to its publications, there are six acid tests of effective self-evaluation:

- It asks the most important questions about pupils' learning, achievements and development.
- It uses a range of telling evidence to answer these questions.
- It benchmarks the school's and pupils' performance against the best comparable schools.
- It involves staff, pupils, parents and governors at all levels.
- It is integral to the school's central systems for assessing and developing pupils and for managing and developing staff.
- It leads to action.

(OFSTED, 2004, p. 7).

What this means in practice is that the SEF asks schools:

- To evaluate their progress against an inspection schedule
- To set out the main evidence on which this evaluation is based
- To identify strengths and weaknesses
- To explain the action the school is taking to remedy the weaknesses and develop the strengths

(OFSTED, 2005, p. 1).

The SEF requires contextual information on the school, covers all relevant aspects of the school's work and evaluates compliance with statutory requirements. It is envisaged that the SEF be filled out prior to the school inspection and be used as a basis for that inspection although it is not compulsory for schools to use it. This latter point is emphasised throughout but yet there is considerable pressure put on schools to view this as a critically important document.

Staffs are expected to rate the school on a four-point scale:

- Inadequate
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Outstanding

One of the innovative aspects of the SEF is the facility provided by OFSTED that allows schools to enter the evidence online and provides a range of reporting and editing functions that should, in theory at least, enable the school awaiting inspection to tailor their data to the requirements of the visiting team.

There is deep disagreement as to whether this is actually a form to encourage self-evaluation or whether it is simply a summary of existing data (MacBeath, 2003). Also, because of the central importance of the SEF to the overall judgement made about individual schools there are serious doubts as to whether schools will actually include all relevant information as is recommended in improvement focused self-evaluation (Hofman, Dukstra, & Adriaan Hofman, 2005) or whether positive information will be cherry picked and included in an attempt to present the school in the best

possible light. To a number of writers, MacBeath being the most vocal, this type of evaluation is more accurately described as 'self-inspection' rather than proper self-evaluation as it can be argued that it is 'simply doing the inspector's job for them'. This interpretation is further strengthened by the inspectorate's maintenance of their position as the ultimate arbiters of quality in the school. While they might 'take into account' the school's own analysis of its work, the final decision still rests with them. As MacBeath points out, 'there is no pretence that this is an equal partnership' (2006, p. 7).

External support for self-evaluation is also offered by the Centre for Curriculum Evaluation and Management (CEM) at the University of Durham but the underlying philosophy is quite different to that of OFSTED. In practice what the CEM centre offers is a methodology whereby data is collected from schools by an external body, analysed and fed back to the school. What makes the model interesting is that at all times the data remains the property of the education community from which it is drawn and they alone can decide what to do with it. At no stage does CEM offer the data to any external body and even goes so far as to forbid participating schools from using its information for comparative publicity purposes. In an attempt to summarise what CEM seeks to achieve, Tymms and Coe state that

> the CEM Centre's work seeks to improve the educational system within which it finds itself, rather than simply to research them from the outside... The CEM Centre has always sought to value evidence rather than authority, solve problems rather than blame, to generate high quality data and to promote randomized controlled trials and efficiency (2003, p. 639).

The essential philosophy of this type of support system is summed up by the paragraph above. It is

- Located within the community.
- Data led.
- Organisationally empowering.
- Solution not blame focused.

CEM uses the term 'distributed research' (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996) to encapsulate this philosophy. Tymms and Coe suggest that at the core of this concept is the

> idea that the recipients of the feedback (i.e. teachers in schools and colleges) are themselves active researchers in the process, analysing and interpreting the data, rather than simply passive recipients. The research is seen as a collaborative process (2003, p. 641).

The CEM model is close to the 'bottom up' approaches championed by MacBeath. However there is one major difference from the latter approach and that is that there is no real attempt to develop teachers as knowledge generators. Rather than giving them ownership of the process of data production, CEM seeks to give them ownership of a rich and detailed stream of data. This is a subtle though significant difference. Teachers now have the information on which to base the telling of their story to any external body however they have been provided with this by someone else. The impact of this on their engagement with the data produced is difficult to assess. A site visit conducted by the researchers certainly demonstrated clearly that management in the schools which chose to use any of the CEM instruments tended to be very pleased with the data it gave them. On the other hand, there was no sense of teachers taking charge of the data and making it their own in the way that many self-evaluation theorists would argue was essential for a genuinely engaged dialogue to take place.

Supports designed to engage teachers with the theory and practice of school self-evaluation with a view to their developing their own contextually sensitive models of evaluation

The 'School Self-Evaluation – Towards a European Dimension' project was an EU Comenius Programme intervention. The project involved the design and implementation of a training programme for school leaders who had an interest in or experience of self-evaluation. As such the project is of particular interest to those who are seeking to prepare networks of school leaders and teachers to begin the process of evaluating their own work.

One of the key initiatives of the 'Towards a European Dimension' project was the creation of a trans-national network of practitioners willing to share experiences relating to self-evaluation. The mechanism for achieving this was the design and delivery of an intensive 12 unit training programme on the principles and practical application of self-evaluation in a school setting. From the outset of the project, there was a clear focus on combining the practical with the theoretical with a view to producing something usable for school leaders from a range of educational sectors. Thus the project set itself the task of creating a course that would:

(a) Provide an overview of evaluation systems of schools.
(b) Encourage an exchange of experiences.
(c) Increase awareness of self-evaluation techniques.
(d) Train participants in the use of self-evaluation instruments.
(e) Design training materials and tools useful for future activities through open and distance learning (ODL).

(Barzano, 2002, p. 83).

The co-coordinators summarised the course inputs as follows:

- Context and principles influencing external evaluation and self-evaluation programmes in the European educational context.
- Origins of school self-evaluation, definitions, approaches, methods and implementation issues.
- The instruments used to gather information on school self-evaluation.
- The use of the information gathered.

(Barzano, 2002, p. 84).

The training programme was designed over a 2-year period and was eventually presented to 21 head teachers from twelve different European countries. It was subdivided into twelve workshop units which were presented over the course of a week (see Table 2).

As is the norm with Comenius projects, there was an extensive evaluation of the course which was used to assess the participants' opinions. In general there was a welcome for the course with particular attention being paid to,

- The quality of the organisation.
- The usefulness of the experience – particularly the mixture of theory and practice.
- The opportunities to share experiences with practitioners from other educational contexts.

(Barzano, 2002, pp. 94–95).

In particular participants highlighted a number of important aspects which allowed them to develop a genuinely interactive network. They included:

Table 2
Training programme devised by the School Self-Evaluation – Toward a European Dimension project

Unit 1: Introduction to course	Unit 2: Self-evaluation and external evaluation: an international perspective
Unit 3: School self-evaluation: origins, definitions, approaches, methods and implementation issues	Unit 4: Presentation of a range of instruments
Unit 5: Data analysis and introduction to group work	Unit 6: Use of information gathered
Unit 7: Presentation of key elements of Italian education system	Unit 8: Fieldwork in school visits
Unit 9: Preparation for final 'consortium'	Unit 10: Course evaluation
Unit 11: Final consortium	Unit 12: Poster session

- The development of a common language when dealing with self-evaluation, which allowed them to transcend the terminological difficulties which almost inevitably emerge whenever individuals working in different educational settings begin to communicate.
- The intercultural aspect of the interactions. Individuals were introduced to the realities of other approaches to self-evaluation which were influenced by specific national and regional contexts.
- The creation of personal relationships and the development of plans for future collaboration.
- The enormous benefit to be derived from belonging to a dynamic, engaged and international group of professionals with similar interests.

(Barzano, 2002, pp. 94–95).

There were of course some suggestions for improvement including:

- Greater terminological clarity when discussing evaluation in an international context.
- The need for a comprehensive framework when discussing self-evaluation in a trans-national setting.

The 'Towards a European Dimension' study is important for two reasons. Firstly, it successfully developed a way of enhancing the self-evaluation skills of key individuals in school communities. Secondly, it created a network capable of supporting, challenging, engaging and enabling the individual self-evaluator. In this particular study the network was trans-national and involved the development of relationships between educators that took them beyond the confines of their own contexts. It is possible to see how a similar dynamic might be created between individuals working within the same national but different sectoral contexts with much the same results. What is important in the creation of such networks is:

1. The development of a common language for explaining what actually happens in the course of a self-evaluation process.
2. The provision of a safe, encouraging space for the development of network relationships.
3. Clear, focused and useful inputs designed to stimulate discussion and future work.
4. The provision of an opportunity to engage in practical activities related to self-evaluation in real educational settings.

Several similar projects around developing self-evaluation capacity in groups of schools or in individual schools are reported in the literature (for example see Halnan, Darby, & Conole, 2006; Neil, McEwan, Carlisle, & Knipe, 2001) and recently MacBeath (2005) working on behalf of the National College of School Leadership in England has produced a range of materials and research instruments for schools and teachers involved in self-evaluation.

While the creation of the conditions outlined above is challenging it is not impossible and the success of this project influenced the design of a similar training initiative by the present authors described in a forthcoming book (McNamara & O'Hara, 2008). Nonetheless it seems to us that ideally some mix of the two broad approaches to supporting self-evaluation outlined above is the most likely to succeed. This is because in our experience with the best will in the world ongoing data collection and analysis is a huge and perhaps unrealistic burden on most schools and teachers and agencies like CEM can provide streams of usable data to schools without in our view compromising the value of self-evaluation.

Conclusion

Self-evaluation is now a mainstream concept and most education systems throughout Europe are to a greater or lesser extent scrambling to find ways of integrating it into the everyday lives of schools. The considerable number of initiatives and interventions being developed by governments and trans-national bodies gives an indication of the seriousness with which the development of self-evaluation capacity is now viewed. Virtually all methodologies proposed concentrate on either providing readymade frameworks for schools to use for data collection and analysis or enhancing the schools' ability to generate data relevant to its own operation. Some choose to do this by forcefully guiding schools down a particular pathway using detailed frameworks and forms whereas others seek to give schools the opportunities to develop their own frameworks through which to tell their stories. While the school is undoubtedly the main locus of investigation when it comes to self-evaluation, there is a recognition of the value of establishing networks of schools and indeed individual professionals who have an interest in augmenting their capacity to evaluate themselves. These networks are important in that they allow different perspectives to emerge and challenge preconceived notions that are embedded in all school communities. Finally, there appears to be a case for establishing agencies, ideally perhaps independent of the state, to lift some of the burden of data collection and analysis from individual schools and teachers.

What does the growth of self-evaluation as a concept and a practice mean for the professional evaluation community? In the case of the present authors it has meant a significant change in the focus of our work away from once-off or snapshot external evaluation and towards contributing to the development of cyclical processes of quality assurance within which systematic self-evaluation is embedded. A great deal more work needs to be done however. To date, in many countries elaborate self-evaluation frameworks have been developed, and the theory has been produced. What appears to be less developed is the capacity of schools or teachers to genuinely see the developmental possibilities and therefore be willing to engage in what is, in reality, time consuming and often repetitive work.

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