abstract


All Norwegian schools are required to undertake regular school-based evaluation in order to assess whether their organization and teaching contribute to achieving the objectives laid down in the national curriculum. This paper describes how six primary schools used their school evaluation findings, and examines the role of the school principal in determining the degree and type of use. Two schools did not use the findings, whereas the remaining four schools used them to make decisions about the direction of school improvement efforts. Only one school used the findings for the purpose of organizational and teacher learning. The authors argue that leadership priority and type of facilitation are important determinants of how evaluation findings are used.

Keywords: evaluation utilization · leadership · school development

Manuscript received: March 2010 (peer reviewed)

The role of leadership in evaluation utilization

Cases from Norwegian primary schools

ANNE BERIT EMSTAD & VIVIANE M.J. ROBINSON

School-based evaluation was first required in Norway by the 1997 Regulation of the Education Act (KUF, 1996–1997). The regulation specified that schools must assess the extent to which the organization, resourcing, and teaching programs of the school contribute to the achievement of the national curriculum objectives. The intent of school-based evaluation is to promote teachers’ understanding of the curriculum objectives and how to achieve them. Although there are many studies describing factors affecting the use of evaluation, just a few of them look specifically at the role of leadership. This study examines how evaluation reports were used in six primary schools and asks whether the actions of principals explain the different patterns of use.

Types of evaluation use

Evaluation use refers to the way in which an evaluation and information from the evaluation impacts the program that is being evaluated (Alkin & Taut, 2003, p. 1). There are many different types of use described in the evaluation literature: instrumental, conceptual, enlightenment, symbolic, process use and learning oriented.
Instrumental use occurs when the evaluation informs decisions about what to do next (Weiss, 1998).

Conceptual use is demonstrated when evaluation findings affect the way people think about an issue (Forss, Cracknell & Samset, 1994; Weiss, 1998). Weiss (1998) describes evaluation as serving enlightenment purposes when it provides knowledge about a field of study that goes beyond the program that is being evaluated.

Evaluation is used symbolically or for persuasion purposes when the purpose is to draw attention to the fact that the evaluation has been conducted, rather than to the content of the evaluation itself (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). An example of negative symbolic use is when an evaluator is hired to evaluate a program to legitimize a decision already made prior to the evaluation (Fleischer & Christie, 2009).

Patton (2003, p. 230) describes process use as:

the individual changes in thinking and behavior; and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process.

Process use is closely linked to the last category of use, learning oriented, which has been emphasized in the more recent writing on evaluation utilization (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). If the purpose of the evaluation is learning, it is important to provide opportunities for staff to engage in collaborative, dialogic, and reflective forms of evaluation practice, and not just to conduct evaluation as an information gathering activity (Preskill & Torres, 1998).

By participating in the evaluation, users learn evaluative and inquiry skills that they are able to use to develop an evaluation culture in their own organization (Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Forss et al., 1994; Rogers & Williams, 2006; Torres & Preskill, 2001; Weiss, 1998).

Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguished between single loop and double loop organizational learning. In a school evaluation context, single loop learning would involve using evaluation findings to learn a more effective or efficient way of achieving existing goals. Double loop learning would involve using evaluation findings to inquire more deeply into the assumptions and values that drive current practices.

**Determinants of evaluation use**

Many different factors affect the use of evaluation findings. As already discussed, one factor is the extent to which the users are involved in the evaluation process. The involvement of the intended primary users in aspects of the evaluation not only increases the probability that findings will be used but also strengthens the capacity of the users to inquire into, and improve, their own organization.

A second factor involves the match between the existing beliefs and practices of the users and the evaluation findings (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986). The closer the match between the two, the more likely the findings are to be used. This means that reports that challenge existing beliefs and assumptions are unlikely to be used unless they are mediated by school leaders or facilitators who can help users reflect on, rather than dismiss, the findings.

A third factor is the capacity to use the findings (Isaksen, 2008; Patton, 2003; Schildkamp & Visscher, 2009). Users may believe they do not have the ability to use the findings for the purpose of improvement (Isaksen, 2008). This may be linked to a fourth factor, as users’ attitudes towards the evaluation affect the use of findings (Shulha
& Cousins, 1997). Monsen (2002) reported that Norwegian teachers were sometimes suspicious of school-based evaluation because they believed its true purpose was external accountability rather than school development. This suspicion is also evident in findings from other international studies (see Rudd & Davies, 2000; Schildkamp & Visscher, 2009; Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005).

Monsen’s (2002) study also showed that Norwegian schools tended to view their evaluations as discrete projects completed with the help of external resources, rather than as an integral part of a school’s operation. Lander and Ekholm (2005) drew a similar conclusion, arguing that the results of evaluations were often used to make decisions about what to resource, rather than as an opportunity to inquire into and transform aspects of practice.

A fifth factor affecting the use of evaluation findings is management support (Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Schildkamp & Visscher, 2009). In the case of principals, such support includes the priority that the principal accords the evaluation, his or her capacity to build teachers’ commitment to and trust in the evaluation, and the resources they allocate to the process. Trust is more likely if principals can openly state their own views while listening carefully to the doubts and disagreements of their teachers (Monsen, 2002; Schildkamp, Vanhoof, Van Petegem & Visscher, 2011; Schildkamp & Visscher, 2009).

As well as providing support, principals may also need to explain why they believe improvement is necessary – it is the combination of support and challenge that is likely to motivate a teacher’s commitment to the evaluation (Indrebo, 1999; Monsen, 2002). Teacher motivation is also likely to be influenced by the extent to which the principal is engaged in the process and willing to learn from it (Indrebo, 2001; Schildkamp et al., 2011).

A Norwegian study conducted by Indrebo (1999) analyzed the principal’s role in school evaluation. She argued that the principal should facilitate learning from an evaluation by giving it priority, setting aside enough time for the process, and following up the findings. This is supported by other international studies, which report that school principals influence evaluation use by giving it attention, resources, and support (Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Johnson, Greenseid, Toal, King, Lawrenz & Volkov, 2009; Nilsen & Overland, 2009; Schildkamp & Visscher, 2009). The principal is the key person for allocation of resources. Time, opportunity to meet, and other resources must be available, so that teachers are given an opportunity to reflect on and use the results (Indrebo, 1999; Schildkamp et al., 2011; Nilsen & Overland, 2009).

### School-based evaluation in Norway

The current system of school evaluation in Norway has a dual purpose of serving both school accountability and school improvement. These dual purposes are expressed in the Education Act and its associated regulations. The Education Act also requires the municipal education authority to ensure that the evaluations are completed.

The introduction of school-based evaluation began in the 1970s and was intended to encourage teachers and leaders to evaluate their own practice and strengthen their professionalism (NOU, 1978, p. 10). In 1987, this was formalized by the requirement in the national curriculum for every school to evaluate its work. In the late 1980s a stronger emphasis on schools’ accountability to government was recommended by an OECD report. The report recommended the introduction of a national testing program that would provide the government with infor-
mation about student achievement across the nation (OECD, 1988/1989).

During the next few years there was considerable discussion about the relative emphasis to be given to school accountability through a national testing system, and the role of school-based evaluation. Advocates of national testing claimed that it would increase student learning and achievement, whereas advocates of school-based evaluation argued that increased professionalism among teachers would improve the learning environment. After several years of discussion, in 2003 a comprehensive web-based publicly available digital resource called «Skoleporten» was introduced. The resource provides municipalities, government, and the public at large with information about the organization and resourcing of every school in Norway, along with information on students’ backgrounds and achievements. The intention was that the information «Skoleporten» provided would be a resource in school-based evaluation (Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 2003; Kyrkje-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 1996, 1999).

Just five years after the introduction of Skoleporten, the White paper nr 31 claimed that many schools were not using Skoleporten in their school evaluation (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007). This claim led to the 2008 amendment to the Education Act requiring each municipality to report annually on student achievement, student drop out, and the learning environment of every school in their area. These changes signalled increased emphasis on the accountability of schools and municipalities to the government.

The increased emphasis on schools’ external accountability was only one of the strategies used to address concerns about the achievement level of Norwegian students on international tests. A second strategy to raise achievement was the introduction in 2008 of a comprehensive reform program called Knowledge Promotion. The reform program comprised a new curriculum, new subjects, and a focus on basic skills and learning outcomes. Along with the increased accountability on outcomes, there was more freedom for schools to choose the methods, materials, and types of classroom organization that would achieve these outcomes.

The Knowledge Promotion reform was accompanied by an invitation for schools to apply for funding to support their school improvement projects. Funding was to pay for external expertise to assist with the improvement projects and for release of teachers or leaders to lead projects within their school. A subsequent national report on the impact of this funding showed that while it strengthened schools’ abilities to complete the steps involved in their projects, it did little to develop their abilities to analyze and improve their practices (Blossing, Hagen, Nyen & Söderström, 2010).

Methods

The study involves a sample of six Norwegian primary schools which had implemented a formative school evaluation model. Formative evaluation is:

designed, done, and intended to support the process of improvement, and normally commissioned or done by, and delivered to, someone who can make improvements. (Scriven, 1991, p. 20)

Two of the six schools were located through a school network that kept track of schools’ involvement in evaluation. Both primary schools that had been evaluated in autumn 2008 agreed to participate in the study. The four other schools in the sample were located through the Norwegian directorate of education (Udir). They had received national
funding from Udir to complete their development projects. Information was provided by Udir to help identify primary schools who had implemented an evaluation as a part of those projects. None of the six schools knew they were going to participate in this study at the time they completed their evaluation. Data collection began six months after the evaluation was completed for all of the six schools.

Data sources
The primary source of data in this study is in-depth interviews. A total of six principals, one assistant principal, and 18 teachers were interviewed (some of the teachers were deputy principals). The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. All participants were asked how the evaluation was used, about their teaching practices after the evaluation, and about the role of the principal in the evaluation process. The evaluation reports and other documents (e.g. project plans, reflection notes, and organizational analyses) were also analyzed.

The data were gathered by the first author during a three to five day visit to each school. A staff meeting was observed in each of the schools, and informal talks in the staff room also contributed to the data collection. The interviews were transcribed and analysis consisted of identifying evidence about different kinds of evaluation use, and the role of the principal in the evaluation and its follow up.

School projects and evaluations
The schools in the sample used two different strategies for meeting the governmental requirements of regular school-based evaluation. Four of the six schools (School 1, School 2, School 3 and School 6) used an external evaluation method which involved hiring external evaluators who typically were experienced teachers and principals. Two schools (School 4 and School 5) used a self-evaluation strategy in which their self-evaluation was supported by an assessment tool called KIS (Quality Evaluation in School).

The external evaluation model was developed by a network of schools in 2002. Since then, several new networks have been created and the approach has spread to most parts of Norway, possibly because this model is recommended by Udir. Under this model, the school decides what it wants to evaluate, and then the external evaluators set relevant criteria for judging good practice in the chosen area. Once the criteria are approved by the school, the evaluators gather data by interviewing teachers, parents, and students. In addition, evaluators conduct observations, administer questionnaires, and consult the national quality system.

Based on the data, the external evaluators write a report about the school, describing areas of good practice and practice that needs to be improved. The process lasts for four days and on the last day the external evaluators present an evaluation report to the school, parent representatives, and the school owner. After six months, the school reports to the school owner on how it has responded to the evaluation and addressed concerns.

The internal evaluation model used by School 4 and School 5 was supported by a self-evaluation tool (KIS) that involves teachers setting goals about what they expect the students to achieve in a subject over a given period of time. School teams co-operate on planning their teaching, and when the specified time is over they evaluate their teaching and student achievement using feedback from the students. The next step is to present and reflect on the results at both team and school-wide levels. The aim of the reflection is to help teachers understand and improve their teaching. Based on the reflection, schools then make an improvement.
plan, which is discussed with the municipal education department.

Findings

The findings are discussed in two sections. In the first, we report the extent to which the six schools used the evaluation, and in the second we explain the different patterns of use.

To what extent did the schools use the evaluation?

The six schools were grouped into three categories based on their evaluation use: Group A includes the schools that did not use the evaluation findings, Group B consists of the schools that used the evaluation to make decisions about future directions, and Group C includes the one school that used the evaluation for learning purposes.

Group A: Schools that did not use the evaluation findings

This category includes the two schools (School 5 and School 6) that did not use the evaluation findings. Both of these schools involved scholars in the evaluation process and received national funding to support their development project. In School 5 the evaluation report was presented at a staff meeting, and school staff discussed the extent to which they agreed with the results. The teachers believed that the evaluation confirmed their current way of working. Beyond this discussion, no further action was taken. As one teacher from School 5 commented: «We were given a presentation by the evaluators and since then I can’t remember ever having seen it again.»

Another teacher from School 5 wondered why the evaluation had been requested, given that the findings of the report were not used:

If this evaluation were to have any value and we had to make some changes, then these changes should have been followed up, discussed, and monitored to see how far we had come – but it’s not like that.

In School 5 the principal held meetings about the evaluation findings with each of the teacher teams but did not write any reports or summaries of the discussions. The teams discussed examples of good practice and practice that needed to be improved. One teacher commented that the discussion was quite limited: «Then we sat down to talk about it but not very much. But we did talk a bit about it.»

Two of the three teachers interviewed in School 5 expressed a negative attitude towards the evaluation. One teacher referred very negatively to all the work invested in planning and implementing the evaluation: «I feel sick when I hear about it, I don’t want to do this again.»

Group B: Schools that used the evaluation to make decisions

The three schools in this group (School 1 – School 3) used the evaluation findings to make decisions about the focus of their projects. Decisions were made without inquiry into the reasons for the evaluation findings. In this sense, the process was neither analytic nor reflective, as was the case for the school in group C. In each school a staff meeting was devoted to the presentation of the report, and just a few minutes were left for the teachers to comment on the report outcomes. The teachers all said they were pleased with the report because they recognized it as an accurate reflection of their school. As one teacher from School 5 stated, the evaluation outcomes provided no surprises:
I think the report was fine; it was good to get this kind of evaluation. It was a confirmation of the work we are doing and presented no surprises.

Following the staff meeting, the process differed across the three schools. In School 1 and School 2, another 90-minute staff meeting was held to discuss the results and the implications for the focus of their projects. Teachers shared their thoughts about the report and considered whether they should address issues where improvements could be made. Teachers then considered the implications in groups and provided feedback to the leadership group about their preferred focus. The leadership groups accepted their recommendations and incorporated them in a project plan. The teachers commented that it was important for them to be involved in this process. For example, one teacher from School 1 said:

It’s important that we are involved because it must be our project, the whole school’s project; when we join the process we have thought it through, if this is right for us and if this is important for the work we do in the classroom.

In contrast, the teachers at School 3 did not participate in this process. The principal analyzed the evaluation report and made decisions about what to implement in the project plan. Teachers reported that they were not consulted in this process. For example, one teacher from School 4 said:

To look back at your own work and discuss it, both I and the team learned a lot: what we want to continue doing and what we want to do differently. I have become more reflective about teaching and how the pupils experience it.

Explaining the different patterns of use

In this section we propose explanations for the different patterns of use. There are many variables that are common to schools that used and did not use the results of the evaluation. Firstly, there is the amount of funding received or the fact that the evaluation was part of a project. This did not affect evaluation use, as there was one school that received funding that did not use the evaluation findings, and one school without funding that used the results of the evaluation. Two of the schools even had the same consultant helping them, but only one used the evaluation findings.
A second variable is the different evaluation models: self-evaluation and external evaluation. Even though user involvement in evaluation is important (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986), whether the evaluation was conducted by schools themselves or by external consultants did not seem to explain evaluation use.

Another factor that determines evaluation use is the user’s attitudes towards the actual evaluation findings (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986). In all cases where the findings were used, the teachers expressed satisfaction with the reports. There was some evidence of a negative attitude towards the evaluation in one school that did not use the evaluation findings, but not in the second.

One variable that does seem to differ between schools is the type of leadership. In the remainder of this section we examine how leadership influenced evaluation use.

**The principal’s role in prioritizing the evaluation use**

The difference between the schools that did (School 1 – School 4) and did not (School 5 – School 6) use the evaluation findings appeared to be associated with the priority the principal gave to their use. In School 6, the principal made the decision not to use the evaluation findings at the time, as he and his leadership group wanted to prioritize their literacy project and not make any changes due to the project plan. The principal explained: «We can’t just let go of that to start with something else.»

The situation in School 5 was slightly different. The principal was described by teachers as engaged and energetic, but rather vague about the school’s direction and priorities. This impression was confirmed by an organizational analysis conducted by the external competence centre assisting the school with its project. As a consequence of this vagueness, teachers in this school tended to decide their own priorities. One of the teachers (School 5) said that teachers had chosen not to do the evaluation and had prioritized other parts of the project. He declared:

> No one has done it all. And that’s an important conclusion for me, that maybe we have taken on too much work, or – that is what I have ascertained.

Although the principal expressed satisfaction with the evaluation process, he did not exercise the leadership that was needed to coordinate any follow up and improvement activities (cf. Lillejord, 2006; Nilsen & Overland, 2009). In short, the low priority given to the evaluation findings in School 5 was more a reflection of a principal who did not establish any strong school-wide priorities, than of a principal who rejected the usefulness of the evaluation itself. In contrast, the principals of School 1 – School 4 prioritized the work by creating times for their teachers to meet and discuss the result of the evaluation.

**The principal’s role in establishing a purpose for evaluation use**

In those schools that did use the evaluation, the principals exercised considerable influence over how the findings were used. The principals in School 1 – School 3 used the evaluation findings to win teachers’ commitment to specific improvement activities. In contrast, the Principal of School 4 used the findings to lead an organizational learning process in which teachers reflected together about the relationship between student achievement results and the quality of teaching and assessment. The following discussion illustrates the difference between these two purposes.

The principals in School 1 and School 3 explained that they had made up their minds about what the focus of their schools’ projects should be, and they had used the re-
ports to argue for that focus. The principal in School 1 did this by creating a summary of the evaluation report and letting the teachers choose two out of four of her suggestions. A teacher from School 1 confirmed this process:

We got a list from the principal with some questions about the evaluation and about assessment. This made it very concrete.

The principal explained:

I wanted their professional opinion. It is very important for the process that they participate in deciding what is going to happen and that it is not just me who decides. So to involve them is necessary. But I set the direction.

Researcher: Can you explain why?
Principal: Because then they can keep much better focused, and I believe that I am important concerning the development work that is to happen in this school. I have used a lot of the time on developing a common vision as well. It’s important that we have essential discussions about what this school shall stand for and represent.

The same principal stated that she liked to ensure that the teachers focused on the principal’s desired direction for the project. She explained:

I try to start the meeting by saying something about what we shall achieve and then I give them the subjects they are to discuss and I ask for a summation so that we have the opportunity to sum it all up in the end. This is because I want to give them the opportunity to think in the direction that I and the leadership group wants. So they are given some tips and ideas as a foundation for their discussion.

In contrast, the principal of School 3 didn’t involve the teachers in the decision-making process. When asked to explain why, he said:

I sat down and studied the report in peace by myself. I was looking for what could fit the project. And I found it. The first thing I would hold on to was that I had to be more clear as a leader… …Earlier we had two projects and the teachers tended to drop out, not taking it seriously. I said to myself that is not going to happen this time. Then I became very clear, I went through our plans, told the teachers about their responsibility toward the project and my expectations. Some were a little offended because they were used to doing what suited them, but this time they were not allowed to do that.

All the principals in Group B used the evaluation report to reinforce the school project and to make decisions that aligned with their own goals. The principal in School 2 said it straight out:

The most important thing is to use the points made in the report as a foundation for the work we do today. As I did at the staff meeting last Tuesday, I pointed at the report to reinforce why we are doing this. Yes – it is because we have said it ourselves, this is what we need to improve. This is what I think is the most important issue of this report, that you can use the statements in the report to underpin the work we do in our development project.

The work with the project was followed up by setting clear deadlines, and by confronting the teachers if the work was not done. The principal explained why:

It may be stressful with all the deadlines, and we can see that in [the] case of presentation and progress in the projects that we have been – knock on wood – very clear; because when it’s said in the plan where we are going to be at a certain date, then we have to prove that we are there. We have been very strict about this and the goal is for the teachers to see that they profit from it as well. If practice is to become common,
they all have to contribute. And their contribution matters.

The deputy principal of School 2 stated that they had learned from their prior experience of the need for structure and close follow-up. The school used to operate as if there were 30 principals in the school and there was no need for the leadership team to coordinate teachers’ work:

We have worked and ignored negative behaviour. We have been strategic and patient. I think we have taken too much time, but I understood that we had to take time in order to get the staff with us. This change has led to some fuss; some didn’t accept that we no longer had a show of hands. But it’s still a democratic way of reaching a decision.

The principal of School 4 (Group C) was clear that the purpose of the evaluation was to promote learning for the students, the teachers, and the school. As described earlier, the principal asked for individual and team reflections before meeting with the staff. Over previous years the school had not achieved the results they hoped for in national and local testing. The principal thought that by focusing on assessments, they could increase students’ achievements:

I want the students to get feedback in their learning process, in every subject, a feedback that is clear and understandable about what they [are] going to learn. Because I believe this will motivate them and the teaching can be adjusted to each student.

The principal’s role in promoting learning from the evaluation

The purpose that principals envisaged for the evaluation was linked to the type of learning they fostered. When principals used the evaluation for the sole purpose of making decisions about what to improve (Group B schools) the teacher learning from the evaluation was much more superficial than when they used it to reflect on why improvement was necessary, and on the causes of unsatisfactory teaching practice and student learning (Group C). This quote from the principal of School 1 illustrates the limited reflection involved in making decisions about the focus of improvement:

So I presented the essence of the evaluation report for the teachers and I viewed four issues I believed we had a potential to develop in our school and asked them to prioritize two. They chose the student conversation and feed forward.

The evaluation report was used to make an informed decision about issues to emphasize in the project, without any deeper reflection on the nature and causes of the weaknesses that had been pointed out in the reports.

Similarly, in School 3 the evaluation report questioned the lack of learning goals and limited follow up of test results. This school intended to focus on preventing reading and writing difficulties among their students. The principal, who wanted the school to become a national model of literacy instruction, decided to follow up test results personally by meeting with each teacher to discuss the results and what to do about them. He decided not to address the lack of learning goals. As a consequence, there was no discussion as to why teachers did not use learning goals, or if they agreed that such goals could lead to improvement.

In contrast, the principal of School 4 (Group C) emphasized the learning process at all levels. While other schools asked what needed to improve, the staff in this school discussed why and how to improve. By critically examining their own practice as a starting point for debate and change, they went from a culture asking only questions...
about how to fix things to a culture that, in addition, reflected on the causes of their current problematic practices. These extracts from the reflection notes and interviews illustrate this deeper level of inquiry about what they still need to learn in order to improve their procedures for setting student learning goals:

We have documentation from the students about what they have achieved. We still need to make the goals more concrete and we need to improve our routines for students’ conversations. It was hard to tell if the students had reached their goal. It also seems that they had too many goals, and that they hadn’t identified them before the second half of the period.

We think we should introduce the learning goals much earlier, and not too many goals. We need help to improve our setting of clear goals and to be clearer about how students will know if they reached their goals. The principal ensured the evaluation was being used to improve the practice of the entire organization.

Discussion

This article has described how six Norwegian primary schools used the findings of their mandated school-based evaluations. Three patterns of evaluation use were seen among the schools: no use of findings, using findings for decision-making, and using findings for deeper learning and reflection. The different patterns of use could not be attributed to the evaluation process (external or self-evaluation) or to the presence of external funding.

The most plausible explanation for the differences lies in the role of the principal and leadership team. In schools where there was no use, the principal did not make the evaluation a priority, did not establish a clear focus for the evaluation, and failed to follow-up. In those schools where the findings were used for either decision-making or learning, the principal and leadership team were more active in these respects.

In their research, Cousins and Leithwood (1986) did not find any differences between schools that used evaluation findings for decision making and for learning. In this study, by contrast, the difference between the two uses could be attributed to a principal in School 5 who structured a reflection process that was undertaken at the individual, team, and school levels, and was designed to prompt all staff to think deeply about the findings.

In order to facilitate learning, the principal made sure the teachers were involved and guided in a reflective learning process (cf. Lillejord, 2006; Nilsen & Overland, 2009; Preskill & Torres, 1998). The process also enabled the principal to get an overview of opinions from across the school by reading the teachers’ reflections and by joining in the discussion. This leader used the evaluation as an opportunity to join his staff in a process of professional learning and development – a leadership practice that has been shown to be strongly linked to gains in student learning and achievement (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008).

In contrast to School 5, schools in Group B used the findings to make a decision about what to do next. Whether the decision was made collaboratively with teachers or by the leadership team, the focus was on doing things that fitted existing practice and priorities, rather than on critically examining current practice. In the language of Argyris and Schön (1978), the evaluation was used for single loop rather than double loop learning.

There was no evidence in this study of a conflict between the external accountability and improvement purposes of the school evaluation process. Rather, the school leadership had considerable discretion to shape
the evaluation to suit their own purposes and priorities. Given such discretion, it may be important for Norwegian policy makers and professional associations to consider how to build the capacity and desire of school leaders to use the evaluation process as a more robust and focused opportunity to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.

Although great caution must be exercised in generalizing from such a small sample of Norwegian schools, these findings confirm earlier studies about the utilization of mandated school evaluation findings (Indrebø, 1999, 2001; Lander & Ekholm, 2005; Monsen, 2002). The evidence suggests that despite the considerable financial and personnel resources associated with these evaluations, the findings are generating limited professional reflection and school improvement.

**Literature**


drecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publisher.