

SELF-EVALUATION A MEANS OF RAISING ACHIEVEMENT / IMPOSSIBLE TO IMPLEMENT?

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ABSTRACT

This paper stems from two small scale studies into the use of self-evaluation by Headteachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning and through this, raise levels of achievement. One explores how four Headteachers in England, leading challenging schools, view and use self-evaluation. The second linked study explores the policies regarding self-evaluation put in place by the Government post 1994, in South Africa and the issues that have emerged in seeking to implement the policy.

In conclusion a number of issues and questions emerge, including. How do school leaders employ self-evaluation to meet their needs? Can the use of self-evaluation lead to a change in leadership style? Can the use of self-evaluation involve all staff in the schools' planning process? What challenges emerge when attempting to meet the needs of globalisation by introducing 'Western practise'? Finally the role of Headteachers and the challenges they face in trying to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

Key Words

Self-evaluation; teaching and learning; leadership; school

INTRODUCTION

This paper refers to two small scale empirical studies on school self-evaluation one in England, the second, in South Africa. The studies emerged from the researcher's background as a Headteacher and current Educational Consultant in England, working with schools in South Africa. The approach taken to the research reflects the researcher's ontological understanding that knowledge of the world comes from many perspectives, each providing an insight into the whole which we seek to know. It recognises that meaning is negotiated, with knowledge coming from attempts to interpret the world from experiences, by both the researcher and others. From this comes the epistemological

framework, interpretive (Pole and Lampard, 2002; Scott and Usher, 1999).

The research seeks to explore the origins of self-evaluation in schools, its use and impact. Specifically it seeks to address three questions

- What are the origins of self-evaluation in schools and how is it used by school leaders?
- Has the use of self-evaluation impacted on the leadership style of Headteachers?
- What have been the challenges or barriers to its use?

CONTEXT

From a review of literature regarding the development of self-evaluation in England it became clear that it did not develop in a linear manner, but emerged and grew from a number of different strands. But underlying its development is the growth of globalisation. The curriculum, post 2nd World War, has been seen as the responsibility of professionals with the state providing the finance for education (Bottery, 2000). This began to change in the 1960's with the growth of globalisation and multi nationals, impacting across the world. Globalisation driven by trade, must impact on education as the 'economic imperative dominates thinking of the state so this dominating the shaping of educational policies. So governments focused on education meeting the economic and technical needs of the country (Bottery, 2000; Stoll and Fink, 1996) evaluating what was happening in schools to seek further improvement. Early self-evaluation stemmed from the understanding of the teacher as 'the professional', with evaluation valued for its contribution to professional growth (MacBeath, 1999). But the significance of globalisation on education was brought to the fore in Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College 1976 questioning the performance of schools to meet the needs of society and calling for greater accountability (Clift et al, 1987) followed by the extension of pupil testing and the inspection of schools by the State. This led LEA's and schools to develop self-evaluation as a means of answering the government's demands.

The late 1970's and 1980's saw a range of central initiatives introduced as government attempted to co-ordinate and control the education process, both curricular and the organisation and management of schools (Bottery, 2000) with an increasing central emphasis on monitoring and inspecting work in schools. An increased emphasis was placed on school leader development and their use of self-evaluation to innovate and

renew the school (Hopkins, 2001) seen as managerialism, designed to leave policy direction to the centre with implementation left to the schools. In schools self-evaluation continued to grow to confirm the implementation of change or to identify the specific progress of pupils.

The 1990's saw some recognition by the state that the 'top down' linear approach to change did not always work as the lack of teacher commitment to government initiated reforms impacted on implementation (Hopkins & Wideen, 1984; Stoll and Fink, 1996). In 1995 the National Union of Teachers (NUT) commissioned a study of self-evaluation resulting in the publication of 'Schools Speak for Themselves' which provided a school friendly but robust framework of school self-evaluation (MacBeath, 1999). But the range and number of 'top down' changes introduced by the state did not reduce and included: further developments in state inspection; control over the curriculum; establishing a National College for School Leaders (NCSL) with the emphasis on training leaders.

1997 saw a change in government to one committed to support and promote school self-evaluation. This was followed by a revised framework of inspecting schools by the State in 1999 with school self-evaluation at the heart of the process (DfES 2004). This included guidance for schools on using the framework for school self-evaluation, not just for inspection purposes. But the process retained its focus on reviewing pupil outcomes in relation to national results as a means of judging schools.

In South Africa a detailed search of the literature identified a handful of references to self-evaluation. A review of the documentation held in a school revealed that prior to 1994 there was no requirement or expectation of schools to undertake self-evaluation. Education was rule driven, hierarchical with top down management (Thurlow, 2003). Post 1994 the first Government move was to introduce the Developmental Appraisal for Education Scheme (DAS) in 1998, intended to involve all educators in evaluating their practice, followed by Whole School Evaluation (WSE) introduced in 2001 for full implementation in 2003. Its intention was to enable self-evaluation of the whole school and the impact of management, to be undertaken by the school, monitored by the Government, leading to the identification of issues requiring further development.

Both systems were unsuccessful, with WSE failing because of a lack of negotiation

between the Government and unions before its introduction (Ngcobo and Ngwenya, 2005). As a result the government introduced Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) combining to a degree DAS and WSE involving individual teachers in self-evaluation of classroom practice and whole school self-evaluation of overall performance, with the individual's evaluation linked to teachers' incentive allowances. IQMS is under review by the government indicating that again the process has not been effective.

METHODOLOGY

With both researches located within the interpretive perspective they operated within a bounded context including the number of educators involved. The small nature of the samples means that insight gained, though relevant, for understanding the experiences of the specific headteachers and educators involved is not necessarily representative and does not provide findings that are transferable. The choices were made to enable the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon from individuals' perspectives, attempting to interpret what constitutes reality for participants and the researcher (Scott and Morrison, 2006; Scott and Usher, 1999).

In applying an interpretive framework qualitative research was undertaken. Interviews were used to gather data as they provided an opportunity to not only to address the initial questions raised, but also to address further questions that might emerge. Four Headteachers were interviewed in England, each from Comprehensive schools in the London area, facing challenging circumstances. In South Africa one Headteacher and two lecturers from the University of the Region were interviewed, identified by the Dean of the Faculty of Education and their willingness to talk to the researcher. The Headteachers chosen came from the group that the researcher currently works with as they were seen to be most likely to provide the data for the specific purpose of the identified study, so it can be seen to be a purposive sample. Considering the small number of participants it was not possible to identify a sample on the basis of probability sampling therefore non-probability sampling was used (Denscombe, 1998).

FINDINGS

The origins and development of self-evaluation

In England the Headteachers saw that self-evaluation in some form became a reality of practice through the intervention of LEAs, reflecting the growing impact of globalisation

and accountability of schools. Ultimately the Headteachers saw the catalyst for the use of school self-evaluation formally, was the introduction of formal inspections and examination league tables.

Self-evaluation was initially used by the Headteachers to understand the situation in their school, providing information regarding the schools' performance and supporting identification of ways to improve. All saw that the major focus was on quality of teaching and learning, whilst acknowledging that improvements here would lead to improving examination results. The Headteachers used self-evaluation as a tool to account for and raise levels of achievement well before the introduction of 'Schools must Speak for Themselves'.

The Headteachers growing accountability, and the need of schools to prove their success was a key for using self-evaluation. Inspection perceptions could only be challenged when clear evidence was present to show how the school was meeting the challenges it faced, ensuring pupils were making real progress. So self-evaluation became normal practice and was supported by the introduction of Performance Management.

Headteachers saw that the development of self-evaluation resulted in what was identified by one 'as a major cultural shift', initially involving the headteacher and to some degree the senior team, but developing to a point where it was the means of ensuring that all staff had a voice within the school. For some this included the wider community of the school including pupils, parents and governors. It was the inclusion of other staff that was seen as an important issue, informing firstly whole school self-evaluation and ultimately the Improvement Plan the essential end point of self-evaluation. There was a strong focus on using self-evaluation, both formal and informal to identify where people needed support, then putting the support in place to enable the staff to be effective. Self-evaluation had developed to meet specific needs in their schools, and changed over time to meet their situation.

The impact of self-evaluation on Leadership styles

The headteachers acknowledged that their style of leadership had changed with the growing use of self-evaluation. One change was the stepping back from the Headteacher 'doing' to a style where individuals / team leaders were taking the responsibility with the

heads trusting and monitoring. This change moved the style of leadership to one of collegiality or distributed leadership. Part of the reason for the change was seen to be the growth of accountability in schools leading to a focus on teams and individuals, which in turn led to the middle managers accepting responsibility for the success of their team.

Underpinning this distributed, collegial style was a clear understanding that Headteachers held ultimate responsibility. They would take responsibility if things went wrong and because of this they would take action where necessary. The headteachers recognised that one key aspect of their leadership was modelling how they wanted people to behave in whatever role they held. They saw themselves as setting the standard within which people worked. Once the standard was set and recognised, they began to step back enabling others in the school to lead on a number of issues. Self-evaluation was used as a means of overseeing that the responsibilities held by others were being met. In this way Headteachers were able to 'grow' leaders in their schools.

A second aspect raised by the headteachers was that leadership was open and less directive. It was seen to be about trusting people. There were no hidden secrets from the staff, especially members of the senior leadership team. Leadership was no longer about telling people what they had to do but about giving people knowledge and letting them have their head. Thus an open leadership style resulted in 'all staff' having a voice, being involved in decision making, not just consultation, especially through their contribution to the schools overall self-evaluation. A third aspect was the fact that the Senior Leadership Team and others had clear roles and responsibility. The Headteachers saw that senior staff needed to be clear about not only what they were responsible for, but why and how this was part of the whole, for them to be effective leaders.

Is self-evaluation used in South Africa, what have been the barriers?

All educators interviewed identified that the various attempts to introduce self-evaluation had failed, though all saw that the concept was one that should be in place. But attempts to use self-evaluation to improve the quality of teaching and learning in individual schools were taking place, with individual teachers working together on classroom practice and in some schools using an adapted IQMS, with the Senior Team ensuring that every member of staff was observed at least once a year, met with the observer, and those seen to have issues being revisited

As to why attempts to introduce self-evaluation failed a number of issues emerged. Firstly, the historical situation which led to the reluctance of teachers to follow Government directives. Even in the ex-white state schools pre 1994 the Government was prescriptive resulting in the reticence of teachers to follow the directions of Government and school management. In addition teachers have not experienced self-evaluation and therefore do not see it as a means of improving their classroom practice. This attitude is exacerbated in the township schools where staff had little training under apartheid. These educators including Principals are still in schools, and their attitude to avoid change is reinforced by the fact that if a school closes because parents do not send their children, educators are moved to another school. Their employment is secure.

The second group of issues were financial. With no financial support the various systems needed for implementation did not take place including: the training of educators in schools and at the local Departments of Education (DoE) to use the systems; an increase in the capacity of the DoE to support and monitor implementation. In addition the fact that self-evaluation is linked to the annual pay rise resulted in the situation whereby if a teacher is deemed unsatisfactory they will not receive the 1% incremental pay rise. In township schools if a Principle identified someone as unsatisfactory and the 1% was not awarded their life would be in danger from friends or relatives of the educator involved. Thus a major factor undermining the development of self-evaluation can be seen to be the linking of the systems to salaries.

The third group of issues relates to the political dimension. Two different departments in government held responsibility for self-evaluation, one for DAS and one for WSE with no liaison between the two. This led to the feeling that certain issues could not be raised as they were the responsibility of the other department. In addition the attitude of the unions have been focused on maintaining employment for their members and getting them best pay, with apparently little consideration of the need to raise the standard of the profession, and the accountability of educators especially in the Townships. Finally it has been virtually impossible to implement the various policies because of their time requirement within the school. IQMS requires two members of staff to be released to observe lessons and work with each teacher with no means of providing cover for the released teachers. In primary schools this is impossible and extremely difficult for

secondary schools

CONCLUSION

A number of issues emerge from the study based in England. Firstly that Headteachers saw their use of self-evaluation developing as Local Education Authorities began requiring accountability before State led inspection. All identified that a key stimulus to the development of self-evaluation was inspection, either informally by the LEA or by the State. They also saw the introduction and development of Performance Management as a valuable strand of self-evaluation within the school.

Headteachers saw that their style of leadership had changed over time to one that was more open, collegial or distributed. Leadership, as a result, was now shared with the staff. This is the opposite result to the view of Bottery (2000) who saw the development of managerialism in school leadership as one resulting in Headteachers controlling the professional and their practice.

Finally all of the Headteachers saw that though the focus of self-evaluation was on raising achievement in their school, the real focus was on teaching and learning. Self-evaluation and their leadership was for them about enabling staff to be as effective in what ever post they held, and through this growing future leaders within their schools.

In South Africa despite various attempts of the Government post 1994 to introduce school self-evaluation as a means of improving the quality of education in the country each attempt has failed. Key issues providing barriers to the implementation the Governments' policy can be identified in two groups. Firstly, managerial issues including: the linking of the use of self-evaluation to the annual pay increments making it impossible to award someone less than satisfactory especially in township schools; the unwieldy nature of the systems needed to implement the policy; and the lack of capacity of the local Departments of Education to either monitor the process, or provide support for schools where a need was identified.

The second group, cultural/historical issues include: the limited experience of educators of any form of self-evaluation and limited training provided; the limited practical training of the majority of township teachers and Principals; the impact of the previous political

system leading to a resistance to change; in Township schools the real danger to the life of leaders not awarding educators with a satisfactory assessment. These barriers still exist as the Government again tries to introduce the effective use of self-evaluation

In addition self-evaluation may be seen as a Western solution to raising standards, requiring Western systems and management structures, therefore can it work in South Africa? But with issues of globalisation and increasingly competitive markets South Africa is under pressure to provide a workforce with skills to meet employers' needs. So the tension remains how to meet this by improving education.

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