

10. Discussion. School inspections and school improvement in the social domain. The assessment of social outcomes of education

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10.1 Differences between assessment models in school inspections: What works?

Effective school inspections and supervision in the social domain

Good education is of great value to the society at large. It is understandable, therefore, that governments pay explicit attention to it and, in addition to regulation and funding, use supervision by school inspectorates as one of their instruments. In their endeavour to improve education and educational performance, many countries have carried out educational reforms or are still engaged in such reforms. Adjustments to control mechanisms are often part of these reforms; in many education systems these include increasing the influence of market forces and controlling output.

Much is known about the characteristics of effective education (see Teddlie & Reynolds 2000; Townsend 2007; Hattie 2009) and much research has been conducted into the functioning of educational supervision, a subject in which there is ongoing interest. Recently, comparative studies such as *Governing by Inspection* (e.g. Grek et al. 2013), the *Impact of School Inspections on Teaching and Learning* project (e.g. Ehren et al. 2013; Ehren 2014) or research by the OECD (2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2014) or the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates SICI (e.g. Gray 2014) have been carried out to obtain a better understanding of the effectiveness of school inspections and its contribution to educational improvement. To some extent, this seems to be a reaction to the emphasis over the last decade on performance data as an instrument for managing education and also points to the relevance of expert knowledge and self-evaluation, the stimulation of innovation and a continuous process of educational improvement (see OECD 2013; Donaldson & Homeier 2014).

Although the subject of this book cannot be regarded in isolation from the broader question of effective school inspections – and we have used

the results of this broader line of research throughout this study – our central topic is school inspections in the social domain and the aspects that are relevant to it. The reason for this is that our understanding of school effectiveness and school improvement in the social domain is still limited, and there is scant attention for effective school inspections of social quality.

What works?

Paying attention to school inspections of social quality is important for various reasons. First, the social outcomes of education are of major social and economic interest. Second, including social quality leads to a broader and better understanding of the quality of schools and the education system, contributes to improvement and innovation of schools and education systems, and provides an answer to the bias in opinions about educational quality and its effects (e.g. narrowing of education) that may be an unintended consequence of evaluations focusing on the academic core curriculum only.

Chapter 9 provided a tentative answer to the questions around which this study revolves: *Is it possible to measure outcomes in the area of socialization, social competences and citizenship in relation to the work of schools?* and *Can school inspectors assess the effectiveness of the work done by schools in this domain and can school inspections stimulate school improvement in this area?*

As we have seen, the quality of education in the social domain can be successfully assessed with the help of standards for the quality of curriculum content, teaching process and the outcomes of education. Depending on the object and purpose of evaluations, several answers may be given to the question of what will be effective. Section 9.2 presented three ideal-typical models: the *output model*, the *school improvement model* and the *process model*.

The output model focuses on results and clear standards and standard setting. The school improvement model maximizes the involvement of the school by cooperating with schools in the assessments and using information provided by the school. One of the national inspectorates in this study recently adopted a system in which support and advice is an important element to a much greater extent than in the other countries. The process model, which focuses on the micro-processes of teaching and learning, seems to be mainly used for indirect assessments of the extent to which the school successfully provides the students with the knowledge and skills they need in the social and civic domains. The inspectorate in one of the countries studied sends students, parents and teachers questionnaires over the course of the inspection cycle to collect information on topics such as ‘safety’ and ‘democratic values’ (e.g. “In my school, students respect each other’s differences”). Thus information

on both process and output indicators is collected. All inspectorates have a clear focus on social safety and, in one way or another, on democratic values and human rights too. Some of the countries also emphasize the influence that students have on school affairs and their responsibility for their own learning, for example by giving them a role in lesson planning.

Motivation driven and compliance driven

Broadly speaking, two approaches can be distinguished in these models. The output model focuses on the assessment of quality by measuring the extent to which schools achieve the intended goals as evidenced by the results of their teaching. The central mechanisms leading to quality improvement consist of setting external standards to provide guidelines for the schools' efforts and disseminating the results as an incentive to improvement. The school improvement model focuses on the process of education, improvement of teaching and school ownership by involving the school in the setting of standards and the design and implementation of the evaluation. Quality is assessed in conjunction with the goals and practices of the school. The central mechanism for school improvement in this model is adaptation (when determining standards and assessing compliance with them). Underlying the two approaches are different driving forces behind school improvement: accountability and adaptation. These approaches may be characterized as compliance-driven and motivation-driven.

Each approach focuses on different characteristics of social quality to achieve improvement of education in the social domain, but their strong points also comprise their potential weaknesses. The compliance-driven approach, for example, provides transparent standards and assessments, which influences both the schools' efforts (directed by clear expectations) and the mechanisms for changing behaviour (public dissemination of results as an incentive to improvement). Because of the heterogeneous and sometimes diffuse nature of social quality, unambiguous standards and concrete output definitions can exert a strong influence on schools. At the same time, however, the validity of these definitions becomes problematic and their usefulness to the school suffers if they do not sufficiently fit the school's situation.

The motivation-driven approach places the school at the centre and focuses on school ownership in such a way that mechanisms for an intrinsic change in behaviour are stimulated: the school considers the inspectorate's delineation of its quality as relevant and is motivated to develop its teaching; the definition of quality is the one adopted by the school and the conclusion that improvement is worth the effort is to a large extent the conclusion drawn by

the school itself. The importance of school climate and school-internal aspects of behaviour for realizing social quality and the currently limited options for wide-ranging measurements of results means that the adaptation focus has a strong influence on the school's actions. However, as we have seen in Section 9.2, motivation-driven approaches are not designed to achieve external goals in the first place. They moreover have limited options for correcting inadequate internal control mechanisms (e.g. when the internal goals are too modest in scope) and do not necessarily provide much insight into results either.

We have also seen that the theoretical and empirical knowledge about 'what works' in school inspections in the social domain is still limited. Chapter 3 sketched the outlines of a model for assessing the social quality of schools. Based on the analysis of the work of the inspectorates in the countries investigated in this study, we added more detail to this model in Chapter 9. In the rest of the current chapter, we will complete our answer to the question of what constitutes an effective organization of school inspection in the social domain by further exploring the two central approaches: the one focusing on school improvement and the other on standard setting and output measurement. It is possible to formulate evidence-based *contours* of effective school inspection by combining the experiences in the four countries (see Chapters 5 to 9) with knowledge of the functioning of school inspections in the domain of the core curriculum (see Chapter 3). However, for the social domain, empirical knowledge and an understanding of the actual effects are not available, as is the case for unintended and differential effects (e.g. different effects on the distribution of student outcomes, general and vocational education, etc. (see Witschge & Van de Werfhorst 2014)). This means that although the model we sketch may seem plausible, research into effects is necessary before the question about effective evaluation of the social outcomes and the social quality of schools can be answered in more detail. The results of recent studies of effective school inspections (e.g. Ehren 2014; Gustafsson & Myrberg 2014) – which point to the importance of clear standards, the involvement of the various parties within the school in the evaluation, and taking into account the self-evaluations conducted by the school – also support the plausibility of the results of the analysis presented here.

10.2 Methodological considerations

The legitimacy of a democracy depends on how citizens perceive the value of political decisions. This has two major components: citizens' access to and

understanding of information, and the mechanisms used by the government to realize political decisions that have been taken. These mechanisms are used to influence behaviour either directly or indirectly through norms and values. The type or combination of mechanisms available to an administration varies between different domains of society. Supervision is one such mechanism. A common element in supervisory activities is the implementation of political decisions based on a democratic process of law-making. The concept of supervision is often used to describe both socialization and the control mechanisms mentioned before. An important question regarding the effectiveness of supervision is whether school inspections serve the goals set by the executive and parliament as laid down in statutory regulations (Johansson 2006).

In the preface to this book, we stated that the goals of education are many and varied. As became clear in Part II, education systems – in spite of differences in the investigated school systems – have in common the goal of contributing to students' identity formation, their individual development and their social and cultural upbringing. In the background of our analyses, the question has been to investigate how inspections can ensure that this goal is fulfilled. Quality assurance means both the internal and external evaluation of quality. In this context, the school inspectorate is one of the agents that contributes to schools providing their students with the optimal conditions for achieving these goals. The school inspectorate operates directly as an external partner in the drive to assure quality and foster improvement and innovation, but can also contribute indirectly to promote the self-evaluation systems of schools through the priorities it sets for supervision.

School inspections and social science research

Although school inspections and social science research do not coincide, they do have characteristics in common. School inspections can be regarded as a form of systematic empirical research – sometimes referred to as 'disciplined inquiry' (Cronbach & Suppes 1969) – that meets the demands of objective, reliable and valid data collection and analysis (see Janssens 2005). Unlike social science research, the goal of which is generalizable descriptive or explanatory knowledge, school inspections draw conclusions about a single school; moreover, these conclusions may have repercussions. In both survey and experimental research, researchers try to control all factors that have an influence on independent and dependent variables. This is impossible in school inspections. Nevertheless, the aim of inspection is to find evidence for successful teaching and learning leading to good

learning results. There are several important differences between social science research and school inspections (see Johansson 2006).

The time factor is the first to be noticed. Compared to school inspections, research projects are usually long-term endeavours. In the four countries described in Part II, the amount of time allocated to individual inspections varies considerably, from half a day to five days. These time frames raise the question of how much areas of enquiry can be realistically covered in the time allocated. Is there sufficient time to allow for the relevant and reliable identification of and reporting on social outcomes?

Another difference is options for controlling the factors that influence the subject of inquiry. The assessment of social learning and social and civic competences is a complex task. Socialization is seen as a lifelong process whereby knowledge, norms, values, attitudes, socio-cultural orientations and roles are transferred to individuals. There are many agents, at different levels, who have an impact on the upbringing of children: parents, other adults in the environment of the child, peers, the media and so on. A few inspectorates studied in this book, however, focus on the contribution of other partners involved in young people's learning. This could be seen as an opportunity to capitalize on the specialist skills and knowledge of these partners that can enhance and expand young people's learning. Also, when interested in the schools 'added value' in the social domain, these student and context characteristics need to be controlled for (see Chapter 2).

An important difference is that inspections can force schools to act according to laws and regulations. Section 9.1 described how the countries in this study use different methods and impose different consequences such as sanctions and penalty fines. Some inspectorates will re-inspect or re-engage, depending on the outcome of the first assessment. Some inspectorates only focus on assessment, while others combine assessment and support. Some place more importance on self-evaluation and involvement of the school as a key partner in developing an improved school culture than others. However, there is a strong overall tendency to increase support and dialogue with the school during the inspection process, thereby facilitating improvement (see Gray 2014). As we have seen before, this seems a promising instrument in the social domain.

A fourth difference between research and inspection is the use of causations. In inspections, causation is mainly used to assume relationships and explanations. In inspections, some causations are grounded in statutory regulations. For example, if a school has adopted a plan to combat bullying, the assumption is that this will lead to students not being abused and the school climate becoming safer. For an effective assessment, both

aspects – have the regulations been met *and* have the intended results been achieved – are important.

The logic of school inspection is different from the logic of evaluation per se or that of social science research, for example because of the link between evaluation and the possible implications of negative conclusions. This is an important distinction for school inspection, particularly where the potential impact of the consequences imposed after a school has been assessed as ‘inadequate’ is concerned. As we have seen in Chapter 3, it is particularly the potential repercussions (‘high stakes’) that amplify the effects of quality assessments: e.g. damage to the school’s reputation, reduced autonomy when instructed to carry out improvements, or financial sanctions (see Bishop 1997; Coleman 1997; Fuchs & Wossmann 2007).

To counter unintended effects, particularly where the inspection of social quality should be developed further (see Section 3.4) it is necessary to strike a good balance between assessments and their implications (Ehren & Visscher 2006; Ehren et al. 2013; Altrichter & Kemethofer 2014). A phased approach, in which schools are assessed over a longer period without (substantial) consequences being imposed, seems appropriate in this respect. Evaluation could be used for diagnostic purposes, to establish trends, weaknesses and risks, and to assess the quality of the school’s teaching and results. Such an approach will provide opportunities for combining elements from the output model (external standards and output indicators) and the school improvement model (building on the capabilities and internal motivation for development within the school).

Constructed metrics

Discourses of school effectiveness and school improvement tend to apply what is known as positivist ideals, such as being able to control and measure outcomes of schools – academic as well as social. Qualitative research methods are generally accepted within the humanities and social sciences today. Polkinghorne (1983: 29) describes the origins of the positivist versus anti-positivist debate, starting with the first advocates of methods to explore human life and institutions other than those used by the natural sciences: “Human science research needs to address life in all of its manifestations. It needs to examine human actions and expressions: it needs to examine the patterns of social organization. In short, it needs to address the intersection of life patterns and the individual’s interpretive efforts toward meaning-giving.” At the same time, it is also generally recognized that qualitative interpretation – which in fact is also a component of quantitative research – inescapably contains a subjective aspect. This can be illustrated

by the following conclusions from a study by Hallencreutz (2012: 69-70) into organizational change management: “The importance of interpretation, meaning and sense-making has grown stronger. (...) There is such a distant gap between the measurable facts and social constructs of success and failure. Thus, there are no objective answers. The literature provides no clear evidence based guidance – there is no best practice. ‘Success’ and ‘failure’ are elusive phenomena which seem to relate more to social constructions among certain stakeholders than to hard metrics. The answer depends on who you ask. The social context, where the actual change is taking place, seems to override no matter what management concept you introduce.” (See also Ravitch 2014).

This does not mean that we should not aim for best practice and equivalence, but it does highlight the risks of trying to do so by applying ready-made models to real-life situations. In his discussion of quality endeavours in general, Hallencreutz (2012) argues that the well-known gap between theory and practice appears when theoretical aspects are ignored in favour of ‘quick fixes’ or ad hoc solutions. He also highlights the risk of becoming blinded by indicators (see Koretz 2008). In searching for evidence to prove certain socially constructed indicators, we may miss what is actually going on ‘out there’ in real life (see Dahler-Larsen 2013). This does not mean that we do not need indicators (see Section 10.4) – it does mean that we need to be aware of the risk of goal displacement when applying them.

10.3 School improvement

Rationale

As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, the inspection of the social quality of schools has a narrow theoretical and empirical basis. There is a limited understanding and limited shared notion of what social quality is, how to define and measure the social and civic competences of students, and which school and teaching conditions effectively enhance the social quality of the school and the social competences of students. Ownership of the definition of social quality by the school and the school’s stakeholders is considered important due to the differences in the social, cultural and economic context of schools. These differences in context are likely to warrant different specifications of social quality and social competences, and a successful improvement of the social quality of schools requires the involvement of stakeholders at different levels in the design and implementation of change,

as well as the improvement of variables at different levels in and around the school (classroom, school, district, national).

Traditional centralized accountability systems are often not well equipped to operate in such a context. Their top-down frameworks and approaches do not cater to more localized standard-setting and improvement models. Such centralized models may also enhance ‘competence traps’ when they legitimize a ‘one size fits all’ strategy for success and disseminate and reinforce certain school and teaching conditions that not yet been proven to be successful (see Section 10.4). The limited knowledge base around effective practices in the social domain could be enhanced by more localized models of school inspections which allow for the dissemination and validation of context-specific information to and within networks. Such an approach would, according to O’Day (2002), involve connecting stakeholders in and across schools who can have a role in effective school improvement, for example through an open forum of feeding back inspection results and setting up target agreements between stakeholders. Such an approach would also entail analyzing, validating and disseminating good practices; describing why the good practice worked for the host school, how the host school created process knowledge (‘this is how we did it’), and making explicit the theory underpinning the practice (‘these are the principles underpinning why we did it and what we did’). Elements of such a model were described in Chapter 9 as a school improvement model of school inspections.

School improvement inspection model for social quality

Section 9.2 outlined the building blocks of a school improvement inspection model as a school-oriented approach to social quality: school ownership, self-evaluation, the school’s capability for improvement and a focus on the development of teaching and the quality of school internal processes, and where the inspectorate validates the school’s assessment on its own standards. The need for localized standard-setting, evaluation and improvement of social quality suggests that such an approach should enhance the collaboration between schools, communities and the inspectorate through the process of collaborative evaluation where the inspectorate is an active partner in a polycentric network where multiple actors are involved in the governance, evaluation and improvement of schools. Such an approach was previously described by Ehren, Honingh & Janssens (submitted) focusing on the academic core curriculum. In their description of such an inspection model (which they refer to as ‘polycentric inspections’), inspectorates evaluate and assess the quality and functioning of networks of schools and their

stakeholders, with the purpose of validating and supporting improvement at the local level. Such an approach includes the following elements:

- The agenda (e.g. standards) for inspection is also set by schools and stakeholders with the purpose of analyzing, validating and disseminating good practices of how to improve student achievement (describing why the good practice worked for the host school, describing process knowledge, and making explicit the theoretical assumptions);
- The inspection frameworks include standards on effective cooperation between schools and stakeholders;
- The inspection schedule includes visits to all schools and stakeholders at the same time;
- Inspection feedback is given to all schools and stakeholders in an open forum and agreements are made about a shared agenda for change.

These inspection models are different from the traditional centralized inspection models in that they adapt their evaluation schedules and frameworks to the local contexts of schools working in partnerships (with other schools and their stakeholders) to improve, and to local problems that are addressed in these partnerships. Inspection schedules and frameworks facilitate and support the creation of these networks and generate, validate and disseminate the context-specific knowledge about improvement that is developed in these networks (e.g. looking at good practices for improvement in networks of schools, analyzing the principles underlying these good practices and evaluating the extent to which these actually contribute to high levels of student competences in the social and civic domain).

10.4 Standard setting and output

Rationale

Schools are organizations founded for a purpose. Briefly, this purpose is stimulating the development of young people. Because young people develop in more than one domain, the goals of education are multifaceted and include, for example, stimulating cognitive and social development. There may be differences in the efforts required to formulate such goals unambiguously or differences of opinion about what these goals should be. The goals in the various domains may also be given different weights. Nevertheless, also where social goals are concerned, the quality of schools is higher as they are more successful in realizing the intended goals and

enable their students to learn and grow. In essence, school inspection in the social domain concerns the realization of goals and the possibility for schools to improve in this respect. This means that the primary criterion determining the effectiveness of school inspection in the social domain consists of the extent to which it provides an insight into what students learn, and the quality of the school conditions contributing to this learning.

This explains why the output model (see Section 9.2), with its focus on results and external standard setting, includes important elements of supervision because it opposes levelling and ineffective standards. Lacking standards of what students should learn, or using standards that make non-compliance virtually impossible, leads to an inspection process that does not provide an understanding of quality. Such standards do not produce relevant information about the development of students. They also do not hold schools accountable for inadequate teaching or students' poor performance, nor do they stimulate improvement.

This underlines once more the importance of external standard setting (see Coleman 1997; Levinson 2011). Although internal standards have advantages (e.g. ownership of the school and links with the local context; see Section 9.2), they only offer limited opportunities for quality assurance. Because meeting meaningful standards requires efforts, it can be expected that schools will take these efforts into account when formulating standards. Meeting a standard involves 'costs' (e.g. a more strict approach to students which may lead to negative effects on the school climate, or more school-wide coordination that may reduce teacher autonomy). That schools may choose standards that minimize the costs for the school illustrates this limitation. Moreover, schools are faced with opposing interests. On the one hand, intrinsic considerations and the expectations of parents and others will stimulate schools to realize social goals. On the other hand, they face the conundrum of every 'vendor': how to minimize the risk of being held responsible for the quality of the product supplied. Schools therefore have mixed interests in external supervision too: the advantages to external evaluation (e.g. an insight into their own quality and knowledge for improvement) must be weighed against the disadvantages of assessment, which, if negative, may lead to sanctions (e.g. a poor reputation). When the evaluation is given into the hands of stakeholders in or around the school, the school still has a major interest, if only because the interests of the school organization (e.g. autonomy, peace and quiet, continuity) usually coincide with those of the stakeholders.

Internal and external cohesion

Where social quality is concerned, a specific aspect also comes into play. Although the relationship with the context is important for teaching and learning in the social domain, it also poses a risk. On the one side, socialization concerns internal cohesion but on the other hand it also involves stimulating external cohesion. The school's social task pre-supposes that it transcends group boundaries, which becomes all the more relevant when people place a high value on such group characteristics. This creates a tension between internal standard setting – in which goals linked to internal cohesion (socio-cultural, religious, local or regional identities, etc.) may be dominant – and conflicting goals aimed at transcending group boundaries, such as a commitment to society in general and being open to 'outsiders'. This opposition not only occurs in schools having specific cultural or religious values or containing minorities with divergent ideas but in all situations where there are latent or manifest ingroups and outgroups, and schools – either intentionally or unintentionally – reflect the culture of the dominant social group (levelling). The stakeholders around the school are part of that system, which means that internal standard setting is influenced by the values that are dominant within the school context.

The school's internal standard setting thus has its limitations in the form of rational organizations that are not used to acting against their own interests, and the lack of a mechanism for balancing internal and external values. External standard setting and a focus on results, if necessary in combination with options to impose sanctions, are thus characteristics of effective supervision in the social domain and form an important distinction between the school improvement model and the output model.

Again, we should stress that these models (as was the case in Section 10.3) are used as heuristic devices. In reality, these types will not occur in their pure form. Instead, practical supervision will include combinations of their characteristics, with varying weights given to the various elements. The above also shows that effective supervision in the social domain provides for sufficient involvement of the school *and* takes external standards and stimuli into account, so that schools can actually be held accountable for inadequate results.

Neutrality and objectifiability

A similar risk occurs when inspectorates endeavour to conduct objective and neutral assessments. Although this is an elementary principle of supervision, also in the social domain, it may lead to overly restrained assessments, particularly in this domain, as values are closer to the surface

than those in the basic curriculum. This is the case when inspectors, in an attempt to minimize the risk of value conflicts, are reluctant in their observations and assessments and instead focus on procedural criteria (such as a safety plan). The often young tradition of school inspection in the social domain, combined with the use of diffuse quality criteria, may also lead to uncertainty on the part of the inspectors, with risk avoidance as a consequence. Inspectorates will then mainly point to situations where standards are patently not adhered to and for the rest write a lacklustre – and often positive – report. If clear criteria are lacking, there is also a risk that inspectors allow their personal opinions about values and the school's social task to resonate in their assessments, in a domain where it is eminently important that there is a clear distinction between the freedom of schools and the duties of government.

The notion that evaluating the social task of schools quickly leads to normative assessments is debatable. Not only do statutory regulations usually provide useful principles and boundaries, but schools implementing their socialization task – despite different religious or moral legitimizations – often adopt variations on the *regula aurea* ('the golden rule': treat others as you would want to be treated). Both the values embedded in this principle (see Dewey 1916) and its instrumental relevance (such as the importance of the transfer of the knowledge and skills necessary to adhere to it) lead to a common domain in which objectifiable standards can be formulated and evaluated (see Eidhof et al. 2013). Where religious and ethical principles lead to debates about the norm, these will usually concern topics – with the exception of the need to maintain basic democratic values – that transcend educational quality and will include the question whether school inspections are the right tool for resolving the underlying value conflicts. This means that inspectorates can take schools to task if they flaunt or neglect basic values (e.g. failure to address discrimination) but should not take a stand on moral issues (e.g. ideas about 'the good life'), as long as these do not contravene the law. With respect to social quality, this means that there is significant room for evaluations that meet the same requirements of neutrality and objectifiability as those in other areas. This is also true for statutory requirements and domains in which there is a high degree of inter-subjective conformity. The remaining area, where there is a legitimate diversity of values, is less suitable for inspection.

This does not mean to say that the sensitivity to values that may be part of the social domain is not relevant and may not, on occasion, lead to tensions. Nevertheless, we conclude that the perceived sensitivity to values is more

limited in scope than is often assumed and that there are no reasons for excluding evaluations of social quality in schools from inspections based on such grounds.

Assessment framework

This again points to the importance of a well-rounded supervision framework that takes school-specific characteristics into account, provides an operationalization of social quality in which unintended focus narrowing and goal displacement are minimized, and includes standards formulated in such a way that both schools and inspectors can use them to their advantage. The latter should include both a clear definition of the aspects of quality – i.e. all elements of provision, process and outcomes that are relevant (see Section 10.3) – and unambiguous criteria for assessment. The conclusion reached by the OECD (2013) that evaluation and assessment frameworks play a crucial role in educational improvement thus also applies to assessment frameworks for social quality and concerns, for example, clear specifications of the aspects that should be included and the criteria necessary to determine the levels of output and compliance.

This underlines what we stated before about external standard setting as one of the primary characteristics of an effective inspection model for the social domain. A clear and specified framework will give inspectors something to go on when selecting indicators and collecting and weighing data, and prevents uninspired, low-risk evaluations as a result of insecurity about the object of evaluation and the requirements that must be met. Where such frameworks are lacking and assessments of social quality produce lacklustre reports, these inspections will be regarded as hardly relevant and further development of supervision in the social domain might stagnate. Investing in adequate supervision frameworks is thus an important priority for the development of school inspection in the social domain.

Elements that are relevant in this respect include a strong support base in educational circles and the society at large for the standards to be used, such as desirable learning objectives and levels of competence (what students should learn); commitment on the part of the schools, particularly in the form of sufficient ownership of the standards; and inspectors who are sufficiently qualified to assess social quality.

As many inspectorates have only recently introduced inspections in the social domain, there is a lack of knowledge around what constitutes effective inspections in the social domain and how to assess good quality and measure social outcomes. As described in Part II, in one of the countries in this study few schools have been evaluated as failing on indicators around

social quality because school inspectors feel unfamiliar with assessing democratic values. As a result, school inspectors may also feel less confident and knowledgeable in evaluating these topics and providing schools with (informal) feedback on how to improve their social quality and the social competences of students. The attitude, skills and role of the inspector are important factors in supervision, while interacting with the object of assessment during the process of inspection, and the results will depend on this interplay (see Dahler-Larsen 2013). In view of the specific characteristics of the domain, specific training should be considered, especially where regular supervision focuses on the core curriculum and general processes of teaching and learning. This training of inspectors should focus on aspects such as pedagogical quality and school climate, effectiveness of teaching social and civic competences (does it lead to learning; does it fit the needs of students and society) and whether all students master the desired competences.

Unintended side effects

As we have seen in Chapter 3, school inspections in the cognitive domain can have a number of unintended consequences. Some of these unintended consequences may also apply to school inspections in the social domain. The way in which an inspectorate defines and measures social quality may, for example, lead to a narrow implementation of measures to improve the involvement of students in the school, such as setting up student committees that do not have a real voice in the functioning of the school. Another example is school inspectors asking schools for plans and protocols describing how the school deals with psychosocial issues in its student population. Having these plans and protocols does not necessary lead to high social quality within the school.

If possible, the social domain is even more susceptible to the risks of inspections with an overly narrow perspective (e.g. 'Does the school have a student committee?') or means-directed focus (e.g. 'Does the school have a safety plan?') while neglecting the purpose (e.g. student well-being) to which these means should be an end (goal displacement). If the intended results cannot be ascertained by limited observations or when the results may be highly diverse so that the observations require a greater effort, there is a risk that the inspection will be limited to indicators that are relatively easy to measure, leading to these measurements having insufficient validity.

Positive side effect: Counterbalance

A narrowing of the curriculum is an unintended side effect when schools focus on a limited set of indicators to measure the quality of education

(goal distortion). In this respect, including social quality in school inspections can have a significant positive side effect. We expect that inspections of social quality and social competences can counterbalance some of the unintended consequences of inspections in the core curriculum. Paying attention to aspects of social quality is an excellent counterbalance, for example, to the risk of tunnel vision, because of the differentiated nature of social education goals and the necessary input of the schools in the realization of these goals, which offers space for both qualitative aspects and quantitative elements outside the basic assessment scheme.

Apart from paying attention to social quality as a goal in itself, supervision in the social domain thus has an important effect on the quality of supervision of the cognitive core curriculum, as it broadens the definition of quality and counteracts the unintended narrowing of focus that occurs when schools view educational quality exclusively in terms of student achievement in the basic school subjects. Because of the nature of the learning objectives related to socialization, which essentially involve the realization of social development and induction into society's culture and which appeal to the formulation of moral and social goals for the school, paying attention to aspects of social quality is also expected to counteract myopia and ossification effects (see Chapter 3). In addition to the primary function of paying attention to aspects of social quality, this kind of educational supervision also fulfils an important secondary function in that it counteracts unintended side effects of the tendency in schools to focus on aspects that are formally assessed.

Need for indicators

The previous chapters indicated that the inspection frameworks currently in use in most countries only have limited sets of indicators of social quality and social competences. This is partly the result of the idea that government only has a limited responsibility in this domain. Some countries feel that social quality and social competences should be defined by schools, and that inspections only have a role in checking whether such definitions are in place and are acted upon. The relative complexity of measuring social and civic competences also played a role, and the interplay of these two factors means that this situation is only slowly changing. A favourable development is our steadily increasing knowledge about the role of the school. Although for a long time the level of understanding concerning the components of adequate teaching and the conditions of school organization that contribute to learning in the social domain lagged behind that in the cognitive domain,

this situation starts to change (see Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Keating et al. 2010; Schulz et al. 2010; Geboers et al. 2012; Isac et al. 2013).

This development can be accelerated by specifically investing in the further development of indicators and measures of social quality and social and civic competences; by research into the relations between school and school system factors, social outcomes and supervision (see Witschge & Van de Werfhorst 2014); and by developing strategies (e.g. public campaigns, public consultations) to ensure that measures and indicators are incorporated into the broader arena of policy and education in which schools function. Such an approach ensures that these indicators and measures will find their way into schools through school inspections and other channels, which in turn should strengthen the involvement of schools and wider educational circles as well as the support base for development and school improvement. Ball, for example, describes an inter-related set of ‘policy technologies’ (of which school inspections are a part) to transform the public sector (Ball 2008: 41). Such technologies involve the calculated deployment of forms of organization and procedures and disciplines or bodies of knowledge to organize societal forces and human capabilities into functioning systems. Examples in the cognitive domain include national reform programmes to improve student achievement in maths and literacy, international league tables in maths and literacy (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS; see Section 1.2), legislation on student achievement targets, national curricula and assessments in maths and literacy, commercial products (e.g. textbooks, formative assessments, self-evaluation instruments) aligned to standards on maths and literacy, and professional development (including initial teacher training) in teaching maths and literacy. These ‘technologies’ create new ways of thinking about what we do, what we value and what our purposes are, and they drive the planning, self-evaluations and daily practices of schools. An example is offered by studies comparing civic education in various countries (*Civic Education Study CIVED* 1999; *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study ICCS* 2009;¹ Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Kerr et al. 2010, Schulz et al. 2010), which reveal sometimes large differences in the social and civic competences of students in these countries and sometimes also socially undesirable findings (see Chapter 4).

¹ In 1971, the first IEA Study of Civic Education was conducted (Torney, Oppenheim & Farnen, 1975). The next *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study* (which will include the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden among others) will take place in 2016.

Evaluation and support

Including social quality and social competences in inspection frameworks; making them a regular part of frequent inspection visits to schools; developing and using reliable and valid measures (e.g. observation protocols, interview guidelines, student achievement tests); publishing the school's performance in these measurements and setting high expectations; creating support for schools to improve in the social and cognitive domain; providing schools with examples of good practice in this area: all of these elements are therefore expected to enhance the institutionalization of standards of social quality and social and competences and the impact of school inspections on these indicators.

It is, however, important to understand that such institutionalization may also lead to a 'one size fits all' approach to improvement and a strong focus on inspection requirements and the measures used to evaluate these requirements, particularly when schools face severe consequences for not meeting these standards. Above, we have already described the importance of a balanced approach that combines elements of the school improvement and the output approach to provide room for school ownership and embedding in the school context. It is also relevant to distinguish between the evaluation of social quality and social outcomes and the dissemination of the results on the one hand, and the resulting consequences on the other hand. In situations where there is high-stakes inspection in which negative evaluation findings may lead to substantial sanctions, unintended effects such as a narrowing of focus and homogenization will more likely occur also within the social domain than when the focus is on standard setting and the dissemination of results without immediately imposing consequences. The latter situation gives schools leeway to choose their own priorities and to stand out through these choices in a system in which clear objectives have been formulated and results are visible.

10.5 The assessment of social outcomes of education

Because the development of a framework of indicators and standards for the assessment of social quality depends on the national context and the goals of education, and because there is as yet little knowledge about what constitutes effective teaching of social and civic competences, any design for the assessment of social quality will, of necessity, be general in nature. However, this does not mean that nothing more can be said about this.

In Chapter 3 we discussed the following principles of effective supervision in the social domain:

- *A coherent system of standards*: clear standards that give good insight into the goals to be pursued and the various components of social quality;
- *Outcome indicators*: knowledge of the students' social and civic competences as an indicator of educational outcomes, with a view to accountability and providing incentives for quality improvement;
- *Insight into curriculum content and teaching process*: knowledge of the quality of teaching and learning, particularly as a means to provide an insight into options for educational improvement;
- *Ownership of the school*: involvement of school management and teachers in the quality assessment in such a way that they can own the results and are willing and able to work with them;
- *Insight into pedagogical quality and school climate*: knowledge that parents can understand and is relevant to their situation, so that they can make choices that best fit the developmental needs and characteristics of their children.

Ten elements for inspecting social quality in schools

The following is based on the national studies in Chapters 5 to 8 and the analyses in Chapters 3 and 9. We will combine the available knowledge about effective education for the acquisition of social and civic competences and our exploration of characteristics of effective supervision in the social domain to identify ten elements which together make up the core of an integrated framework for school inspection of social quality. Although this proposal is not intended to be exhaustive and – depending on the characteristics of the national situation – will require more detailing (the Appendix contains several examples of indicators, guidelines, interview protocols, student questionnaires, etc. from the countries in this study to illustrate the aspects of social quality included in the inspection frameworks in the social domain), it does present the central elements that must be taken into consideration when assessing the quality of education in the social domain.

1. *Legislation*. Compliance with statutory requirements.
2. *Results*. Student performance (learner results). Relevant aspects for this element include:
 - that it can be measured objectively;
 - that it is possible to assess the relationship between the achieved results and the intended learning objectives;
 - that the results provide an understanding of how achievements comply with statutory requirements and/or expectations within society.

This may be done with standardized measuring instruments or other methods for measuring learning outcomes. Section 2.4 explained that measurements of the students' perception of social safety and student well-being are also an indication of the school's social outcomes.

3. *Climate*. The social climate in the classroom and the school at large. Relevant aspects include a correspondence of the climate with the goals the school wants to realize in the social domain.
4. *Pedagogics*. The pedagogical quality of the teaching, in which it is important that the pedagogical behaviour of teachers reflects the social and civic competences that the school wants to transfer (e.g. being respectful to each other).
5. *Teaching methods*. The didactic quality of the teaching. Important in this respect is that the didactic behaviour of teachers and the teaching methods adopted by the school promote the social and civic competences that the school wants to transfer (e.g. cooperating with others and taking responsibility).
6. *Safety*. The social safety of students and others in and around the school. An anti-bullying policy is an element of social safety. Offering a socially safe environment is not only important as a condition for learning but is primarily an indication of the desired school climate and the quality of pedagogical behaviour.
7. *Curriculum*. The organization and content of the curriculum. Relevant aspects for this element include:
 - that the content offered can be expected to contribute to the acquisition of social and civic competences by students;
 - that attention is paid to the main dimensions that are relevant in this respect, such as the transfer of knowledge, attitudes and skills; the various levels at which social and civic competences operate (e.g. school, neighbourhood, society; not limited to social safety and school climate, etc.); and divergent aspects of social upbringing (e.g. promotion of social norms *and* critical attitudes and autonomy; where appropriate, the transfer of specific values *and* common basic values);
 - that the content offered is logically structured in terms of school years and subject areas;
 - that the curriculum is appropriate to the characteristics of the student body and the school's context and that attention is paid to risks involved in not achieving socially desirable goals (e.g. prejudice and xenophobia).
8. *Objectives*. Clear learning objectives that are relevant to the school's mission.

9. *Student care.* The quality of student care, including attention paid to intrapersonal development (building self-confidence or addressing causes of anti-social behaviour).
10. *Mission & leadership.* The school's mission and the support base for this mission among teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders. For the mission to be feasible, the school's leadership is important. It should be aimed at realizing the school's mission by way of the content and organization of the curriculum and appropriate pedagogical and didactic teacher behaviour. Aspects related to mission and leadership include:
 - the school's links with the social context and maintaining contacts with stakeholders;
 - the conditions necessary for realizing the school's mission, for example promotion of appropriate pedagogical and didactic teacher competences.

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