

**DECONSTRUCTING
EVALUATION
IN
EDUCATION**

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION, NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

FOR THE PURPOSE OF:
INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE (ETI)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines school evaluation policy and practice in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and seeks to articulate how the education community can respond to finding a balance between school self-evaluation and inspection as a moral and social discourse for quality in education. The author presents a review of the literature on the varying concepts of quality in education and how these complementary and at times contradictory concepts of quality have managed to influence the school evaluation frameworks of most countries. Using an extended version of Nevo's (1995) dialogue model of evaluation, the author examines the challenges of trying to find a balance between school self-evaluation and inspection. Finally, an analysis of the systems of school evaluation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is described. The author utilised a concurrent multi-phase mixed methods strategy that consisted of an all island survey of every school principal in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with a sample of school principals and inspectors in order to elucidate further the questionnaire responses and recommendations for improvement. Findings suggest that, although there are many similarities between the systems of school evaluation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; there are also differences in terms of how to ensure that evaluation is used as both a benchmark and promoter for quality in education.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The initial title for this study was *Nijesh solk mwil start gyamyath* (save us from the time of trial). The saying originates from old Shelta, a language used among the travelling community in Britain and Ireland. Kirk and Ó Baoill (2002) state that the language is referred to by a number of names, such as Cant, Gammon or Tarri, although the etymology of its origins is contested. Indeed, within the lexicon of the travelling policy of educational evaluation, contestation relating to the purpose of and meaning of the terms ‘inspection’ and ‘evaluation’ are also open to debate; contrariwise, the former may be referred to as accountability or school effectiveness and the latter may be referred to as self-evaluation or school improvement. What is not open to debate however is the fact that the word ‘Shelta’ first appeared in written text in 1882. This same period also saw the establishment of a national inspectorate of education on the island of Ireland where ‘in May 1832, four men were appointed as inspectors’ (O’Connor 2001, p.2).

The role of the inspectorate, whose *raison d’etre* is to provide for government and people, or whomsoever, a balanced and fair assessment of how education is being provided’ (Coolahan 2009 p.314), was later summarized in a select Lords Committee of Inquiry on Education in 1837.

They were charged with investigating new applications for aid; they were to visit schools being built; and they were to visit schools actually in operation and to examine the work of the teachers and monitors therein (O h’Eideain, 1967: 128). The third duty became by far the most important, in practice it began to occupy most of the inspectors’ time and indeed has continued to do so up to the present time (O’Connor 2001, p.2).

Indeed, the core function of inspectors in both the ROI and NI has not changed since the Stanley Letter (1831). Furthermore, in the case of the inspectorate of NI, ‘the present Inspectorate is in direct unbroken descent from the Inspectorate established in 1832 by The Commissioners of National Education in Ireland’ (ETI 2012). What has changed since this period however is the view that education is now accepted as one of the key determinants for increased social and economic development, and within the global education space, effective educational evaluation policy and practice is also seen as being one of the foremost catalysts to ensuring that students have both the human and social capital required for active citizenship. By way of contrast, it is the author’s belief

that—not only in the field of education but also in other essential services such as public health and wellbeing—erroneous evaluation policy and practice at the school and regional level could also be viewed as one of the key factors resulting in successive governments and educationalists reverberating the plain language statement, ‘Where did it all go wrong?’ The importance placed on the significant role of educational evaluation in realising the stated goals and objectives of government and school, as advocated throughout this study, cannot be underestimated.

In this century, however, educational evaluation is no longer merely considered an external monitoring process or top-down externally devised legitimate dictate of examining, sanctioning or rewarding. In the case of inspections carried out in nineteenth century England, it was said that, ‘Superintendence ought to be felt; ... it should be a constant, forceful, living power’ (Graham 1885 in Thody 2000, p.53). Rather, educational evaluation is widely viewed as an allogamy of external evaluation carried out by the inspectorate in parallel with internal evaluation carried out by a school, the dual purpose of which is to serve both the accountability agenda on the one hand and the school improvement agenda on the other.

Commentators suggest that self-evaluation, embedded into the educational frameworks of most countries, is centred on a much wider decentralisation agenda in Europe and elsewhere. Whether perceived or true, there is also a widely held belief, in line with the key theme advocated throughout this study, that when inspection and self-evaluation are treated as interconnected units and used in partnership, both systems of evaluation have the potential to counteract the flaws that are inherent in each system. However, as Newton (2006) states,

Any quality assurance model, method or system, will always be affected by situational factors and context. This leads to the view that the success of a system may be less dependent on the rigour of application, and more on its contingent use by actors and protagonists, and on how the system is viewed and interpreted by them. (Newton 1999 cited in Newton, 2006)

Furthermore, it could also be argued that in order to gain an understanding of how best to form an amalgam between IE and EE, it is imperative that the perceptions of an array of stakeholders who are central to the process are taken into account. Otherwise, research of this type could be construed as selective and, to coin a phrase, an

unintentional form of *manufacturing consent*. To counteract this assertion, the approach taken in this study centred on a range of antecedent and perceived subsequent variables influencing and shaping how evaluation is interpreted from both the perspective of principals and inspectors who are deemed central to the process. However, it is acknowledged as a limitation of the study that other stakeholders who were not included in the study, such as parents and teachers, also form a significant part of the relationship between internal and external evaluation.

The aim of this thesis was to provide a critical analysis of school evaluation as it exists in practice. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, coupled with a description of how behaviourist interpretations of evaluation are now being replaced with more constructivist approaches to evaluation that are however strongly influenced by historical interpretations of quality in education. Chapter 2 described the rise of the quality improvement agenda and, using Harvey and Green's (1993) and Harvey and Knights' (1996) classification of quality in education, also provided a description of how deterministic assumptions of quality have managed to influence the development of evaluation frameworks that currently exist. Leading on from this, the theoretical foundations for the study was described by using an extended version of Nevo's dialogue model for evaluation. Finally, a description of the systems of evaluation that exist in the NI and the ROI were described. Chapter 3 provided a description of the multi-phased mixed methods approach that was used in the study. Finally, using a modified version of Bushnell's (2000) training model, Chapter 4 extended the authors understanding of the relationship between IE and EE to four overlapping systematic layers of evaluation that have an effect on the co-existence between IE and EE. Leading on from this, each layer was subsequently classified into additional sub-layers in order to further elucidate participants' perceptions of the factors that affect the terms of co-existence between IE and EE.

Further to the evaluation layers mentioned, the research also investigated how other relevant, but often overlooked, antecedent variables have an effect on the commitment of inspectors and principals to fully embrace both forms of evaluation. These variables were inclusive of, but not exclusive to, the indirect effects of evaluation, such as changes in stress levels during the evaluation cycle and the efficacy and popularity of evaluation among users. The main conclusion argued by this study is the belief that there is a greater likelihood of understanding critical variables that affect the mutual

terms of co-existence between IE and EE and how both systems of evaluation have an impact on the quality of education provided when the systematic layers of IE and EE are analysed concurrently using both a theoretical framework and the practical experience of users. Indeed, the professional contribution of inspectors, management, teachers and the wider school community need to be recognised in an open culture of collaboration, trust and respect, empowering all members to make meaningful contributions to the school community as a whole and to recognise the deep meaning of teaching and learning.

In conclusion, after a four-year study consisting of an all island survey of every school principal in the ROI and NI that included interviews with a sample of principals and school inspectors in both regions, it would be reasonable to suggest that, despite the systems of evaluation in NI and the ROI having many similarities, both regions are undeniably at different stages of realising the dual culture of evaluation in education.

On the one hand, in the case of the ROI, it would reasonable to suggest that inspection of post-primary schools has been received as being a significant catalyst for school improvement (pp.228-234). In this regard, the DESROI could be commended for the manner in which inspection was introduced, particularly since, prior to its introduction in 2006, school inspection was an unfamiliar concept to the majority of post-primary school principals and teachers in this region. Moreover, one could also say that schools in the ROI must also be commended for the widespread acceptance of inspection rather than what could have been abjection and rejection. In the case of NI, it would also be reasonable to suggest that the system of school evaluation that has been developed, implemented, improved and used should also be used as a model of best practice for the creation of a culture of evaluation by other countries/regions; it appears that the pillars of partnership, transparency and trust are the very driving force for its implementation and success. Indeed, schools and the inspectorate of NI should also be commended for the creation of a culture of evaluation in education where, although tensions inevitably arise, having engaged with the process, the education community of NI now appears to be in the process of asking the question, ‘How do we as practitioner researchers improve the quality of education not only in our schools but also in our communities?’

As previously stated, there were many differences and similarities relating to the systems of evaluation that exist in both regions. However, one common trait existed among all of the various actors who participated in this study. That common trait, with all the benefits and indeed connotations and flaws of evaluation, provides great solace and optimism for the future of education in both the ROI and NI; it may be surmised by an inspector from NI when referring to the importance of context and culture in school evaluation policy and practice.

You know I remember being in [NAME OF COUNTRY] once... and inspecting a class. The teacher taught and some of them listened and some of them didn't and I said well, "What about those ones sitting at the back?" and he said "That's not my problem, that's the parents' problem"... We don't do that. You know, we work from the premise you know the pupil and Ireland's not that urbanised. (INI2/538-542)

Although the concept of evaluation as a vehicle for improving the quality of education provided by schools has been embedded to varying degrees into the education systems of both the ROI and NI, this research has also found various differences in both attitude and practice towards certain aspects of evaluation. On the other hand, this research has also found that there were also, quite frequently, significant similarities in attitude among principals and inspectors. These were most noticeable between inspectors with regard to the present and future direction of evaluation policy and practice in both regions.

In relation to the quantitative data extrapolated from the questionnaires, coupled with the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the following section details the main issues and consequent recommendations drawn from the data presented in this study.

5.2 Recommendations emerging (input)

From an analysis of quantitative data, a majority of principals in the ROI do not believe that the existing resources provided are useful for IE, whereas in NI, this value is considerably less (Tables 4.2.1 to 4.2.2). However, a majority of principals in both regions believe that more resources are required (Tables 4.2.3 to 4.2.4). Furthermore, the majority of principals in both regions believe that schools should be provided with a generic set of tools to assist with the implementation of IE (Tables 4.2.5 to 4.2.4).

Further analysis of qualitative data revealed other limitations; consequently, it is recommended that, akin to NI, rudimentary IE training and research instruments should be provided to all ROI schools. In NI, the majority of principals who were interviewed were of the view that school personnel understand the fundamentals of IE and that the resources required were not those of a procedural nature. Rather, there was a need for resources on how best to share evaluative knowledge among and within schools and communities as a means of further embedding a culture of evaluation in schools (p.122-124). Indeed, with the establishment of Area Learning Communities in NI, coupled with the inspectorate evaluative knowledge gained from visiting schools, inspectors in the form of DIs could be ideally placed to lead this initiative by extending the number of shared case studies on elements of best practice beyond those presently in existence. However, as previously stated by INI1, it is challenging for schools to move from behaviourist competition to a more constructivist approach to school improvement in the form of co-operative competition between schools. In this regard, it is recommended that incentivised support is provided for schools to engage with the process.

Although CVA in the form of Free School Meals has become embedded into the evaluation frameworks of NI and by all extents from an analysis of qualitative interviews, there is a concerted drive for the use of CVA in the ROI (p.5, p.32 and pp.128-130). However, while recognising the benefits of data driven evaluations; at a global level, there appears to be an almost obsequious belief in the usefulness of such processes despite the component of error attached to such data-driven exercises. At the same time, those in power ignore or are unaware of the overwhelming evidence in regards to the most significant barriers to student achievement—the magnitude of importance is not so much the quality of teaching, it is far more quantifiably reliable variables such as a student's socioeconomic status, parental engagement or belonging to a minority ethnic grouping. An article referring to the misuse of accountability systems, written by Ravitch (2010), resonates well with this perspective and in many ways, Ravitch seems to highlight all that is flawed with monocratic nineteenth century evaluation systems that focused heavily on results from standardised terminal examinations as a proxy for quality in education.

It would be good if our nation's education leaders recognized that teachers are not solely responsible for student test scores. Other influences matter, including the students' effort, the family's encouragement, the effects of popular culture, and the influence of poverty...Since we can't fire poverty, we can't fire students, and we can't fire families, all that is left is to fire are teachers. (Ravitch 2010)

Furthermore, Obama, in his national address to school children at the beginning of the academic term (2009), stated,

At the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, the best schools in the world—and none of it will make a difference, none of it will matter unless all of you fulfil your responsibilities, unless you show up to those schools, unless you pay attention to those teachers, unless you listen to your parents and grandparents and other adults and put in the hard work it takes to succeed. That's what I want to focus on today: the responsibility each of you has for your education. (Obama 2009)

In this regard, it is recommended that the IE and EE evaluation frameworks that exist are revised to include more of an emphasis on the quality of school mechanisms and supports to facilitate and promote parental engagement in student learning, not only in designated disadvantaged schools but rather, in all school types, none of which exist to any significant extent in many systems. Indeed, as Harris and Goodall (2008) state,

parental engagement in children's learning in the home makes the greatest difference to student achievement. Most schools are involving parents in school-based activities in a variety of ways but the evidence shows that this has little, if any, impact on subsequent learning and achievement of young people. (p.277)

Furthermore, it would be reasonable to suggest that external test-based scores are the most significant desiderata from which schools are publicly judged. However, it is an undeniable fact that even when CVA results are adjusted for socioeconomic conditions—in almost every region in the world—the majority of schools that perform better in externally devised examinations, such as A level's and the Leaving Certificate, are those schools from more affluent areas. By way of explanation, the school league tables in the ROI's *Sunday Times* (March 2012) reveals that, in most cases, the highest progression of students to third-level study from all 730 secondary schools in the ROI are either from fee-paying or Irish-speaking schools. In the case of NI, an article in the *Belfast Telegraph* reveals similar results: of the 170 post-primary schools, only 'several grammar schools are being outperformed by non-grammars' (Ferguson 2012) in A-level results. However, and in many ways affirming that inspection is not only a data driven exercise, the article goes on to state,

School reports can also give a better indication of a school's achievements on the whole. Some of the schools that are lower down our rankings have much better performance when other criteria is used and many have received glowing inspection reports for their overall quality of education which looks at pastoral care, quality of teaching, quality of leadership, parental responses, special educational needs provision etc. (ibid, 2012)

Indeed, while it is the author's belief that schools that perform well in external examinations should be commended and if there is a need for these schools to celebrate their achievements by making their results publicly available, so too should schools that exhibit exceptional teaching, leadership, parental engagement, etc. in all socioeconomic settings. In this regard, with no significant cost to the exchequer and adding beneficial and true meaning to the term CVA, it is recommended that schools who show exceptional aspects of educational provision be given Department of Education specialist status that is maintained and reviewed over a period of time. This would have the effect of, 'United we stand, divided we fall' ensuring that a school from any socioeconomic condition who shows an exceptional aspect of educational provision receive the affirmation they deserve. It would also affirm that quality can be achieved in all areas of life. As per the recommendation of sharing evaluative knowledge, these schools could also be used as 'educational guides' by other schools who are in the process of trying to improve a particular aspect of educational provision.

In relation to the resources required for EE, from analysis of quantitative data, the majority of principals in both regions are of the view that inspection documents make the inspection process clear (Tables 4.2.7 to 4.2.8) and only a minority of principals in both regions are of the belief that more resources are required to prepare for EE (Tables 4.2.9 to 4.2.10). Furthermore, the majority of principals in both regions are of the view that pre-inspection literature provided by the inspectorate clarifies all issues relating to EE (Tables 4.2.11 to 4.2.12).

From an analysis of qualitative interviews, principals in both regions were of the view that inspection documents act as valuable instruments for schools to ascertain what is required for EE (pp.132-137). However, in the case of the ROI, where reference was made to WSE-MLL, confusion centred on the level of quantitative analysis that was required of the school (p.136).

From an analysis of quantitative data and adding significant confidence to the value placed on the professional capacity of inspectors in both the ROI and NI, only a minority of principals in both regions are of the view that inspectors do not have the capacity to conduct IEs (Tables 4.2.13 to 4.2.14).

From further analysis of qualitative interviews, however, it appears that, where the professional capacity of inspectors is questioned, it centres on the view among principals that inspectors did not have principalship experience prior to becoming inspectors (pp.138-139). Conversely, one could also state that many principals do not have principalship experience prior to becoming principals. On the other hand, a number of principals were also of the view that although inspectors had not been principals prior to joining the inspectorate, this does not actually change the quality of the evaluation. However, given the stated benefits of introducing AAs to the inspection process (pp.140-141), coupled with the success to which it has been greeted in NI, it is recommended that AAs also become part of the inspection process in the ROI and the DESROI refrain from recruiting the last remaining experienced principals in the ROI.

In relation to the capacity of school personnel to carry out IEs, from an analysis of quantitative data, a minority of principals in the ROI and a significant majority of principals in NI are of the view that staff at their school has the capacity to carry out IEs (Tables 4.2.15 to 4.2.16). However, the majority of principals in both regions are of the view that management and teachers need more training on how to conduct IEs (4.2.17 to 4.2.20).

Although principals in both regions are of the view that more training is required to carry out IEs, the training required is different. In the case of the ROI, the perceived training and consequent recommendation centres on the need for principals and teachers to receive training on the rudiments of evaluation. Moreover, a number of principals in the ROI who were interviewed were also of the view that principals needed peer review training to evaluate the professional capacity of teachers (p.146). Moreover, and as part of the author's recommendations, inspectors in the ROI were very much of the view that teachers require more training on how to work collaboratively with partners and that a culture of trust needed to be encouraged (pp.147-158, p.211). These requisites should be seen as part of the development in a teacher's or principal's practice—not as a weakness but rather as an opportunity for school improvement. In the case of NI, principals were

of the view that they had been provided with the necessary training on how to conduct IEs, having learned the rudiments of IE and having been provided with the necessary assistive tools and frameworks for IE, such as PRSDs and *Together Towards Improvement*. However, principals were of the view—which is also part of the author’s recommendations—that more peer-to-peer training among and between schools is required (p.148) in order to fully expedite the advanced stage of evaluation that is evident in many schools in NI.

Finally, from an analysis of qualitative interviews, there were uncertainties relating to other members of the community becoming part of the evaluation (pp.149-151). Although all principals and inspectors were of the belief that data relating to the quality of services provided by schools should be gathered from parents and students in the form of interviews and questionnaires, issues surrounding the capacity and voluntary nature of BOMs were of concern among interview participants. As stated by IROI2 when referring to BOMs in the ROI,

The local county councillor could be the chair. The parish priest could be the chair. A trusted past pupil, a retired principal, and some of those might have some of the skills that might be at the stages of careers that might be tired of it. It’s hard sometimes to find out where the dynamism will come from for action planning and review within boards. (IROI2/125)

After an analysis of qualitative interviews, it is recommended that the present training afforded to BOMs be extensively revised. Indeed, it makes little sense that various organisations provide isolated minimalist training to newly appointed board members given the fact that the majority of legislatively required duties of the respective boards are the same. In this regard, it is the author’s view that all of these respective groups have a collective duty to empower board members, such as parents, to become equal partners by providing training on all aspects of the role and function of BOMs rather than what is presently provided. Furthermore, it is also recommended that BOM members complete the necessary training prior to taking up their positions. One solution, given the voluntary nature of BOM members, would be to provide online training on the role and function of respective BOM members. This effort could be jointly funded by the respective bodies and over time, could also reduce the considerable costs involved in providing on-site training. It is also recommended that a review of how schools are governed is conducted, given the fact that there are in excess of 4,000 separate BOMs in the ROI.

5.3 Recommendations emerging (process)

From an analysis of quantitative data, the majority of principals in both regions are of the view that EE should be based on a combination of a school's IE and development plan (Tables 4.3.5 to 4.3.8), which is also in line with the views of the inspectorates of both countries. Principals in the ROI are also more in favour than principals in NI of being provided with a generic set of tools, methods and procedures for carrying out IE.

Although it could be reasonably inferred that principals in the ROI are in favour of a more isomorphic form of IE than principals in NI, it might also highlight the degree to which schools are able to carry out their own evaluations, as only 26.7% of schools in the ROI as opposed to 81.8% of schools in NI have a set of procedures for carrying out IE (p.152). However, proceeding the qualitative and quantitative part of the research, all primary and post-primary schools in the ROI have now been provided with procedures and guidelines for SE of teaching and learning (DESROI 2012). Indeed, as stated by the DESROI, 'Over time the guidelines will be further developed to support schools as they evaluate other key dimensions of school provision' (DESROI 2012b, p.8), with these key dimensions being that of leadership and management and support.

However, while it is recognised within *Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006–2015* (Government of Ireland 2005) that schools are required to evaluate teaching and learning as a dimension of overall performance⁹ and 'over a four-year period from 2012, all post-primary schools should engage in school self-evaluation and produce three-year improvement plans for numeracy, literacy and one aspect of teaching and learning across all subjects and programmes' (DESROI 2012e, p.2). On the other hand however, although the dimensions for SE of leadership and management, pre *Towards 2016* will become embedded into future social partnership agreements if still in existence, it seems unwise to wait this long to provide schools with guidelines on these other two dimensions, especially given the view that 'the type of leadership exercised by the principal and the school's leadership team must be linked both to the school's profile of learning results and improvement capacity at

⁹ It is agreed that schools will consider the role and contribution of teachers to overall school performance in the context of the school development plan. Each school will assess performance by using the themes for self-evaluation set out in the above documents for the aspect teaching and learning as a dimension of overall school performance (Government of Ireland 2005, p.125).

any point in time' (Hallinger and Heck 2010, p.106). In this regard, it is recommended, akin to documents such as *Together Towards Improvement* (DENI 2010), that schools are provided with guidelines for SE of leadership and management before 2016 comes to pass. Indeed, although laudable, it also makes little sense for school leaders to venture towards new territories in the form of 'leadership for learning' without having any clear parameters on how their present practice in the form of leadership management and administration can be evaluated.

In addition, in line with the need to evaluate and improve the quality of education in schools, it is commendable that, within the WSE-MLL process, inspectors are gathering statistical data on the quality of education from parents and students through the use of parental and student questionnaires. The WSE-MLL guidelines state that 'the Inspectorate greatly values the views of teachers, parents and students as key stakeholders in the school community' (DESROI 2011, p.10). However, the preceding sentence states that 'as part of the WSE-MLL, questionnaires are administered to a representative sample of parents and students in order to get their views on the operation of the school' (DESROI 2011, p10). In this regard, and in order to validate the inspection process further, it is recommended, akin to the inspection process in NI, that this process of data gathering is extended to what INI2 refers to as the hearts and minds of education in the form of school personnel who are deemed central to the process.

5.4 Recommendations emerging (output)

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that the recommendations outlined by the inspectorate in the EE report are fair and reasonable based on the present availability of school resources (Tables 4.4.1 to 4.4.2). Furthermore, principals are of the view that external recommendations have resulted in a faster pace of educational change than would have occurred if recommendations had been made internally. However, in the case of the ROI, principal criticisms of inspectorate recommendations relate primarily to the fact that inspectorate recommendations could actually relate to a number of schools where it appears that recommendations were primarily centred on system rather than school compliance.

Of considerable note, however, was the fact that the inspectorate has not been in contact with the majority of schools in the ROI to see what stage the school was at in relation to

realising the recommendations from previous reports; the opposite is the case in NI. This is no surprise, given the limited number of inspectors employed in both NI and the ROI, the fact that inspectors are frequently assigned to other duties outside of school inspection and the fact that inspectors visit schools at relatively the same intervals except in extreme cases of unsatisfactory educational quality. However, assuming that schools will automatically initiate and have the capacity to realise external recommendations is unwise. In this regard, it is recommended that the inspectorates of NI and the ROI review their schedule of inspection visits whereby inspection visits should be proportionate and based on the change capacity of the school and the required improvement action needed. Indeed, from an analysis of qualitative interviews, a significant majority of principals and inspectors, when asked about their visions for the future of evaluation in education, suggested that their vision for the future of evaluation policy and practice related to the deployment of resources to schools that need help and support the most. An inspector participant, when asked about their vision for the future of evaluation policy and practice in the ROI, stated that ‘So from a policy point of view I would like to see internal evaluation being the main focus. External evaluation looking at national, informing policy and enabling resources to be properly distributed so that we would have perhaps a more equitable system intervention’ (IRO1/238). Indeed, further to IRO1’s view on enabling resources to be properly distributed, this study also recommends, akin to the role of the DI in NI, the repositioning of the majority of inspectors into disadvantaged communities in order to advise and support at an adjacent level, effective mechanisms for school improvement in communities that require the most support.

Further, to the recommendation on the need for proportionate-based inspection and support, it is recommended that the quality indicators in *Together Towards Improvement* be reviewed. This would also form the basis for proportionate-based inspection and support on a particular aspect of educational provision and would also bring clarity to IE planning and improvement priorities in schools. Although the quality threshold levels within *Together Towards Improvement* are based on a six-point quality-banding scale (outstanding, very good, good, satisfactory, inadequate, and unsatisfactory), it is recommended that the term ‘satisfactory’ be removed from inspectorate and IE criteria, as there is uncertainty regarding the long-term effect the word ‘satisfactory’ would have within the priority frameworks of any school

improvement agenda. As stated by PNI6, 'What does it mean? It means it will just about do. That is not good enough for kids'(PNI6/31).

It is also recommended that criteria within the quality continuum of evaluation, such as very good/good, and inadequate/unsatisfactory, be reduced in order to delineate anomalies relating to these threshold levels of quality, as is the case with other regional evaluation frameworks found in the ROI and New Zealand.

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that EE reports should be published on the Internet (Tables 4.4.5 to 4.4.6). However, the majority of principals in both regions are also of the view that IE reports should not be published on the Internet (Tables 4.4.7 to 4.4.8). This low figure appears to emanate from the recurring view among principals that EE should be used for accountability and IE should be primarily used for school improvement.

Donaldson et al. (2012) state that 'increasingly, as can be seen from the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) website, inspectorates across Europe are embracing transparency as integral to effective external evaluation. Such transparency is seen as fairer to those inspected as well as promoting the integrity, rigour and impact of external evaluation' (p.105). However, in the case of this study and contrary to the preceding statement relating to the importance of transparency in accelerating the impact of external evaluation, principals and inspectors were of the view that schools are more willing to engage with and furnish evidence to the inspectorate when EE reports are not published on the Internet (p.182). Consequently, participants were also of the view, without refuting the importance of public accountability, that the rigour of EE and consequent advice given by inspectors are more beneficial to the schools' improvement agenda when inspection reports are not published on the Internet. In this regard, and as part of the recommendations, while recognising the importance of public accountability, it appears that an acknowledgement and greater understanding of the reciprocal reality and consequent limitations of transparency need to be far more explicitly understood between inspectors and schools than they are at present. Otherwise, the relationship between IE and EE could become nothing more than veiled internal judgements of quality in order to satisfy external demands. As Perryman states,

The performative culture is so deeply ingrained in schools and education systems that I can foresee a game of permanent artifice, where schools squeeze their individual circumstances into a self-evaluation document designed solely to impress inspectors, and hold themselves in a state of perpetual readiness to live up to their claims, the model prisoner. In this context, 'bleak indeed is the desire for perfection' (Marshall 1999, 310)'. (2009, p.629)

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that inspectors should visit schools more often on an informal basis (Tables 4.4.11 to 4.4.12) and less often on a formal basis (Tables 4.4.9 to 4.4.10). Furthermore, a considerably higher number of principals in the ROI would like inspectors to visit schools more often on a formal basis compared to principals in NI.

While it might be assumed that principals in the ROI place a higher value on EE than principals in NI, from an analysis of qualitative interviews, it appears that ROI principals interviewed are of the view that more inspections of teacher performance were required because of the perceived view that principals in the ROI do not have the same level of legitimate power to deal with what is more commonly referred to as 'underperforming teachers' compared to other jurisdictions.

In addition to the perceived need by principals in the ROI for an increase in teacher accountability, although the majority of principals in both regions were of the view that more informal inspection visits were required, it appears from an analysis of qualitative interviews that principals in the ROI see one of the benefits of informal evaluations (in the form of unannounced inspections) is making teachers in the ROI more accountable. However, in NI, during the course of the qualitative phase of the research, issues surrounding teachers' professional competence rarely arose and the supports and collaboration required during informal visits seemed to centre on the need for the inspectorate and schools to work more collectively together to realise the recommendations of EE reports and also for the purpose of inspectors advising schools on their school improvement priorities.

Indeed, throughout the course of educational evaluation, policy and practice, far too often have educational initiatives been tried, tested and subsequently failed as a result of the misuse of legitimate, coercive and reward power structures. However, it is the author's view that in order to bring about long-term sustainable change for the benefit of all members of the school community that a far greater focus on evaluation should be centred on the informational, expert and referential aspect of educational evaluation

policy and practice. In this regard, it is recommended that the practice of informal inspection visits in the form of unannounced inspections in the ROI be more closely aligned to that of the purpose, function and practice of informal DI visits in NI. Furthermore, it is also recommended that informal visits in the ROI be negotiated with a purpose as opposed to, *admiratio*, in astonishment, inspectors arriving at the school gates. Indeed, as INI2 states in reference to the informal advisory role of DI visits in NI,

There's no point in going in with an external consideration when they're putting their focus on an internal consideration, so take it from where they are. So, that's where the whole idea of, you know, if I have a school in my district and they're working particularly well on the whole idea of language for learning, well why would I go in and look at numeracy? (64)

5.5 Recommendations emerging (commitment)

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that EE places a lot of stress on staff (Tables 4.5.1 to 4.5.2), whereas this value is considerably lower for IE (Tables 4.4.5 to 4.4.6).

From an analysis of qualitative interviews, however, it appears that one of the foremost factors relating to the stress caused by both IE and EE appears to centre on a challenge to the professional autonomy of teachers in the form of appraisal and peer observation (pp.199-200). There is also the view that peer observation is (to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, 'A rose is a rose is a rose') another form of accountability. Bell is of the view that 'peer observation of teaching offers many benefits such as improvements in teaching practice and the development of confidence to teach and learn more about teaching' (Bell 2005 cited in Bell and Mladenovic 2008, p.736). However, the authors go on to state that peer observation can also be seen as intrusive and challenging. Indeed, Cosh (1999), in line with the research findings from this study, also points out,

Both of these management techniques have strong educational justification behind them, and, used well, they can have a very positive effect on job satisfaction and staff development. On the other hand, many staff see them as threatening, potentially arbitrary, and judgemental. It is, therefore, extremely important for the assessor/observer and the assessee/observed to be aware of the rationale behind these procedures, and the spirit in which they should be carried out. (Cosh 1999, p.22)

From the evidence, it would be reasonable to suggest that schools in NI have engaged with the process of peer observation through PRSDs (p.225), and some schools in the ROI have engaged with observation through the observation of newly qualified teachers (NQTs). With regard to the ROI, DESROI states that ‘for many schools, however, such observation of teaching and learning for the purpose of school self-evaluation is a relatively new development’ (2012b, p.57). In this regard, it is recommended that peer-to-peer training be provided to all school personnel in the ROI. Furthermore, and in order to delineate perceived notions of the purpose of peer observations, it is also recommended that principals and managers of schools create a safe environment for peer observation of teaching practice with the purpose of the observation being that of teacher improvement as opposed to teacher accountability. Indeed, IROI2 is also of the view that management should place a greater emphasis on staff motivation and morale during evaluations.

One major success is trying to determine how it leads to school improvement and trying to quantify...student outcomes in examination terms or in levels of ability, ability of reading and writing. So really, does it affect student outcomes or does it lead to school improvement? Does it lead to one that I think is forgotten, you know, keeping motivation of staff and students high. I think in school environments, they don’t put enough emphasis on motivation, morale, that end of it. (IROI2/71–73)

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that both IE and EE take up a lot of time (Tables 4.5.9 to 4.5.12).

From further analysis of qualitative data, however, it appears that a considerable amount of time spent on evaluation and planning did not necessarily relate to the actual event of evaluation in the form of, for example, peer observation and data analysis, etc., but rather that of pre- and post-evaluation activities, such as form filling and gathering vast amounts of data. It appears that there was a view among schools that school development planning consists of describing enabling actions as opposed to measuring how effective the plan may be in bringing about school improvement (p.205). As stated by INI2, when referring to the early stages of school development planning in NI,

The Internal Evaluation became almost like a thesis or a doctorate, and it was hijacked by this whole idea of writing this wonderful report and then we foolishly...and this was a big mistake on our part—we started looking at their process of self-evaluation when all we needed to look at was how effective was it in promoting and bringing about improvement. (12)

In order for schools to analyse how effective enabling actions following a school evaluation actually are, it is recommended, in line with IN3's assertion, that schools be given the capacity and skill set required to produce what IN3 refers to as 'first-hand evidence'. This would also enable schools to take a far greater ownership of evaluation activities, and it would also allow the inspectorate more time to advise and support schools with regard to their school improvement planning strategies.

Furthermore, from an analysis of inspectorate interviews in the ROI, it is also recommended that the present schedule of inspections should be reviewed, as inspectors were of the view that the amount of time spent on repetitive, cyclical, school-based inspections, although of value, reduces the amount of time inspectors can spend on evaluating wider macro issues (p.206). Moreover, the present schedule of inspections also reduces the amount of time that inspectors can spend carrying out case studies similar to *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools* (DESROI 2012c), which appears to have acted as a significant promoter for school-wide evaluation activities in schools of this type.

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that neither system of IE or EE is popular with staff, although IE appears to be more popular with staff than EE in both regions (Tables 4.5.13 to 4.5.16).

From an analysis of qualitative interviews, the perceived lack of popularity towards IE appears to centre on the time spent on pre- and post-evaluation activities. However, it also appears that the lack of popularity towards IE and EE is interrelated to the stress caused by evaluations. The principals and inspectors interviewed are of the view that a culture of inviting feedback does not exist in many schools. Indeed, according to PROI6, 'I do think that the biggest problem would be the culture and there isn't a culture of SE in. There is not a culture of self-evaluation in Irish schools yet. Not to say that that couldn't be fostered' (PROI6/16).

From an analysis of qualitative interviews, the perceived lack of popularity towards IE appears to centre on the time spent on pre- and post-evaluation activities. However, it also appears that the lack of popularity towards IE and EE relates to the stress caused by evaluations. The principals and inspectors interviewed are of the view that a culture of inviting feedback does not exist in many schools. Where a culture of IE has been

successfully introduced, it appears to have been led from the top down, i.e. principals initiated the process.

Although in the case of the ROI, *Towards 2016*, IE will primarily centre on an evaluation of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, in order to delineate the view among some teachers that IE is for the purpose of internal accountability and also to highlight that leadership is one of the central pillars of an effective education, it is recommended that principals in the ROI initiate the process of internally evaluating leadership and management activities in their schools in a safe environment that is conducive to leadership improvement as opposed to leadership accountability. Indeed, Bredeson states,

Scholars of organisational culture and leadership tell us that if you want to know what's important in a school, watch what the principal does... They establish learning as the core of their practice and they set the tone, direction, and expectations for learning in the school by what they pay attention to, what they do, and what they reward (2000, p.392).

5.6 Recommendations emerging (outcomes)

The majority of principals in both regions are of the view that EE results in better management, teaching and learning (Tables 4.6.1 to 4.6.4).

However, given factors outside the realm of inspection, the assertion that inspection can be directly correlated to school improvement is questionable. Nonetheless, almost all of the principals interviewed in both regions are of the view that inspection has had an impact on the quality of teaching, learning and management in their schools, in particular where adherence to management and teaching standards is required. In addition, as a result of inspection, a number of principals were also of the view that there was an accelerated rate of change in certain elements of practice, such as principals using external examination results to form the basis for IE activities.

Furthermore, the majority of principals also believe that IE results in better management, teaching and learning (Tables 4.6.5 to 4.6.8) where dialogue evaluation is seen as central to the process.

However, in order to increase the effect of IE, a number of principals and inspectors are of the view that there should be less time spent on secondary evaluation activities, such as writing up lengthy reports, and more time spent on primary evaluation activities such as peer review. Nonetheless, and as part of the study's recommendations, in order to fully utilise the process of IE and EE as promoters for change, inspectors were of the view that a better system, in terms of schools supplying inspectors with first-hand evidence, needs to be formed to increase the advisory role of inspectors. Indeed, the professional contribution of inspectors, management, teachers and the wider school community needs to be recognised in an open culture of trust and respect at both a regional and national level, empowering all members of the school community, inspectors or otherwise, to make meaningful contributions to the school community as a whole.

In conclusion, it is fitting to leave the last word to Nevo who states,

Those of us who are proponents of external evaluation should find ways to empower schools and teachers to participate as equal partners in the evaluation process and make use of it; and those of us who believe in internal evaluation as a means for school autonomy and teacher professionalisation must admit the legitimacy of accountability and the right of the public to know. They, in their turn, should seek external evaluation as a partner for dialog rather than an object for rejection. (Nevo 2010, p.784)

5.7 Recommendations for further research

Although there has been a considerable amount of research carried out on the perceptions of principals and teachers towards evaluation, only a limited amount of research has been carried out in order to ascertain the perceptions among inspectors towards IE/EE as one cohesive unit for school improvement. In this regard, more research is required to investigate the perceptions of inspectors towards the present and future direction of evaluation in schools.

From an analysis of studies on evaluation policy and practice, including the present study, studies of this type almost always seem to focus on the perspectives of those on the influential apex of evaluation. These studies seek to ascertain how to improve teaching and learning without taking into account the perspectives of those who are directly involved in the process, such as teachers and students. In this regard, as a means

of further improving the effect that evaluation has on teaching and learning, research relating to the opinions and experience of evaluation from the point of view of teachers and other school personnel would be welcome.

In this study, it was found that various factors such as time, lack of training and research instruments have had a debilitating effect with regard to the quantity and quality of internal evaluations that are carried out in schools in the ROI. In this regard, a feasibility study on the practicalities of setting up an IE unit akin to that of the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring in Durham University would be welcomed.

It is also recommended, that studies relating to the capacity and present function of BOMs be carried out in order to ascertain the challenges and effect that BOMs have on school evaluation, policy and practice.