

Assessment as a Tool for Change and School Improvement

Stockholm Summit for Top Level School Leaders
Stockholm, 19 – 21 May, 2008

Jorunn Møller

Department of Teacher Education and School Development
University of Oslo



UNIVERSITETET I OSLO
DET UTDANNINGSVITSKAPLEGE FAKULTET

<http://utdanningsledelse.uio.no>
Utdanningsledelse

Structure of Talk

1. Forces for concensus – the impact of trans-nationalism
2. Frameworks of accountability
3. Assessment as a tool for school improvement
4. Summing up and reflections regarding the future direction



Forces for consensus - the impact of trans-nationalism

- The discourse of quality assurance in education
- The influence of PISA and TIMSS
- The Improving School Leadership Project

Frameworks of Accountability

- Accountability means having to answer for one's actions, and particularly the results of those actions. It is a multilayered concept which defines a relationship of control between different parties, and has a connection to trust.
- Within the school system often the answers are evaluated by a superior against some standards or some expectations, which means that accountability is located within hierarchical practices of bureaucracy.

Frameworks of Accountability continued

- Has educational accountability been more about regulation and performance than educational improvement, local capacity building, and the encouragement of democracy in schools?
- But accountability is also an important dimension of professionalism.

(cf. Jill Blackmore 2001; Ranson 2003)

Frameworks of Accountability continued

Five forms of accountability

- Political accountability
- Public accountability
- Managerial accountability
- Professional accountability
- Personal accountability

Frameworks of Accountability continued

- Assessment can be related to decentralization
- Professional standards for teachers and principals have been developed, and benchmarking and comparison are at the heart of the new performance assessment.
- A drift from management of places to management of expectations. It means that only those outcomes which meet the predefined criteria are considered as success
- “Glocalization” as a phenomenon

Assessment as a Tool for School Improvement

- Assessment within the framework of managerial accountability
- A risk of ignoring some critical purposes of public schooling which cannot be easily or cheaply measured
- Many conditions are beyond the control of the local school

Assessment as a Tool for School Improvement ... continued

Limitations of outcomes-based accountability

- The lack of validity of the outcome measure
- Problems of motivating for improvement
- Inadequate reallocation of resources
- Test-driven reform models are rooted in the assumptions that all children are ready to be assessed at the same time in the same way on the same things.

Assessment as a Tool for School Improvement ... continued

Questions to explore

- Is there an overinvestment in testing and control and an underinvestment in knowledge and skill?
- It is not sufficient to establish a policy of accountability if it is not followed by a practice of school improvement.
- Is professional accountability a more promising framework?

Assessment as a Tool for School Improvement ... continued

- Assessment within a professional accountability framework seems to address problems of motivation more productively.
- It draws attention both to teaching as practice and to teachers' collective responsibility for student learning.
- The information which is shared is more immediate than the one accumulated at higher levels of aggregation.
- For teachers it seems to strengthen the emphasis on their identities as educators.
- However, there are studies which indicate a weakness of professionalism in many schools.

Assessment as a Tool for School Improvement ... continued

Why does assessment have such a great appeal to policymakers?

- As a tool for improvement it is cheap
- It can be quickly implemented
- The results are visible and can be made public
- It is easier to mandate at the state or municipal level compared to participation in change inside classroom

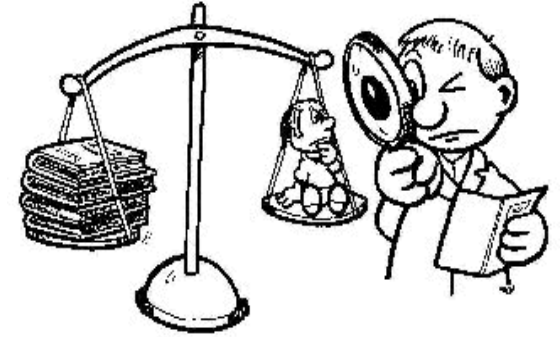
Assessment as a Tool for School Improvement ... continued

How may assessment be a useful tool?

- It must be followed by sharing of knowledge, and a commitment to the improvement of practice.
- Time and space is needed for reflection of current praxis in schools, and principals have delegated power and mandate to deal with such structural preconditions.
- Teachers must be offered systematic prospects of competence enhancement to benefit from such structures.
- There should be a focus on accounting for conditions as well as outcomes

Conclusion

- The success of an accountability system including its tools for assessment, depends on how it facilitates engaging the knowledge, skill, and commitment of people who work in the schools.
- Standards must specify both learning outcomes students are expected to achieve, and the resources and conditions necessary to support teachers and students to produce those outcomes.
- State officials have to be accountable to students and parents.
- Procedures for responding to failures and incentives that will induce better performance



*Thank you
very much!*



UNIVERSITETET I OSLO
DET UTDANNINGSVITSKAPLEGE FAKULTET

<http://utdanningsledelse.uio.no>
Utdanningsledelse

Questions for discussion

- Has educational accountability and assessment been more about regulation and performance than educational improvement, local capacity building, and the encouragement of democracy in schools?
- Is there an overinvestment in testing and control and an underinvestment in knowledge and skill?
- If you have developed standards, do they specify both the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve, **and** the resources and conditions necessary to support teachers and students to produce those outcomes?
- What kind of procedures for responding to failures, and incentives that will induce better performance, are established in your context?

Assessment as a Useful Tool for School Improvement

Review the practice of assessment in your context. To what extent is it characterized by:

- It is followed by sharing of knowledge, and a commitment to the improvement of practice.
- There is time and space for reflection of current praxis in schools, and such structural preconditions are in place.
- Teachers are offered systematic prospects of competence enhancement to benefit from such structures.
- There is a focus on accounting for conditions as well as outcomes