



SICI Workshop 21-23 November 2012 – Paris/Sèvres-CIEP Teacher Performance Assessment in a Context of Change and Innovation

Closing remarks by Marie-Hélène Ahnborg
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Dear colleagues,

This workshop has come to an end and it's time to close the session. It has been an interesting three days, just as inspiring as I thought it would be. The choice of theme couldn't be more strategic and engaging. At the end of the day or at the end of this conference we all agree on the significance of the teacher. As has been said several times during this conference – the quality of an education system can't surpass the quality of its teachers. We know from different studies that what really matters is what is going on in the classroom, the everyday performance of the teacher in interaction with its pupils.

We do also agree upon the importance of professional learning. All professionals need to reflect upon their own practice. To be able to do that you need an external point of view, a critical friend looking at your way of teaching, some constructive feed-back in a respectful and professional dialogue. What we experienced from the school visits yesterday, was that this is often exactly what is going on in the individual inspection of teachers in France. I think that many of us were impressed by the way the French inspectors handled this professional dialogue, with integrity and respect and in a supportive way. No one could say that this is not important, that it is useless, leading to nothing. As Xavier Pons summarized the analyses of the class observations yesterday – It was an intense professional moment, it *must* be useful!

After establishing these agreements we may see that we still have some different points of view on where these individual inspections should take place. Who should do it and in what function? Is it the role of a national or regional inspectorate or is it the role of the local board or of the headmaster? If there is such a thing as a national inspection, what should be its role in relation to the local authorities and to the school itself? Here we still have our differences and it must probably go on that way. One of the questions that were asked on the first day was: Should inspection be the same everywhere irrespective of cultural background and other differences? The answer to that must be NO. The aim of international exchange shouldn't be interpreted as a wish for mainstreaming. It shouldn't be understood as an ambition to erase all differences and becoming all the same. I rather

hope that the SICI networking should help us to understand ourselves better by looking at others and to understand others better by looking at ourselves from other perspectives.

These remaining differences must be understood in the perspective of the different contexts in which we, as inspectorates, exist. The development of our inspection systems and our different inspection traditions must be understood in relation to the goals and objectives that have been set up, what purpose the inspection is serving. If the main task for a national inspection is to contribute to raising national standards, the inspection system has to be constructed in a specific way. But if the main purpose is to stimulate professional development of teachers then it has to be carried out in another way. If the inspection should assert the right of each individual pupil then you have to use other criteria, tools and methods than if the purpose is to assert national equivalence. If the main purpose is accountability rather than support you must construct the inspection system in line with that. Certain countries use the inspection as a tool for transparency giving the citizens possibility to be informed about how schools are run, something that is seen as a legitimate right for them as taxpayers. Openness and public reporting of the inspection results in such a context are of course essential elements. In other systems the inspection is seen primarily as a way of supporting schools and individuals within schools, helping them to become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, giving them advice on how to improve their practice. In such a context it is much more important that the inspection results are presented in a less open, more intimate and trustful way.

We also need to understand how responsibilities are distributed in our different education systems. In a centralized system such as the French it is quite adequate that the state should so to speak look after, check up on its teachers because there is no one else doing it. But in a decentralized system with a high degree of autonomy the role of the state must be different and a national inspection must have another function.

The question is not which system is the best. The question we all should ask ourselves is: Do we have the system that serves its purposes, that is adequate within its context? Even here we might need help from outside. We need an external perspective and the OECD reviews may very well serve as this external help pointing out our strengths and weaknesses that we are unable to see for ourselves. It is my belief that even these SICI workshops, where we have the opportunity to reflect upon our own systems just by answering questions about it, can help us widen our perspectives.

SICI has a slogan – Better Inspection – Better Learning. Let us not forget that whatever we do, however we do it, in whatever context, the ultimate purpose is to contribute to the learning of every student. We all know what the consequences are when schools are failing in giving children a solid ground of knowledge. It costs too much not only in terms of personal suffering but also when it comes to unemployment, social and other problems causing trouble for the whole society. We really need to think about inspection in this perspective and I believe this is one of the biggest challenges for an inspection in the 21st century.

Someone asked yesterday: Can inspection be a driver for change? I am personally totally convinced that it can. It is not a coincidence that SICI will go on arranging workshops on the theme of Change and Innovation. The next SICI workshop will be held in Malta in March and will focus on how inspection can ensure both equity and quality in education.

Finally I would like to thank our hosts for this extremely well organized conference. Thanks to CIEP for hosting us in such a beautiful building. Thanks to IGEN and IGAENR for the professional arrangements. Special thanks to you, Daniel Charbonnier, for your elegant way of leading us through the programme. It has been a pleasure for us SICI EC-members working together with you in preparing this workshop. I would also like to warmly thank you all French inspectors for letting us look into your work in such a generous way. And thanks to you all participants for your contribution to the lively and fruitful conversations that have taken place during these three days.