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Chapter 5

Finnish Quality Evaluation Discourse: Swimming Against the Global Tide?



Hannele Pitkänen

Abstract This chapter discusses Finnish quality evaluation in comprehensive education, recognising that it frequently differs from that used by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) in most countries. Instead of high-stakes testing of pupil achievement, monitoring or school inspection, Finnish quality evaluation (QE) rests mainly on sample-based national testing and self-evaluations conducted in schools and municipalities. The argument presented here is that, although reform of the Finnish education system has often taken a different path from other countries, at the level of discourse, the Finnish system is increasingly caught between the more usual approach to QE and the Finnish variant approach. This follows an analysis of the emergence and formation of the present quality evaluation discourse, consisting of historical layers of discursive practices of school-based development, performance and market-oriented quality. Between the rationalities of these discursive practices but also in relation to recent political concerns about the QE system, it remains to be seen to what extent the Finnish system is able to resist the power of the discourse into which global ideas and rationalities of quality evaluation have been imprinted.

We have recently witnessed a global megatrend towards evaluation,¹ which has permeated different sectors of society and realms of life. It has become institutionalised and is also part of our everyday experience. In the words of Peter Dahler-Larsen, we have experienced the emergence of the “evaluation society”.²

The shift to evaluation has also been evident in education, manifesting, for instance, as a rise of an ‘invasive culture of the educational evaluation’³ and the ‘global testing culture’.⁴ Along with these, the idea and practices of quality evaluation (QE) have become incorporated into the everyday settings and practices of education and education policy-making—from the classroom of the smallest school to the highest levels of transnational policy-making. Currently, it seems, quality evaluation and its various forms and techniques, such as national and international large-scale student achievement testing, policy programmes and curriculum evaluation,

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auditing, accreditation, school inspection, teacher evaluation and many practices of school and teacher self-evaluation⁵—has become a somewhat natural and obvious technique for governing education across the globe.⁶ These techniques of QE and continuous evaluation and monitoring of education aim to improve the performance and quality of education at all levels of education systems to meet the manifold requirements of the global economy.⁷

The spread of evaluation and the global testing culture in education is no isolated phenomenon, but a key part of larger developments in education policy and governance occurring throughout the education system since the 1980s and 1990s. These pervasive education policy reforms combining policy technologies and related rationalities of marketisation, managerialisation, decentralisation, consumerism, choice, etc., all manifesting the performativity and ethos of excellence, have been described as travelling global education reform ‘packages’.⁸ Building on the work of Andy Hargreaves and colleagues,⁹ Pasi Sahlberg has applied the notion of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) in analysing this trend of converging policies; “the transfer of education policies across country borders.”¹⁰

According to Sahlberg, GERM has manifested in different ways across countries but shares some fundamental underpinnings. It rests widely on the adoption of market-based and managerial solutions such as school choice, school autonomy, competition in raising standards and quality of education. The policy techniques of quality evaluation and standardised large-scale testing have also often been found at the core. The rationality related to these policies in GERM is to hold teachers and schools accountable for pupil achievement. As Sahlberg puts it, according to the logic of GERM, “school performance—especially raising student achievement—is intimately tied to the processes of evaluating, inspecting, and rewarding or punishing schools and teachers”.¹¹ In this understanding, quoting Lawrence Angus, “school failure [is] being represented as the responsibility of schools and individuals, and as being due to the inadequacy of the educational ‘product’ rather than to the socio-political, cultural and economic factors that affect school performance”.¹²

The roots of GERM are in neoliberal education policies in Anglo-Saxon countries in the 1980s,¹³ and since then have spread to education systems across the world as a policy solution to problems in the quality and effectiveness of education. Nevertheless, as noted by many researchers, instead of improving the quality or effectiveness of education, the enactment of these reforms and quality evaluation policies has been to the detriment of the calibre of education. According to Martin Thrupp, the negative impacts include “... ‘teaching to the test’ and the fabrication of results, narrowing of the school curriculum, an increasingly instrumental view of teaching, the valuing of some students over others, and damaging effects on students’ conceptions of themselves as learners”.¹⁴ Additionally, these reforms, including increased reliance on test scores and evaluation data and related teacher evaluation systems, have negatively impacted on professional culture and professional relationships in school by increasing anxiety, encouraging competition and discouraging collaboration and collegiality in the school community.¹⁵ Finally, an argument of many scholars in the fields of sociology and the politics of education has been that going with GERM has not only fundamentally altered the rationalities

and techniques of governing education, but also of thinking of education and what it means to be educators and educated.¹⁶ As Stephen J. Ball has put it “the novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are”.¹⁷

In recent years, GERM has continued its expansion across education systems and locations, especially those traditionally quite receptive to it,¹⁸ although this globalising effect of GERM and even the adoption its techniques depend on the context. For example, Antoni Verger and colleagues have pointed out that national large-scale assessment results can be used both to support education improvement or trigger competition and sanction ‘underperforming’ schools.¹⁹ This means that the same policy technique may be supported by diverse rationalities and used for a range of purposes. As Jaakko Kauko and colleagues have concluded, policy reforms are always attached to context sensitivity, path-dependency and contingency.²⁰

The Finnish education system has traditionally been unreceptive to mainstream global quality evaluation policies. Hard and harsh sanctioning policies utilising the evaluation data and forming part of GERM have not been put in place in Finland. For example, instead of high-stakes testing of whole age cohorts and sanction-oriented school inspections, the Finnish quality evaluation of comprehensive education has relied mainly on national sample-based student achievement testing and thematic evaluations, and on autonomous local level self-evaluations.²¹ The purpose of these is to further develop education,²² not sanction or blame and shame schools or educators, which is rather common in more punitively-oriented systems.²³ From this point of view, it might be concluded that global policies have not reached the Finnish education system, or that the impact of these policies has been minor. As colleagues and I have pointed out elsewhere,²⁴ the Finnish education system has been developing against global trends and has had some success in doing so.

Nevertheless, by analysing the history of rationalising local evaluation in the Finnish quality evaluation discourse, this chapter aims to challenge the success story of resistance to global pressure. This builds on our recent argument²⁵ that the success of Finnish quality evaluation policy, resting for instance on cross-party and administrative political legitimacy and professional support and having continuity and stability over time, has been more partial than complete. We claim that this is especially the case when reflecting on it through the most recent changes in policy discourse,²⁶ in which more centralised control over quality evaluation is anticipated.²⁷ This chapter shows the significance of international trends in shaping Finnish discourse since the 1980s, even though GERM has not been emulated in actual practices of quality evaluation. Considering recent trends in Finnish quality evaluation policy, the question arises whether the Finnish system is slowly but surely becoming more attached to global patterns.

In what follows, I present a short overview of QE in Finnish comprehensive education at present before briefly explaining the genealogical methodology underpinning my analysis and then discussing Finnish quality evaluation policy discourse itself.

Quality Evaluation in Finnish Comprehensive Education

The evaluation system of Finnish comprehensive school currently rests on two main pillars, national-level evaluation and local-level evaluation of education. The regional-level evaluation falls between these main pillars. Additionally, Finland participates actively in international evaluations such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS.

National-level evaluations are co-ordinated by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), an independent agency responsible for the evaluation of education at the national level. The actual evaluations are conducted with co-operation from other Finnish evaluation and research organisations. National-level evaluations consist of assessment of learning outcomes in relation to the aims set out in the curriculum and of thematic and system evaluations with varying foci. All evaluations are based on the politically confirmed national evaluation programme. Assessment of learning outcomes has recently focused mainly on assessing the outcomes in the mother tongue, namely Finnish and Swedish (both of them official languages in Finland), studies in foreign languages (English) and mathematics.²⁸ The thematic and system evaluations focus on some specific content package or theme. They may focus on the carrying out of some policy programme or curriculum reform or evaluate the general state of education. For example, recent thematic and system evaluations in comprehensive education have focused on the educational transitions of pupils from diverse backgrounds and on the implementation of local evaluations and of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act.²⁹ In contrast, regional-level evaluations tend to focus on education from the point of view of basic service; how this service is provided in the respective regions.

Local education providers, mostly municipalities ($n > 300$), are required by law to participate in external national evaluations. However, these have been conducted as sample-based studies, so that the results can be generalised across the entire pupil population. The principle of sample-based testing together with the development orientation in evaluations has been a pioneering aspect of Finnish education policy intended to prevent the adverse effects of publishing evaluation results as league tables and to avoid competition between schools.³⁰

The other main component of the Finnish quality evaluation system is local self-evaluation on which the Finnish evaluation system heavily relies. This includes evaluation organised and co-ordinated by education providers but also school self-evaluation. The idea of school self-evaluation supported by education provider emerged in the 1980s, was adopted into the curriculum and educational legislation in the 1990s and has been emphasised since then.³¹ Reflecting the strong tradition of municipal autonomy and public trust in the school institution and the professional calibre of teachers, education providers and schools are independent in their evaluation policies, with no binding national framework or model for local-level evaluation. The foci and methods of evaluations therefore vary between education providers and schools. To guide and assist education providers and schools in their self-evaluation,

the Ministry of Education and Culture has published quality criteria for basic education.³² These quality criteria, by nature, are recommendations only. Around 40% of education providers have reportedly used them as quality evaluation tools.³³

Finally, taking all these elements together, the idea has been that the quality evaluation conducted at each level of the evaluation system should be mutually supportive. Nevertheless, most weight has been put on local self-evaluations. On several occasions, the local level has even been seen to constitute the basic structure for Finnish quality evaluation of basic education, supported by the other elements, especially national-level evaluation.³⁴

Methodology: Analysing the Origins of the Quality Evaluation Discourse

Finland has clearly taken a path different from other countries following GERM in quality evaluation. Drawing on my earlier genealogical analysis on the Finnish quality evaluation discourse from 1970 to 2010,³⁵ this chapter presents an account of the socio-historical formation of that discourse. My key question has been: Does the Finnish quality evaluation policy discourse express different rationales of QE policies than those found globally?

Generally, genealogy can be characterized as the history of present. It aims at providing a socio-historically framed account of how the current situation we live in has come to be. Therefore genealogy takes as its starting point the knowledge, idea, phenomenon, practice or issue which is considered self-evident, normal or taken-for-granted in the societies we live in: 'socio-historically formatted truths', as Michel Foucault calls them. Then it looks back at history and studies the socio-historical constitution of that truth. This is done by focusing on incidents of emergence, mobilization, transformations and disappearance of rationalities, conceptualizations, ideas or practices related to it. It also focuses on relations of power supporting and productive of studied discourse and 'truths'. By doing so, the genealogy challenges the current taken-for-granted and shows its socio-historical groundedness and relation to the multitudes of relations and forces of power operating in society.³⁶ These changing truths are approached and analysed here as discursive practices, which can also be thought of as historical layers in the formation of the current discourse.

This chapter, stemming from these analyses, illustrates how the current discourse, especially the idea of local quality evaluation conducted in schools and municipalities, is a result of the entanglement and multi-layered mixture of these socio-historically changing and emerging discursive practices. Each of them had contributed to the formation and transformation of the quality evaluation discourse by incorporating and merging their specific kinds of 'truth' and rationalities into it. As each new discursive practice has emerged, it has inserted a new historical layer into the studied discourse. Therefore, discourse is considered to be in continuous

formation that is shaped by relations of power prevailing in a society. The chapter pays attention to the relations of international and global trends and discourses with the Finnish discourse. The original research drew on educational legislation and the curricula of comprehensive schooling and more than 400 different kinds of texts intended to guide, direct, steer, or promote local-level self-evaluation during the period researched. Due to space constraints in this chapter, only a compact account can be presented.

Next, I present a genealogical analysis of those rationalities and practices here referred to as discursive practices, along with the prevailing understanding of quality evaluation as a normal and continuous everyday practice of schools and education providers. I also challenge the prevailing understanding of Finland's position running so utterly contrary to global trends. A realistic account finds Finnish discourse being an integral part of the global flow, and therefore, inseparable also from complex relations of power, those productive of and conditioned by globally mainstream discourses.

The Discursive Practice of School-Based Development

Local evaluation, the self-evaluation conducted by schools and education providers, is currently required by Finnish law and the national curriculum. It is now assumed in Finland, and also elsewhere, that self-evaluation is necessary to improve and ensure the quality of education in the context of global economy.³⁷ In genealogical terms, this idea has become a truth of our present.

In the early 1970s 'quality' was not so much discussed or problematised. Rather, it was taken for granted that the national curriculum, if correctly put in place, would ensure a reasonable and equal level of education for each and every pupil in Finland. School inspections by the regional inspectorates and supervision by local boards, central evaluation and steering bodies of that time operated in support of this rationality by controlling and evaluating whether the legislation and orders were indeed complied with and thus equality and level of education ensured. In this context, the idea of teachers and schools conducting systematic self-evaluations was inconceivable and beyond the scope of what can be said and done within the limits of the prevailing discourse.

The early idea of local self-evaluation emerged in the Finnish education policy discourse at the turn of the 1980s,³⁸ at the dawn of strong deregulation and decentralisation policy, and the related abolition of the traditional school inspection system and supervision by school boards which used to exert evaluative surveillance and control over schools.³⁹ The idea developed in the context of the rise of the discursive practice of school-based development in response to the prevailing education policy discourse emphasising top-down bureaucratic planning and regulation of schools. The essence of the emerging view was that, instead of the bureaucratically imposed top-down governance and reforms, school development should come increasingly from the grassroots level, from the schools themselves.⁴⁰ As part of this new school

improvement policy, highlighting the role of schools and teachers in the continuous development of schooling, the idea of school-level self-evaluation advanced. It was reasoned that self-evaluation should constitute a regular phase in the continuous cycle of the pedagogical development of each individual school⁴¹:

The starting point is school-based development. A key principle is that all schools should undertake more evaluation of their own activities and to seek solutions to reduce and eliminate problems that arise.⁴²

This understanding of school-based development, widely manifest in both Finnish education policy documents⁴³ and the professional literature⁴⁴ in the mid-1980s, was supported by the knowledge base provided by the school effectiveness and school improvement movement originating in the USA and spreading to other continents and also to the Nordic countries.⁴⁵ One of the core elements of the school actively developing itself—known as the self-reforming school—was that schools continuously evaluate themselves as part of their pedagogical development⁴⁶:

One of the main goals is to make the school self-renewable. This means that the school continuously evaluates its own activities and resolves the problems that arise.⁴⁷

As a result, the view gained ground in policy and curriculum documents that schools should, independently and continuously and as part of regular practice, self-evaluate their activities and develop them according to the national aims laid down for education.⁴⁸ This meant that not only were individual teachers expected to evaluate and reflect on themselves—an idea which had also prevailed at least since the 1930s in teachers' professional discourse⁴⁹—but it was also an expectation directed towards the whole school institution as a pedagogical community. In this way, the discursive practice persuaded individual schools and teachers to think about themselves as capable of actively developing both their school and Finnish school education in general, instead of being mere operators of top-down organised school development and objects of direct governance by way of administrative rules and the legislation. For example, the National Board of General Education proclaimed:

One must generally strengthen teachers' confidence in their own abilities, the importance of their work and the fact that it is possible to develop activities in each school through their own efforts.⁵⁰

By the 1990s interrelated discursive practices of performativity and customer-oriented quality began to emerge, giving rise to new discursive layers and practices in the Finnish quality evaluation discourse. The prevailing practice and idea of school-based development would be caught up in these emerging practices, but only on the margins and thus represented in the developing discourse on the quality evaluation of Finnish comprehensive education. Today, some three decades later, fragmentary traces or vestiges of the basic idea and practices of school-based development are still discernible in the current discourse.⁵¹ For example, one valid quality criterion still states:

The quality of the processes and structures of comprehensive education can be approached from the perspectives of school improvement and effective school studies focusing on

those traits' characteristic of well-functioning schools. [...] In development-oriented schools the self-evaluation and development of the operations based on systematically collected evaluation data will be highlighted.⁵²

The Discursive Practice of Performance

Reflecting the rise of GERM and the growth of managerialism in particular, the discursive practice of performance developed in the Finnish discourse in the 1990s at a time of severe economic recession and cuts in the public sector.⁵³ Earlier, policy discussion in education had focused mainly on inputs and principles, rules and pre-regulated processes aimed at governing education. Now the discussion turned to focus on performance and the outcomes of basic education.⁵⁴ The central policy idea was that targets and resources would be given to schools and education providers, which in turn would become responsible for the attainment of such targets.⁵⁵ The means of monitoring the outcomes of education would be the evaluation of the performance⁵⁶:

The basic idea [of performance based management] is that the school itself is allowed to seek the means for the result after the goals and financial resources have been agreed upon. This creates a clear link between the performance goals set by the school and the evaluation.⁵⁷

Similar changes in the rationality of governing and related political technologies of decentralisation and deregulation appeared across the entire Finnish public sector and administration in the 1990s. These changes were greatly influenced by the managerialist New Public Management doctrine (NPM), which at the time was being widely adopted across western economies and the OECD countries.

The emergence and constitution of the practice of performance in education relates strongly to these NPM-influenced rationalities, technologies and knowledge, but cannot be understood as any straightforward application of them. Rather, it was a mix of these NPM-derived ideas and prevailing practice in school-based development, which emphasised continuous cycles of development and self-evaluation by school staff.⁵⁸

This interface can be illustrated by practice around the evaluation of performance. Throughout the Finnish public sector and administration, the demand to evaluate the performance and outcomes of public services was increasingly acknowledged. An evaluation model focusing on economy, effectiveness and efficiency, the three E's of NPM doctrine, was developed for the public sector.⁵⁹ However, the general model for the public sector was deemed to apply only partially to the education sector. This reflected the prevailing educational discourse, according to which education and its outcomes had some specific traits which were not easily measured⁶⁰ or compared with the results of other sectors. This was due, for example, to the idea that the most important results are not apparent until decades after formal education has ended:

The results of the educational institution are very many, obviously. It is impossible to achieve residual assessment data on these.⁶¹

The impact of an educational institution extends back decades, throughout the lifetime of a person. With such a broad view of impact, it is impossible to measure or even estimate.⁶²

Thus, the Framework for Evaluating Educational Outcomes⁶³ was modified to take into account the special nature of education and educational outcomes, although through the dimensions of effectiveness, efficiency and economy highlighted by NPM doctrine. According to that document, education should be evaluated on these dimensions not only at national level, but at the local level, in schools and municipalities. Finally, the results from each of these levels should interact with each other to generate an overall and holistic picture of the outcomes and performance of Finnish basic education.⁶⁴

In the discursive practice of performance, the goal was not only an all-encompassing picture of education and its performance but primarily the emergence of an evaluation culture and related evaluative attitude which teachers and schools should espouse. This was promoted through projects and extensive literature on quality evaluation, mostly prescriptive or educative in nature. In these, teachers and schools were strongly positioned as professional subjects only if they internalised a willingness for and aspiration to continuous self-evaluation. It was deemed essential that teachers and schools develop an ability and aspiration simultaneously to be able to self-evaluate themselves and be evaluated; to be subjects and objects of evaluation⁶⁵:

The objective of the evaluation of the performance of the school is to develop the school's activities in a determined manner both for the pupil's learning and growing and the development of community activities. It is often about changing attitudes and mindsets and creating a new working culture in schools.⁶⁶

Talking about performance orientation in the context of the school world is essentially an attitude approach; it is a question of culture rather than purely economic aspects.⁶⁷

Whereas within the practice of school-based improvement self-evaluation appeared as a separate phase within the cycle of the pedagogical school development, now it appeared as an omnipresent activity and expected attitude.⁶⁸ This also prompted a question of the role of self-evaluation in the production of evaluation knowledge if its subjective nature was acknowledged. In highlighting the practices of self-evaluation, the idea evolved that, despite striving towards objectivity in self-evaluation, we must live with the subjective nature of self-evaluation.⁶⁹

The discursive practice of performance that evolved at the interface of NPM doctrine and school-based development peaked in the 1990s and early 2000s. The notion of market-oriented quality also entered the picture in the mid-1990s. Yet the practice of performance was dominant and remains in current discourse together with market orientation to quality. This can be seen in the quality criteria associated with basic education as published in 2012:

Evaluation is/means the evaluation of the performance of basic education in which the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations will be taken into account. Evaluation will serve to investigate how the curriculum and targets set for education have been realised and how effective the education is.⁷⁰

The Discursive Practice of Market-Oriented Quality

Following the rationality of GERM, approaching quality and school performance as quantifiable and presentable as numbers and being manifest e.g., as customer satisfaction, the market orientation to quality has become more important in the 2010s. This has been accompanied by the construction of the idea of ‘quality school’ in the Finnish quality evaluation discourse.⁷¹ In this frame, quality school is a replica of an idealised business organisation with a strong customer orientation:

The quality of the school is identified by how well the needs of the client can be taken into account and how the professionalism of teachers can be used to meet the needs of the clients.⁷²

Continuous evaluation and excellent results became highlighted also as elements of quality school:

The outstanding school community continuously evaluates and measures the realization of its strategies and goals, and also achieves excellent results consistent with objectives.⁷³

The most influential model of such organisations in the Finnish context has been the EFQM [European Foundation for Quality Management] model promoted in many Finnish publications about the quality of education at school and municipal level.⁷⁴ Along with the spread of these models and their adoption in influential education governance documents there has been a strategy to produce a ‘quality school serving the customers’ as a symbol of organisational excellence. In this discourse, teachers and schools as well as municipalities as educational providers are positioned as the servants of educational client-citizens. School is supposed to endlessly strive for excellence in every respect, and this is rendered quantifiable by reflecting on and evaluating the school organisation through the calculation model of quality presented by these quality evaluation models. Thus, total quality would be the representation of the calculated sums of performance in each predetermined sector of the organisation. For example, according to one of these models, in the total quality of the school management accounts for 10%, strategy 8%, personnel 9%, processes 14% and performance in customer service 20% of the quality of the school.⁷⁵ Most importantly, the traditional core of the education, teaching and learning, remains as only one element in the quality of education, and the focus on quality calculation increases in the organisational elements of the school. Thus, education and learning are supplanted, and quality of education appears as universally applied market-oriented quality decontextualised from the specificities of school, education and pedagogy.⁷⁶

Conclusion: An Unhelpful Mythology?

This chapter has sought to provide a realistic account of Finnish quality evaluation of education by challenging and modifying the argument that it has been resisting

the global tide. This was done by providing an historically sensitive analysis of the emergence and construction of the idea of local-level evaluation in the Finnish quality evaluation discourse. Three diverse discursive practices were cited as fundamental to the constitution of the current discourse. Each of them has had its moment: school-based improvement in the 1980s, performance in the 1990s and market-oriented quality since 2000, but all of these are embedded and mixed into the current quality evaluation discourse. Central to the argument of this chapter is that each of these has its roots in internationally travelling policy discourses, including the school effectiveness and improvement movement, the New Public Management doctrine and the EFQM model together with the idea of a universal quality school.

Additionally, arising from the analysis, I identify three tendencies in the Finnish quality evaluation discourse which support the claim regarding the impact of GERM on the Finnish discourse. First, since the 1980s we have witnessed a gradual intensification of the idea of evaluation in the production of knowledge of the quality and performance of education. In the early 1980s, the focus of evaluations was limited to very specific areas of school development. Currently, stimulated by the discursive practices of performance and market-oriented quality, the discourse embodies the notion that each aspect of education should be known through the practices of quality evaluation. I call this intensifying tendency the pursuit of overarching knowledge of education through the practices of evaluation.

Second, quality evaluation becomes enshrined as part of the everyday practices of education and education governance. Once a single phase in the development of education, evaluation is nowadays expected to be a constant component of the 'quality work' done at schools as an integral part of normal work at school. I call this tendency the normalisation of evaluation in education practices.

Third, the ethics of the inevitability of self-evaluation emerges along with the consolidation of the evaluation culture. In this evaluation culture, teachers and schools are considered professional and ethical subjects only if they internalise the pursuit of better performance through the practice of continuous self-evaluation. In these settings, evaluation becomes an internalised attitude indispensable in the pursuit of universal excellence of education, determined and scored by the quality evaluation models. I call this tendency the ethics of the inevitability of self-evaluation.

These tendencies, arising from and constituted by the discursive practices of school-based improvement, performativity and customer-oriented quality, are closely related to the basic ideas and rationalities embedded in GERM and in internationally disseminated quality evaluation policies, which see continuous quality evaluation as a central technique for improving the quality of education.

At the same time some understandings and countertendencies have buffered these GERM-related tendencies of the discourse. The intensity of these understandings has varied over time. There has been the principle of an immeasurable variety of education. According to this understanding, the outcomes of education cannot be totally converted into numbers or quantifiable results. By measuring or quantifying education, something important and valuable to education and the educated will inevitably be lost. This understanding has been slowly fading in recent decades. Another principle and countertendency is the idea of the vagueness and subjectivity

of self-evaluation. Despite the firmly entrenched idea that QE should capture objective and reliable knowledge about education and its performance, there has also been a view that the subjectiveness of self-evaluation should not harm the aim of the evaluation. These countertendencies in the Finnish discourse around quality evaluation may have limited the rationalities of GERM in the Finnish discourse. Thus, they may constitute some previously unnoticed countertendencies to global hegemony. At the same time, recent developments have introduced evaluation and quality work in the form of internationally disseminated quality models such as EFQM, thus it may be a mistake to overemphasise the way that Finland is swimming against the global tide.

Overall, if looking at the current quality evaluation practices in comprehensive education, the Finnish case definitely still goes against the rationalities and techniques of GERM. But when focusing on the rationalities embedded in the Finnish quality evaluation discourse, there is still a drift towards the global mainstream. It remains to be seen whether these parts of the Finnish discourse going with GERM will become more powerful over time, or if Finland continues to go against the flow. This is an urgent matter to consider given recent pressure towards stricter and more centralised quality evaluation policies in Finland.⁷⁷ For example, the Finnish Government has called for ‘clear and binding quality goals’ and related indicators and systems of open data to monitor and ensure the equal access and quality of ‘educational services’ across the country.⁷⁸ The existing Finnish quality evaluation discourse, shaped by global policies and discourses, is partly supportive of adopting these stricter and standardising quality evaluation policies and practices.

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