

# Chapter 3

## The Role of Evaluative Thinking in Generating, Evaluating and Scaling Innovations in Learning: A Case Study of the Greenland Education System



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Photographer: Lars Demant-Poort

**Abstract** The Greenland education system has had an impressive growth over the past 50 years. But how are things with the quality and content of the primary school? The role of national government versus local government in countering the quality of learning is examined. What types of objectives are being set, what is being monitored and for what purpose? The chapter discusses the overall objectives for the education system, how context shapes evaluation culture and conditions for

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D. B. Hirshberg et al. (eds.), *Education, Equity and Inclusion*, Springer Polar Sciences, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97460-2\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97460-2_3)

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development, and how reforms inspired by foreign countries do not make sense if country and regional specific contexts, needs, stakeholder involvement and capacity building are not considered.

**Keywords** Education policy · Decentralized education governance · Accountability · Policy tools · Evaluative thinking

Much hope is pinned on education in general to yield enhanced productivity, economic growth, social development and poverty reduction. However, for education to deliver on these expectations, it must be of sufficient quantity and quality to lead to meaningful learning among young people, a task known to pose considerable challenges globally. Are education systems generating, evaluating, and scaling innovations in learning, and if not, why not? In twenty-first century complex systems there is a need for continuous innovation, assessed through co-learning (within and across classrooms, schools and regional administrations; and to ministries). Among the key responsibilities of leaders at all levels of the education system are to clarify system goals and to articulate and monitor the progress being made toward achieving them. To aid this process and responsibility, evaluative thinking is a process that enables ongoing adaptations to address the ever-changing learning needs within the classroom, school, regional, and government environments (Kuji-Shikatani et al., 2016).

In order to understand educational outcomes across the Arctic, education must be placed in a historical and cultural context. Many students are the first generation in their families to get an education, exemplifying the education traditions among the different post-colonial societies and populations across the Arctic. Yet, this way of explaining the trajectory of the primary education system and level of education in the Arctic is incomplete, as it assumes that the development of an education system follows an apolitical template for how one should go about developing a system of education based on the needs of the people. Education in Greenland has been highly prioritized both in terms of resources and political will since the 1980s, where the education sector has been in the forefront in the post-colonial development policies, and yet the country has not seen the desired educational outcomes. The objective of this chapter is to give a critical view of the architecture of the Greenland education system: how the governance and institutions are structured, and how formal education systems and cultures fit with the principles, language, and culture of the indigenous populations in Greenland.

This chapter identifies the conditions for evaluative thinking and sense making across the multi-level education governance system in Greenland, where at least 80% of the schools are rural, in the quest of developing the education system in terms of better outcomes and cultural compatibility. This chapter argues that, in order to understand how educational change unfolds in the Arctic, it is necessary to analyze and describe (1) the governance and institutional structure, in order to map the conditions for change; (2) the motivations and behavior of governments and policymakers; and, ultimately, (3) how these all impact the conditions for education reform.

### 3.1 Literature Review

This section discusses the underlying foundations and the rationales for evaluative thinking in order to create conditions to use the information collected in the monitoring processes for development of the status quo. Getting all parts of an education system to work together is difficult, and the agencies responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating education policies often lack the capacity to take on this role (World Bank, 2018). However, failure to tackle these technical and political constraints can trap countries in a low-learning, low-accountability, high-inequality equilibrium.

A key function of evaluation in governance is the promotion of democratic accountability and transparency. In general, accountability systems refer to the mechanisms and instruments used to ensure that individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions meet their obligations (Hatch, 2013). Accountability generally consists of three phases: (1) an information phase, (2) a debating phase, and (3) a phase of consequences and sanctions (Schillemans, 2008). In education, phase 1 consists of the schools providing reasons for their actions, explaining themselves and passing information about their performance to the accountees (central or regional government); the accountees in turn pass judgment on the performance. In phase 2, the information at hand is discussed, which then in phase 3 formulates positive or negative consequences (praise and promotion, more freedom, naming and shaming, formal disapproval, tightened regulation, discharge of management, or ultimately, termination of school).

In education systems, a conceptual distinction can be made between two different accountability forms: external accountability (also referred to as bureaucratic, hierarchical, or vertical accountability) and internal accountability (also referred to as horizontal and professional accountability) (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Elmore, 2004; Firestone, 2002; Levitt et al., 2008). The external accountability model is a top-down and hierarchical model, where schools are understood as an instrument for education policy on the national, regional and local level. External accountability is when system leaders assure the public through transparency, monitoring and selective intervention that the education system performs the tasks that are set in accordance with societal expectations and requirements in relation to legislation. It enforces compliance with laws and regulation and holds schools accountable for the quality of education they provide. Schools and teachers are held accountable for the quality of the education they provide – measured as student test results and / or other quality indicators. Formal authority alone may be used to enforce compliance in the external accountability model, but that authority can be reinforced with performance incentives such as financial rewards or sanctions.

Internal accountability arises when individuals and groups assume personal, professional and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), and therefore presupposes non-hierarchical relationships. It is directed at how schools and teachers conduct their profession, and / or at how schools and teachers provide multiple stakeholders

**Table 3.1** Four forms of school accountability

Vertical and external	<p><b>Regulatory school accountability:</b> Compliance with laws and regulations, focuses on inputs and processes within the school. Mechanism: Reporting to higher levels of school authority.</p> <p><b>School performance accountability:</b> periodic school evaluations. Mechanisms include: (1) standardised student testing, (2) public reporting of school performance, and (3) rewards or sanctions. (Rosendkvist, 2010; Levin, 1974).</p>
Horizontal and internal	<p><b>Professional school accountability:</b> professional standards for teachers and other educational staff. Mechanisms: credible, useful standards and the creation of professional learning communities (Levitt et al., 2008).</p> <p><b>Multiple school accountability:</b> involving students, parents, communities and other stakeholders in formulating strategies, decision-making, and evaluation (Levin, 1974).</p>

Source: Adapted from (Elmore, 2004; Hooge et al., 2012)

with insight into their educational processes, decision making, implementation and results. Each of the two types of accountability can be further divided into two subsections (see Table 3.1 above).

In view of consequences placed on the outcome, in education a distinction between high-stake and low-stake is common (Morris, 2011; Rosenkvist, 2010; Verger et al., 2019). High stake implies that significant rewarding or punishing is coupled to the third phase described above, while with low-stake accountability such a coupling is absent. Stronger forms of sanctions are not necessarily more effective or influential than weaker forms (Schillemans, 2008), as the context surrounding a school is decisive for what is possible to do with the available resources and opportunities at hand. According to Fullan et al. (2015), it is more important to invest in the issues that develop internal accountability than to increase external accountability, as the importance of internal accountability precedes external accountability across the entire system. Put another way, the internal accountability of the institutions must be present, if the intention of external accountability is to be achieved.

## 3.2 Methods

The chapter examines the role of evaluative thinking in the political drivers of the Greenland primary and lower secondary school system and its impact upon learning outcomes for students. It does so within the context of addressing the overarching research questions, including:

1. what quality inscriptions and infrastructure are used in education policy monitoring and making?
2. are evaluation policy instruments used as they were designed to?

**Table 3.2** Summary of research techniques and data

Research technique	Data
Text analysis of relevant primary documents	Parliamentary and governmental documents and debates
	Municipal documents and debates
	Consultation and reports
	Project plans, budgets and evaluations
Secondary analysis	Internal and external evaluations of policy
Semi-structured elite interviews with key stakeholders	Policy makers
	Municipal leaders
	Representatives of school boards
	Heads of schools
Participation in field-level conferences and events	Teachers
	Observation notes

The research questions explore to what extent evaluative thinking is embedded into the legislative framework, working procedures of the governing bodies, schools and classrooms with the purpose to improve learning outcomes for students. The design of this study was done with the purpose of exploring the above listed research questions through an analysis of the key institutions, individuals and interests of Greenland's education sector. This chapter draws from existing literature and policy reports, semi-structured interviews, and participant observations of conferences and meetings. A summary of the research techniques and the generated data can be read in full in Table 3.2.

The data is analyzed through a political sociology approach to education reform and policy instruments with analytical premises deriving from a historical institutionalism lens. In this respect, it is expected that the politico-administrative regimes to which countries adhere strategically mediate the variegated adoption and evolution of policy instruments in education. A political sociology approach is contextually grounded, in the sense that it is compatible with historical institutional premises on the role of institutions in the mediation of global forces and agendas, but also in the sense that it provides actors operating at different scales with voice and agency in understanding policy adoption. The political sociology approach to policy instruments emphasises that meaning-making processes importantly interact with political, institutional, and economic factors in the production of policies.

### 3.3 The Promise of Education – And the Challenges

The empirical setting for the study is Greenland's public primary and lower secondary schools (grades 1–10, ages 6–16). Greenlands public schools are divided into three stages, all of which must be completed with tests (standardised testing). The

school system, which is one unit, has just about 7.500 students in 73 schools (2018) along the 4.700 kilometer habitable coastline.

Greenland is a young nation that introduced Self-Government in 2009 and has had Home Rule since 1979. Before that, Greenland was a Danish colony from 1721 until 1953, where with the amendment of the Danish constitution, Greenland was recognised as an 'equal society with the Danish', and a county in the Danish kingdom from 1953 to 1979. Since the Home Rule Act assumed the responsibility of education, the education system has undergone many changes. Education has been given high priority and features prominently into the government's social and economic development plans.

One of the fundamental objectives after the introduction of Home Rule was to adapt the educational systems to Greenlandic conditions and culture. The cultural and economic transformation during the 1950s throughout the introduction of Home Rule created significant challenges in the attempt of adapting frameworks, content and context to the educational system. There are two main structural challenges to the adaptation of the Greenlandic education system (Brincker & Lennert, 2019; Lennert, 2018). First, given that the education system was based on the Danish education system, the reality was, and still is today, that for Greenlandic students to continue studying after primary and lower secondary school it is a prerequisite that Danish is their second language and they have a working knowledge of the English language. Second, with only 56,000 people, the small and geographically dispersed population poses many political, economic and governance challenges. Despite the political attention and priority, education quality remains low, as 62% of the workforce still have no education beyond primary and lower secondary school (Statistics Greenland, 2018).

With the basic political consensus being a need for higher levels of education among the population, planning in the education policy front has been the subject of demands for quick results; partly to minimise imported foreign labour, and later, to achieve more autonomy and independence. In 2015, 71% of graduating students (Grade 10) did not achieve qualifying grades in all their subjects (Greenland Ministry of Education, 2015). The quality of education in the Greenland primary and lower secondary school is a recurring theme in both media and political debates. The latest external evaluation of the current framework legislation (adopted in 2002) was published in March 2015 (Brochmann, 2015). The main conclusion was that the weak academic achievements of the primary and lower secondary school in recent years were not due to the content of the legislation, but on the lack of implementation and capacity in the municipalities.<sup>1</sup>

Annual standardized testing measures students' professional skills in Mathematics, Greenlandic and Danish in Grade 3. In Grade 7 students' skills in English are also tested. Annual school leaving exams for the graduating class (Grade 10) are also monitored. But it is one thing to measure, and another thing to do something about

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<sup>1</sup>The methods of the evaluation have since its publication been critiques, including the Teacher's Union IMAK (2015) and Boolsen (2017)

it. According to the World Bank (2018), for learning metrics to be effective, they must overcome two important challenges: ensuring that information leads to action, and minimizing the potential perverse impacts of measurement. To date, there is no nationwide target for the level of the standardized tests and graduating class exams in the primary and lower secondary school nor are there sanctions or rewards behind the performance measurement and management system.

### **3.4 Learning and Evaluative Thinking Based on the Legislation/Education Act – Intentions on Policy Level**

This section looks at how learning and evaluative thinking are articulated at the policy level and what assessment and evaluative tools are used, from the classroom to the Ministry of Education.

The educational system in Greenland is, like in many other countries, characterized by a multi-level governance system (e.g. Burns & Köster, 2016; Wilkoszewski & Sundby, 2014), making the relationship and power structures complex. The primary and lower secondary school grades (Grades 1–10, ages 6–16, hereinafter the ‘school’) compose a municipal school, divided into three stages, all of which must be completed with tests (standardized testing). At the center, *Inatsisartut* (the Parliament of Greenland) set the framework for the activities of the school, e.g. the overall purpose of the school, the minimum teaching hours and the length of the school year, while the detailed provisions and the supreme supervisory responsibility of the quality of education are laid down by *Naalakkersuisut* (the national government). General rules are established for the planning and organization of teaching, compulsory education and the rights and duties of parents, teachers, school administration, municipal government, and rules of appeal and financing, while the daily operation of the schools is run by the five municipalities in cooperation with school leaders and parent school boards. A detailed description and analysis of responsibilities, roles and how these are distributed between primary stakeholders can be found in Lennert (2018).

The 2002 reform<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter the Education Act) fundamentally changed the way teachers evaluate students. The new policy required that students not only be involved in goal setting and planning work for their own learning and schooling, but also that they be key players in assessing and evaluating their own learning, development, and performance (Inerisaavik, 2009). Testing and evaluation based on learning outcomes are therefore very new in the Greenland school culture. Key elements of the school reform introduced new principles for the students’ learning

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<sup>2</sup>A full background and history on the 2002 reform, the cultural compatibleness, how support was sought and the initial implementation efforts can be read in Wyatt (Wyatt, 2012).

and teaching, tools for planning and assessing the teaching; such as learning objectives, action plans, and assessment of educational achievements.

### 3.5 School and Classroom Level

At each school, there are school boards, consisting of parent representatives who, within the goals and limits set by the municipal council, lay down principles for the activities of the school. The learning perspective, based on the fact that each student is an entirely unique person, implies that the teaching is to be targeted to the individual student, in recognition that all children learn in different ways; the Education Act states in §18: *“The teaching must be varied to match the needs and prerequisites of each student”*, and *“is the responsibility of the school leader to ensure that the teaching is planned and organized in such a way it presents challenges for all students.”* In order to do this, the teacher has to know the prerequisites and progression of the individual student, and therefore, §19 of the Act specifies that the student *“in consultation with his/her teachers are to develop an action plan that forms part of the on-going evaluation (...) And form the basis for the student’s further education and training.”*

In practice, these requirements are to be built into the tailored teaching plan’s mandatory learning objectives, and in the indicative teaching and assessment plans. National learning objectives, objectives of the subjects and teaching objectives are stated in an executive order, putting in black and white that the purpose of the school is learning. Each student in collaboration with the teachers are to, at least twice a year, prepare an action plan on how they are planning to meet these learning outcomes. Here, the student, in collaboration with his teachers, must write new individual goals derived from the learning goals. In a separate executive order on evaluation and documentation, the assessment requirements laid out in the Education Act are further specified.

### 3.6 Regional Government and Municipal Council Level

In the municipalities, the municipal council determines the goals and frameworks for the school’s activities with by-laws. The administrative and pedagogical management of the municipal school system is regulated locally by the individual municipality. Supervision practice for whether the schools are living up to the expectations set by the legislation varies from municipality to municipality, but follows the same form (vertical accountability). Data and information are collected by the submission of annual quality reports and school board reports on every school. However, a single model for the form the quality report is to take has not been introduced, and therefore differs among municipalities. The quality report is a requirement in the Education Act (cf. §49). It is the head of the individual school that is responsible for

preparing the annual quality report (cf. §48 paragraphs 2, 3). The purpose of the quality report is to focus on the development at the individual school. The quality report is a tool that must ensure systematic documentation and collaboration between the municipal council, the municipal administration and the schools on the evaluation and development of the quality of the individual school. It is then further stated that the quality report gives the municipal council the opportunity to supervise how the Education Act and local political goals are fulfilled at the individual school and in the school system as a whole, as “*the quality report is an essential tool for Qeqqata Kommunia’s municipal council to take political responsibility for the development of the municipal schools.*” (Qeqqata Municipality, 2013), by-laws, author’s translation). The report must finally contribute to openness about the quality of the school system, which is a prerequisite for quality improvements, according to the Qeqqata Municipality. How the quality report is used in practice, and the disconnect between what is stated in policy is discussed in the following sections.

### 3.7 Ministry and National Government Level

*Naalakkersuisut* are, according to the Education Act, obligated to supervise the municipalities’ administration of the school, carry out evaluations, and collect and disseminate knowledge in order to strengthen the efforts of the municipal council in the field of primary and lower secondary school and to maximize resource utilization. In practice, this obligation is fulfilled by the submission of reports by the schools and municipalities and annual standardized testing.

The Ministry of Education publishes an annual Education Plan, which is an action plan based off the National Education Strategy (The Ministry of Education, Culture, 2015), that contains the initiatives that are to be commenced over the next few years. The Education Plan follows the structure of the Education Strategy and lists the objectives of each education area followed by initiatives to help meet the goals. The purpose of the Education Strategy and the associated Education Plans is to present *Naalakkersuisut’s* visions, goals and initiatives that will contribute to meeting the objectives of the education area. There are two monitored goals for the primary and lower secondary school: the transition rate from the graduating class to further education and the share of trained teachers (teachers with a degree). The Education Strategy also forms the basis for *Naalakkersuisut’s* cooperation with the EU via the Partnership Agreement (European Commission, 2014). The indicative amount for the implementation of the Greenland Decision the period of 2014 to 2020 is EUR 217.8 million. The annual disbursement contains a fixed tranche of 80 pct. and a variable tranche of up to 20 pct., conditional on the performance of the program.

At the same time, the Partnership Agreement gives us a responsibility to ensure that we raise our level of education, that this is done efficiently, that the effort is continuously evaluated, and that the results are carefully analyzed. (Greenland Ministry of Education, 2018)

As a part of the Partnership Agreement, the Government submit an Annual Work Plan and an Annual Implementation Report to the European Commission. The Annual Implementation Report is *a tool for those responsible for the program to diagnose gaps, challenges, and progress as well as identify measures needed to improve progress*. The Partnership Agreement has a reporting obligation on a set of indicators defined in the Performance Assessment Framework.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.8 Is Learning a Priority on a System Level?

In Greenland, it is often politically stated that education is a high priority. Economically, this priority is also obvious when tabulating that the total public expenditure for the education sector in 2017 was EUR 330.9 million, which accounts for 25.35% of the total expenditure of the public sector. However, prioritizing education is not the same as prioritizing learning. The fact is, greater national spending on educational services does not seem to have improved desired educational outcomes much (Pritchett, 2018).

It's already evident on a policy level that there is a shift away from 'the student at the center' and measuring learning the further you get away from the classroom, in terms of the nature of indicators and evaluation tools. On the national and system level, there is much focus on external accountability, where the Education Act, Strategy and EU partnership agreement indicators shape the accountability and monitoring forms. The regulation and supervision structure of the Greenland education system reflects the traditional forms of education regulation elsewhere, known as the bureaucratic-professional model,<sup>4</sup> which is based on arrangements such as the control of conformity to rules, the socialization and autonomy of education professionals and joint regulation regarding questions of employment or curriculum. A vertical and external accountability form is practiced in Greenland, in the form of *regulatory school* and *school performance accountability*, where the primary aim and focus of the supervision is based on arrangements such as control of conformity to rules. Going deeper into the terminology, a *regulatory school accountability* and 'two thirds' of a *school performance accountability* are practiced, as there is standardized testing and public reporting of school performance, but there are no sanctions, rewards, or consequences, resulting in an expensive performance management system, where a lot of resources are spent on measuring.

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<sup>3</sup> A full description of the Partnership Agreement and monitored indicators can be read in the annual planning and implementation reports conducted by the Ministry of Education: <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Attached%20Files/Uddannelse/Engelsk/Annual%20Work%20Plan%202017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The model brings "state, bureaucratic, administrative" regulation and a "professional, corporative, pedagogical" regulation together (Maroy, 2008).

### 3.9 Learning and Evaluative Thinking in Practice – Evaluation and Monitoring with Different Purposes

This section looks at how the Education Act has been put to practice, in a context where “*testing and evaluation is not a part of the Greenlandic school culture*” (Greenland Agency of Education, in Petersen, 2010).

The basic purpose of the 2002 Education Act is that student evaluation, whether internal or external, must be carried out in order to support the individual student’s learning and development (Parliament of Greenland, 2002). Evaluation should also help teachers make appropriate choices regarding the planning and implementation of teaching and thereby target teaching so that it supports the different needs of individual students (Inerisaavik, 2009). The evaluation is furthermore to support each student’s learning competencies, so *that all students can experience an exciting, challenging and meaningful schooling* (Parliament of Greenland, 2002). The question then becomes how this (evaluation) purpose of the school is understood, and whether this understanding is powerfully normative, or whether the system is so fragmented that the intentions did not gain traction.

### 3.10 What Is Measured and Monitored?

Some things are easier to monitor; school building and programs for example, are highly visible and easily monitored investments, aimed at expanding access to education. By contrast, investments to raise teacher competence, or to improve the curriculum are less visible, and monitoring their impact on student learning is even more difficult. Such challenges can, according to the World Bank (2018:176), sometimes prompt education systems to emphasize improvements in access over improvements in quality. In Greenland, this is exemplified by the following quote:

We must ask ourselves whether the existing legislation provides sufficient protection that there is a necessary framework and conditions to ensure proper education for all children in the Greenlandic school. We must note that it does not. Unfortunately, the results testify to that. (Chairman of the Teachers’ Union IMAK, (Dorph, 2015), author’s translation)

There are several paradoxes in that, according to the Education Act, all teaching and other activities must be based on the individual student. The resource allocation models in the municipal budgets, for example, do not seem to take this into account, as most of the resources are distributed according to number of students or other input measures. By only monitoring statistics, the *learning crisis* can become invisible, as monitored data is focused on things other than learning. Therefore, there is a lack of systematic data on who is learning and who is not, and what can be done to improve the situation. An example of this and of the absence of evaluative thinking and coherence for schooling, is that, due to low results in a subject, a municipal council scheduled more teaching hours in the subject, without questioning the quality of the content or teaching.

**Table 3.3** Evaluation instruments at classroom and student level

Internal	External (Standardized testing)
The student's goals and action plans,	Grade 3: Greenlandic, Danish, Mathematics
Ongoing evaluation,	Grade 7: Greenlandic, Danish, Mathematics, English
Presentations of own work in third grade and	Grade 10 (final evaluations): Written proficiency tests and written tests in Greenlandic, Danish, English and mathematics. Three oral or oral-practical tests.
Subject-oriented assignment in seventh grade	
Documentation for students and parents	
( <i>Angusakka</i> ), including proficiency marks (grades 8–10)	

Source: Home Rule Executive Order no. 2 and 3 of 9 January 2009 (On evaluation and documentation in the primary and lower secondary school, and on the final evaluation)

The content of the national supervision report and municipal quality reports<sup>5</sup> are quantitative key statistics and indicators, such as standardized testing outcomes, the number of students, planned, cancelled and completed teaching hours, and the size and qualifications of teaching staff. There is a great focus on the output in terms of standardized testing outcomes, while there is less focus on learning and quality in the planning and evaluation processes. A focus on outcomes, while at times “statistically significant,” explains very little of the observed variation in learning outcomes at any level (Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2015). In other words, success as determined by standardized testing outcomes is strongly prized, while classroom activities that cannot be easily measured receive low priority.

Evaluation instruments at the classroom level can be divided into internal and external instruments (Table 3.3).

The purpose of the supervision is *to see if schools comply with legislation* (Interview, Agency of Education 2019). With the type of data that is collected, the supervision is reduced to focus on input measures that have very little correlation with the quality of teaching or learning. Examining the way the system works and is structured, and access to and the expansion of schooling is a very high priority. The compulsory education commences from the beginning of the school year in the calendar year in which the child reaches the age of six, and ceases after the child has received regular education for 10 years. However, local contexts and conditions often result in being in school meaning being in a building that looks like a school with adults that look like teachers, as the smaller communities struggle to attract

<sup>5</sup>These differ among municipalities. In some, in addition to the quantitative part, there is a focus on the schools having to account for their efforts within the topics “the students’ subject knowledge”, “the students’ well-being”, “the students’ continuing education” and “the teacher’s well-being and professionalism”. In addition, schools have been asked to set goals for the coming school year, within the above topics.

trained teachers. These schools must follow the principles of the Education Act and the specified learning outcomes must be on a par with all other schools in the country. However, there is no systemic, scheduled or standardized follow-up, or consequences if the level of quality is not met, as it is not even defined. This practice means that the purpose of the supervision is reduced to reporting, rather than promoting learning or developing the system. The process compliance culture is exemplified by the quote below, where a municipal director reflects on the drivers behind how their municipality is working with schools and children:

We are working for the system ... not looking at how the child is doing. As long as we work like this we are not seeing the well-being and learning of the children as a priority. (Interview 2019, Municipal Director of Education, author's translation)

This supervision practice, a technical and political construction, can be explained by many factors; however, external pressures and demands, capacity and turnover challenges of employees and teachers result in a focus on things where data is available and things that are easy to measure, such as enrollments, results, and budget allocations. This unfortunate practice continues, in spite of a wish from virtually all representatives from all levels of administration for evaluation and assessment regimes with more tools that yield thick quantitative data that provide more useful and informative results when considering tuning up the system with improvements and innovation (Observation notes, 2017–19). It results in a *low-learning, low-accountability, high-inequality equilibrium* (World Bank, 2018).

### 3.11 Different Interpretations on Key Evaluation and Monitoring Tools

Key components of policy and evaluation tools, based on the interviews and document analysis, are interpreted differently across governance levels. There are different purposes for teachers, school leaders, administrators and policy makers in terms of goals, approaches, indicators and utilization related to evaluation instruments. According to the Teacher's Union, the focus is too narrow:

A prerequisite for developing the academic skills of all children in Greenland is, according to IMAK's opinion, that you have to stop only evaluating the conditions from an economic perspective in relation to the resources used and the results of the standardized testing or to focus on whether some specific teaching principles are applied, as was the case with the Danish Evaluation Institute's evaluation of the school reform. (Danielsen, 2017) (Karl Frederik Danielsen, Chairman of the Greenland Teachers' Union IMAK, 2017)

The purpose of the standardized testing is to see the status of the students in terms of learning outcomes so that the teacher can use the knowledge in the planning of the teaching. With that purpose in mind, one should be careful to use the standardized tests as a national benchmark parameter. (Interview, Agency of Education, 2019, author's translation)

The above quotes illustrate how the same evaluation instrument is being used with different purposes, mainly for benchmarking, and not as stated in policy.

### 3.12 Conclusions – a Perfect Storm of Dysfunction

Many countries are inspired by foreign education reforms and, to varying degrees, import ideas and tools in their own reform efforts. This case study of Greenland shows that, if supervision and monitoring processes do not consider the country-specific contexts, needs, and capacity building, the education system can *get trapped in a low-accountability and low-learning equilibrium* (World Bank, 2018).

In 2002 a new legislative framework introduced elements of coherence for learning, in terms of self-evaluation and tools for assessments of learning, but without evaluative thinking embedded in the system and accountability relationships. Thus, learning is de facto not prioritized. This has resulted in learning assessment tools that are not manifested in practice, in the development work, in the supervision and monitoring processes, or when new policies are developed. Supervision and accountability practice can instead be characterized as being focused on process compliance. And, as learning becomes strangely disarticulated from the internal legitimation of the system itself, as organizational legitimacy is obtained by only collecting statistics. Evaluation instruments at the classroom level, and even the standardized testing, are based on learning outcomes, where the purpose is to put the child's learning at the center. However, they are not used systematically or as intended. There is little collective accountability across the administrative levels of the responsibility of quality learning on school level. The result is a practice where schools and classrooms are like small islands where the monitoring is disconnected and not strategically integrated.

### 3.13 Context Shapes (Evaluation) Culture and Conditions for Development

In Greenland, school legislation is flexible and has delegated decision-making power to local governments and schools in order to best accommodate local needs and requirements. However, it requires a school with competent management and motivated and capable teachers to develop and achieve the policy intentions. Local opportunities in the specific municipalities, towns and settlements in terms of capacity, motivation, culture, prioritization, and knowledge are crucial for whether evaluation tools are used as intended. In Greenland as there is little assistance when a school cannot meet the expectations set in the legislation, and then there is a risk of evaluation instruments not being used for purposes for which they were designed. Resulting in a system where a process of compliance is dominating, and where you stray further and further away from the purpose of the evaluation – to improve learning for children.

Classroom practice is what matters, so in practice it becomes a matter of what is possible and realistic to do with the resources at hand locally. In rural Greenland, where a permanent qualified teacher shortage is a challenge in most places, local

resources are often different. There are good intentions of evaluative thinking and the placement of learning at the center – policies, documents and interviews document it. The challenge is in the capacity, both in terms of employees, implementation, but also in knowledge of what it means to embed evaluative thinking in all processes. Learning is measured with standardized testing, but the majority of the schools are unable to use results for what they were intended. Other challenges (some technically simple, but that take a lot of time) take up much of the work day and overshadow strategic thinking. This results in the evaluation tools not being used as intended, and, in practice, half a performance management system.

The Greenland case shows how an (uncritical) import of accountability form, absence of evaluative thinking, results in an organizational legitimacy based on thin information derived from measures of compliance. There is major political fragmentation among primary stakeholders in the Greenland primary and lower secondary school system, and a prescient need for dialogue and cooperation. The argument is that to achieve coherence (for learning) in any education system, it is imperative that evaluative thinking is embedded in the system, as in order to systematically improve learning outcomes for students, the system must be oriented towards learning and development. However, even if learning is measured, which is the case in Greenland, it does not necessarily lead to action, as the results and the data collected are ultimately not contributing to the improvement of education policies and curriculum for the enhanced learning of students. Evaluative thinking could be a major foundation for developing an education system coherent for learning, and necessarily needs to be embedded in the working processes within the system as a whole. The Greenland case study points to several research directions with global relevance, as to uncover the main facilitators and barriers for the efficient use of learning data in the ongoing monitoring and development processes of education systems.

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