

11 Reflections on Relevance and Quality in School-In

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According to the critique of innovation research, we know that few projects report on their goals or results (De Vries et al., 2016). In School-In, we publish research findings in reviewed articles and books, but we also think that the quality and results of a project can be discussed in terms of international and national relevance and from an external perspective. This chapter aims to exemplify and shed light on these aspects.

A national goal in Norway is to promote innovative capacity and create a culture of innovation in the public sector. Thus, there is a desire for new forms of cooperation and collaboration (Meld. St. 30 (2019–2020)). In School-In, the municipal heads asked researchers at the University of Agder to collaborate on finding answers to their questions. For several years, they had worked together within the project ‘Inclusive Learning Environment’ (Knutepunkt Sørlandet, 2012, 2015, 2017). However, despite the similar measures and efforts provided by the project group (municipal executives), the schools in ‘Inclusive Learning Environment’ developed very differently. School-In was considered a reinforcement measure within ‘Inclusive Learning Environment’ (Knutepunkt Sørlandet, 2017), which had introduced new research on inclusion (Nordahl, 2012; Haug, 2014) as well as theories for implementing new practices (Roland, 2013; Fixsen et al., 2005) to establish and improve inclusive cultures in the schools in the five municipalities. As part of the collaboration, we wanted to explore the different effects of the measures. We also defined the innovation goals together with the project group. In this way, we aimed to facilitate political and administrative support and ownership of the project.

The project School-In built on empirical findings from the ‘Learning Regions’ project (Langfeldt, 2015). The findings from this study showed that the school’s local context could explain the different implementation results. Thus, the starting point for our discussions was the idea that the school’s surroundings impact the school’s capacity for inclusion and that inclusion itself is associated with a locally anchored culture. Therefore, the overall goal for the project School-In was to develop research-based knowledge on the importance of local expectation structures for school culture and how these structures can be changed to expand the school’s collective capacity for inclusion.

Many innovation projects (28%) have effectiveness as their primary goal and outcome, but most of them (40%) do not mention any results at all (De Vries et al., 2016).

Effectiveness and results are the main issues for international innovation research, whereas the Norwegian model of innovation has learning and communication as the primary goal and theoretical framing (Garmann Johnsen & Pålshaugen, 2013a, 2013b). Nevertheless, irrespective of the innovation goals, the public sector as a cooperation partner expects answers to certain questions and justifies investing time, money, and effort in research. Therefore, there was a need for specifying the expected outcome of the study. The study's quality would become salient to the public sector based on the extent to which it succeeded in responding to its expectations. Three aims were essential for the project:

1. To explore how to change the school culture through changing the school organisation's ties to the local community
2. To explore how teachers' participation in work to create change can enable the development of collective capacity for inclusion
3. To explore the potential impact of locally anchored school development on schools' capacity for change and implementation

11.1 Considering quality in the implementation process

Usually, school development processes are characterised as 'top-down' processes, where directives are initiated and implemented by the government, or as 'bottom-up' processes where initiatives arise in a specific school (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015; Gräsel & Parchmann, 2004). Top-down processes tend to fail (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). One reason might be the gap between the government's intentions and the specific needs of each school. Thus, School-In aimed to involve the schools in the development process and ensure the teaching staff's ownership of the innovation. The university was closely connected to the participating schools. Gräsel and Parchmann (2004) would probably relate this study design to a third form of implementation – the 'symbiotic implementation' – which refers to academics and practitioners cooperating on implementing innovations.

Schools also differ in terms of their relationship to the local context, which explains the different school results to some extent (Langfeldt, 2015). Kvalsund & Hargreaves (2009) highlight the importance of considering local school development, and Dalehefte & Midtsundstad (2019) emphasise the benefits of considering the local context in professional development processes. Thus, School-In accentuated the link between the school and the local context and highlighted the school's role and responsibility in coordinating the development processes in the sense of 'leading from the middle' (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015), with 'professional learning communities' being central to achieving success. Success is achieved, for instance, if a programme has caused improved and sustainable cooperation structures in a school, if problems have changed for the better, if measures have caused effects, and if dissemination has taken place (Gräsel & Parchmann, 2004). School-In considered several additional aspects in order to enhance the *process quality* of the project: (1) anchoring the innovation in

the public sector; (2) establishing relevant aims and structures; (3) involving the municipal leadership; (4) practicing shared responsibility; and (5) using existing communication and collaboration structures. Quality considerations in School-In were also linked to the *product quality* of the study in the sense of (6) improved methods; and (7) didactic benefits that can be of use for other studies; and finally, (8) dissemination strategies. These aspects are highlighted in the following sections.

11.1.1 Anchoring innovation in the public sector

The public sector was involved from the very beginning, and public sector experiences formed the basis for our joint work. Even the research application for the Research Council of Norway was written together with the project coordinator (Line Håberg Løvdal), who represented the public sector. She participated in discussions concerning the goals and structures of the project to ensure focus on the knowledge needed in the five municipalities that had already cooperated in the project ‘Inclusive Learning Environment’ (Knutepunkt Sørlandet, 2012, 2015, 2017). Thus, in School-In, existing structures and networks were deliberately used to ensure good communication and implementation structures.

11.1.2 Establishing relevant aims and structures

Ensuring the relevance of goals and structures is one way to obtain quality in innovation projects. The public sector often reports that research efforts do not respond to the knowledge needs of municipal, regional, and state actors (Research Council of Norway, 2018–2023). To meet this critique, the Research Council establishes collaboration programmes – so-called INNOFF programmes – and provides research communities with framework conditions, stimulating cooperation with the public sector to ensure societal effects of research are enhanced (Research Council of Norway, 2018–2023). School-In focused on aims and structures considered highly important for the public sector and was funded by the Research Council of Norway (project code 260539). Knowledge on how to enable schools to expand their limits for inclusion is of high relevance for meeting society’s needs.

11.1.3 Involving the municipal leadership

In School-In, a project group was established, consisting of the heads of the five municipalities and a coordinator. In Norway, municipalities are so-called ‘school owners’ for 1st to 10th grade with the municipal heads being responsible for school development programmes at this level. The municipal project group participated in key decisions in the project, such as formulating goals for the application and financial support, and was also present throughout the project. Each semester, the municipal heads participated in network meetings with school leaders in the participating innovation and control schools, informing themselves of project progress and experiences in ‘their’

schools. They also participated in the meetings with the international reference group, which took place twice during the programme period. In this way, School-In was followed closely by the school owners, who showed genuine interest in the project activities.

11.1.4 Practicing shared responsibility

School-In is a typical example of shared responsibility between local authorities and the higher education sector. As part of the programme's 'Innovation Projects for the Public Sector', the Research Council of Norway requested one of the five participating municipalities to be the owner of the project. The head (Steinar Harbo) of the owning municipality (Vennesla municipality) convened meetings in the project group and was responsible for the economy. The head of the municipality was the administrative manager of the project, while a professor at the university (Jorunn H. Midtsundstad) was the project manager and responsible for conducting the innovation and research in mutual understanding with the project group. Close cooperation and shared responsibility between the two parties were central values in School-In.

11.1.5 Using existing communication and collaboration structures

We used existing regional network structures established by the five municipalities during their project 'Inclusive Learning Environment' (Knutepunkt Sørlandet, 2017). By doing so, there was no need to develop new pathways or define new roles in the cooperation between the school owners, Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT), and the school leaders in the innovation and the control group. Thus, we avoided spending time and effort on establishing information and cooperation structures. This helped us disseminate results and experiences and provide support efficiently throughout the project.

For each municipality, a 'municipal group' was established. When one of the innovation schools participated in the project, the municipal group met to prepare the municipality for the innovation. This group met both before and after the innovation. At the first meeting, the main goal was to establish understanding and trust between the project manager (UiA) and the school's leadership. After the innovation, the project leader reported findings from the innovation, and the school's leadership reported on their experiences. The main goal of the latter meeting was to discuss the recommendations of the research teams for further work and the kind of support the school would need from the municipal leadership.

11.1.6 New and improved methods

The previous chapters present both intervention methods (chapter 5–7, Mental Mapping Response method, Dialogue Café and Reflection Cycle) and research methods (chapter 7–10, seven-step multi-method approach, focus group interviews, video re-

cordings and questionnaires), used in School-In. These methods were carefully chosen due to their characteristics and purpose in the study. A pilot study taught us how the implementation process had to be adjusted, refined, and expanded. Because of the experiences from the pilot study, we improved the questionnaires and the design of the study. We also decided to record the intervention methods for better understanding. Since reflection processes are of central importance in capacity building and learning communities, we captured these processes in the focus group interviews and during the operationalisation of the Mental Mapping Response method, Dialogue Café, and the Reflection Cycle.

The diversity of methods used for research purposes makes it possible to consider the school development from a broader, in-depth perspective. The study design allowed for quantitative, qualitative, as well as mixed-method research. The quantitative part was planned as a quasi-experimental control group design to reveal measurable effects. The qualitative data delivered additional, more concrete information. Brought together in a mixed-method design, the data sources provided a solid knowledge base.

However, the research design also has its limitations. In School-In, we aimed to obtain knowledge regarding systemic structures inside and outside schools (Fig. 2.1). However, a significant part of the data on how the school is linked to the local context and community stems from the ‘inside’ perspective – from teacher and student data (provided in questionnaires). This was done due to the theoretical approach of the study, with the aim of exploring how the teaching staff’s expectations influenced the expectations structures and, thus, the school culture (Midtsundstad & Langfeldt, 2020). A more differentiated ‘outside’ view might have been achieved by asking more people or parents. However, the ‘outside’ perspective was considered to some degree in the local expert interview, the student perspectives (provided in interviews), and through the use of national statistics.

The research findings in School-In are also limited to the small sample size and the selection of schools. All schools in the region were encouraged to apply for participation. We chose a parallel school as a control school for each participating school, matching the innovation school according to size, location, and type. We also ensured that all schools, both innovation and control schools, had previously participated in Inclusive Learning Environment (Knutepunkt Sørlandet, 2017). As the project proceeded, we observed that some of the innovation schools were especially eager to apply, which might have caused a biased sample of schools.

The School-In study asked the teaching staff for their pre-post views in both the innovation and control schools such that we had a basis for comparison with an independent sample. In addition, we conducted the focus group discussions in the innovation schools, which provided the possibility to compare findings from the teaching staff questionnaire and focus group data for validation purposes. In the video study about mathematics instruction, we also had a pre-post comparison with the innovation schools, but no control group.

We did not consider the students’ views at the end of the study, apart from at one school where we were asked to collect data from teachers and students half a year later

as a follow-up. This made this school particularly suitable for a case study (Midtsundstad, Dalehefte, Hillen, Horrigmo & Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø, 2022). In this case, we also saw how important it is to continue the school development process with the whole teaching staff even after the project has ended, because of changes in staff. Some quit while other new staff members were welcomed. In such cases, it is clearly vital that the staff develops a collective memory related to the programme knowledge so that the new members can be familiar with the methods and content of the project.

11.1.7 The didactic benefit of the study

Didactic benefits are typically observed in the sense of ‘teaching effectiveness’ based on students’ learning outcomes (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). In the School-In video study, we linked theory-based supportive learning conditions derived from interest theory (Prenzel, 1995) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) in mathematics instruction to proximal learning outcomes, such as students’ motivation and learning processes.

However, in School-In, we aimed to go one step further and gain knowledge from a systemic perspective, intervening in the school as a whole. In particular, we investigated how the teaching staff – teachers and paraprofessionals – develop and learn, understanding the teaching staff as a ‘learning community’. We also developed measures and working methods for school leaders and owners to support school development processes. The operationalisation of professional development is described in several chapters of this book. This work resulted in an innovative concept for fostering learning in learning communities and organisations – *Organisational Didactics* (Midtsundstad et al., 2022). Our experiences and empirical findings in the study show that this strategy can be very helpful for professional development in organisations. So far, our research findings indicate that this concept can change reflections in teaching staff (Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2021). We assume that this concept is not restricted to school development but that it can also be useful in other kinds of organisations. Hence, more research on this is needed.

11.1.8 Dissemination strategy

Dissemination happened via different channels within the project. Of course, *conference contributions* and *publications in books and journals* were a natural part of the dissemination. Publications related to the project were both international and national and aimed at different target groups, including both researchers and practitioners. Two chronicles were even published in the local newspaper to inform locals about their influence and the contextual role for school development (Hillen et al., 2017; Midtsundstad & Harbo, 2021).

A key dissemination strategy involved the *network meetings*, arranged by the project team to provide information on work and progress in the project. These meetings included representatives from each innovation and control school, the Educa-

tional and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT), and the municipal heads. These meetings provided an opportunity to show gratitude to the control schools for their participation and to allow them to receive first-hand information, since they were to carry out the project after School-In officially ended. These network meetings were arranged every semester and considered only schools that had participated in the study, to avoid influencing schools that would participate later. Thus, the number of participants in the network meetings increased each semester according to the number of schools that took part.

The research group informed the participants of the ongoing project research and the research findings in the network meetings. This was not as easy as it may sound: On the one hand, we wanted the participants to discuss our findings, to get feedback on what they experienced as valuable and useful to their everyday work in school. On the other, we were obliged to anonymise which schools were involved in the innovation. Therefore, we recommended that the meeting participants not reveal who was from a control school and who represented an innovation school. We did whatever we could to prevent others from recognising the participating schools by making it impossible to recognise where and when the presented research had been performed. Nevertheless, on occasion, the project participants were able to identify their own school from the facts presented in our texts, resulting in a need to define special rules for the participants attending the network meetings in order to ensure anonymity: (1) The researchers were not to refer to the schools when talking about the findings; (2) the researchers were to publish data in such a way that it could not be traced back to individuals; and (3) school leadership and teaching staff might recognise themselves, but the researchers were not to disclose the names of the schools. These rules were clarified and agreed upon at the beginning of each network meeting and aimed to instil trust and confidence in the research team's activities. It was of great importance for us that the participants in the schools felt they could rely on our efforts to keep our data collection anonymous and consistent with the rules of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and standards of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

The participants also had the opportunity to exchange and discuss experiences related to the various measures and the effects of the work. They were given the 'homework' task of submitting answers and notes from their meeting to the project leader and the coordinator from the public sector. In the next network meeting, these notes were used to make the content relevant and useful for the participants. These notes were also important for planning the implementation of the innovation in the remaining municipal schools after the end of the project and were, thus, also of particular relevance for the future planning of the municipalities.

Table 11.1 gives a picture of the topics presented, discussed, and worked on in the network meetings during the project. We started with the municipal working groups only, and the number of participants increased from meeting to meeting.

Table 11.1: Network meetings, presentations, and participants

| Semester | Presentations | Participants |
|-------------|--|---|
| Autumn 2017 | Project presentation by the research team Research focus presented by researcher | The municipal working groups in five municipalities |
| Spring 2018 | The project, including how expectations are influenced by how schools organise responsibility | The municipal working groups (5), the school working group in the pilot school, 2 school working groups in the innovation, and 1 control-school |
| Autumn 2018 | Local communities and schools | The municipal working groups (5), 3 school working groups in the innovation, and 2 control schools |
| Spring 2019 | Our working methods and the effect on reflection in the school's professional learning communities | The municipal working groups (5), 4 school working groups in the innovation, and 3 control- schools |
| Autumn 2019 | Modelling the working methods: Dialogue Café and Reflection Cycle | The municipalities working groups (5), 5 School working groups in the innovation, and 4 control schools |
| Spring 2020 | Modelling the Mental Mapping Response method | The municipal working groups (5), 6 school working groups in the innovation, and 5 control- schools |
| Autumn 2020 | Local school development | The municipal working groups, 7 school working groups in the innovation, and 6 control schools |

We learnt a great deal about school culture, expectation structures, and the school's link to the local context. This knowledge has resulted in *products* in the form of articles and book chapters; please see the project website for an overview: uia.no/en/school-in. We have also developed new didactics for learning in organisations (Midtsundstad et al., 2022) and established a website providing other schools with tools that can be used in school development. Thus, School-In provided new knowledge on how expectation structures constitute the foundation of school culture, how to work with expectation structures to cause change and development in a school organisation, and finally, knowledge on how school and support systems can work together on implementing innovations in school. Although School-In emphasises inclusion, ties to the local context, and participation of the teaching staff, this study also contributes general knowledge on school development processes from which other programs can profit.

As outlined above, several aspects were considered in connection with ensuring *process quality* in School-In. In School-In, we have emphasised ensuring quality at both the international and national level; the methods used in this respect are presented below.

11.2 International relevance of the project School-In

We invited international researchers to two *international reference group meetings* at the beginning of the first and second half of the project. The purpose of these meetings

was to ensure the quality and relevance of our research at the global and national level. The international reference group consisted of representatives from international and national research communities and the education sector, and aimed to (1) ensure the quality, relevance, and impact of our research; (2) ensure national and international understanding of the project; (3) facilitate cooperation on developing the research design together with dissemination; (4) enable representatives from the education sector to ensure the national and practical relevance of the project; and finally (5) facilitate cooperation on developing opportunities for local and national implementation.

Our first meeting took place from 11 to 12 June 2018, at the University of Agder. The following participants attended:

Researchers: Prof. Dr. Annelies Kreis (University of Zurich, Switzerland), Prof. emer. Gjert Langfeldt (University of Agder, Norway), Prof. Dr. Aslaug Kristiansen (University of Agder, Norway), Asst. Prof. Dr. Yi-Hwa Liou (National Taipei University, Taiwan)

Participants from the school districts/municipalities: Steinar Harbo (head of the project owner, Vennesla municipality), Line Håberg Løvdal (project coordinator, Vennesla)

The School-In research group at the University of Agder: Prof. Dr. Jorunn H. Midtsundstad (School-In project leader), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Inger Marie Dalehefte (head of the Department of Education), Prof. Dr. Stefanie Hillen; Asst. Prof. Kirsten J. Horrigmo; Asst. Prof. Maria K. Myrann, Asst. Prof. Grethe Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø

To give an impression of how the sessions were prepared, we provide a list of presentations and presenters (table 11.2).

Table 11.2: International reference group I – presentations and presenters

| Presentations | Presenters |
|--|--|
| Background and relevance of the project cooperation | Administrative leader of the project, Steinar Harbo, and the project coordinator, Line Håberg Løvdal |
| Project School-In; research focus and theory development. | Jorunn H. Midtsundstad |
| Similarities and differences between schools. Comparative analyses of expectations | Inger Marie Dalehefte |
| The interplay between School and Place | Kirsten J. Horrigmo & Jorunn H. Midtsundstad |
| Professional Learning Communities in four schools – How do they perceive inclusion as a balance between social and academic needs? | Grethe Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø & Jorunn H. Midtsundstad |
| Mental Mapping Response method | Stefanie A. Hillen |
| Innovation working methods – Dialogue Café and Reflection Cycle | Grethe Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø |

After each presentation, there was an open discussion where the international researchers commented and gave advice for further work. At the end of the meeting, we also discussed the international relevance of the project and the aspects perceived as most interesting for international research by the group members. We also discussed opportunities for international cooperation and affiliation with other research projects with our international guests.

The response from the international research group was highly valued and gave essential input on how we should develop our research further as well as how to establish an international network. For instance, one crucial suggestion from this first meeting was to involve the municipal heads as school owners in the next meeting of the international reference group. They also suggested discussing research findings in two groups; the international researchers in one and the school owners in another. The purpose was to reveal different perspectives. As a consequence, we organised the next international group meeting as recommended by the group.

Our second meeting took place from 4 to 5 November 2019, at the University of Agder. The following participants attended the second meeting:

Researchers: Prof. Dr. Annelies Kreis (University of Zurich, Switzerland), Prof. emer. Gjert Langfeldt (University of Agder, Norway), Prof. Dr. Aslaug Kristiansen (University of Agder, Norway), Prof. Dr. Stefan T. Hopmann (University of Vienna, Austria), Prof. Dr. Barbara Drechsel (University of Bamberg, Germany), Prof. Dr. Elisabet Öhrn (University of Gothenburg, Sweden), assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Pinskaya (Head of Research Group, Effective Schools) & Ph.D. cand. Aleksandra Mikhaylova (National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia), Dr. cand. Livia A. L. Rößler (University of Innsbruck, Austria); Prof. Dr. Unn Doris K. Bæck (University of Tromsø, Norway)

Participants from the school districts/municipalities: Steinar Harbo (head of the project owner, Vennesla municipality), Jon Wergeland (Søgne municipality), Kristin Eide Robstad (Songdalen/Kristiansand municipalities), Bente Voreland (Iveland municipality), Eivind Eikeland (Kristiansand municipality)

The School-In research group at the University of Agder: Prof. Dr. Jorunn H. Midtsundstad (School-In Project leader), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Inger Marie Dalehefte (Head of Department of Education); Prof. Dr. Stefanie Hillen; Asst. Prof. Kirsten J. Horrigmo; Asst. Prof. Grethe Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø

An overview of the presentations and the presenters is listed in table 11.3.

Table 11.3: International reference group II – presentations, and presenters

| Presentation | Presenters |
|---|---|
| Background and relevance of the project cooperation. Research focus and theory development. | Jorunn H. Midtsundstad, project leader |
| The interplay between school and place – possibilities and hindrances for school's inclusion | Kirsten J. Horrigmo & Jorunn H. Midtsundstad |
| Professional Learning Communities in four schools – How do their reflections develop during innovation? | Grethe Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø & Jorunn H. Midtsundstad |
| Describing and explaining the effects and non-effects of the innovation in School-In | Inger Marie Dalehefte & Stefanie Hillen |

After each presentation, the groups (divided into groups of researchers and school owners) discussed the content, and with notes on large sheets, presented their replies and questions so that the presenters could respond. At the end of the meeting, we held a Dialogue Café where the participants discussed our research. The questions discussed were: (1) From your point of view, what in our study would you consider worth further exploring? (2) What do you perceive as the study's impact? (3) In what way is the project relevant from a national and/or international perspective? We were allowed to record the discussions, which made it possible for us to listen to the ideas and feedback afterwards.

The members of the international reference group provided the research team with various ideas and feedback. For instance, they encouraged us to publish experiences and findings from School-In together with practitioners and school owners in order to highlight the special ties and strong sense of ownership within the project, which they found to be quite exceptional. They also helped to ensure the relevance of the project by presenting arguments such as, 'All schools are located in places with existing expectations; therefore, it [the project] is of universal relevance' or 'You seem to have a new understanding of parents' role in the school – to engage them in what the school wants to accomplish through activities.' We were advised to consider who we wanted to influence with what results, seeing that the project directly affected different school system actors. They even provided advice concerning research methods and suggested writing a book with 'stories of change', where each school is presented. Another suggestion was to consider establishing a new school theory that was anchored locally and based on views of expectations. Furthermore, they asked us to be explicit in what we discovered about inclusion and how theory could be developed in this area. Their questions and ideas showed us what they found relevant from an international point of view. Hence, the contributions of the international researchers and the municipal school owners were of great importance to us.

The members of the reference group also had a positive experience of the meetings. They appreciated the organised group discussions and the possibility to discuss the presentations before responding, feeling that this approach safeguarded the process of the task at hand – to ensure and provide feedback on the quality and relevance of

the project. The participants also emphasised the opportunity to discuss together with the municipal heads from the public sector. They were impressed that the different roles in the project were able to collaborate so closely and actively participate in the discussions with their perspectives and views. It became clear how solidly the project was anchored in the municipality. They described this as an outstanding experience they would like to bring back to the research communities in their own countries.

After the international reference group meeting, the project group members met to evaluate experiences from the reference group meeting. The project group members reported positive experiences as well, expressing that their participation had been important in supplementing and clarifying different issues in the group discussions. They reported a perceived emergence of two worlds of research and practice. The discussions gave them a foundation and new perspectives for local work and, as the group members put it, 'confirmed that we are on the right track'. Furthermore, it was expressed that the international reference group had been an eyeopener for understanding contextual issues of education and how Norwegian school culture differs from the school culture in other countries. This led to discussions on whether and how research from other countries should be implemented in the Norwegian school system.

Overall, the School-In team concluded that the participation of international and national researchers and the project group of municipal heads was vital for bringing in diverse perspectives on the presentations and identifying any necessary corrections. The output from these two meetings where participants with different perspectives and contexts came together was an important secondary effect of the project School-In.

11.3 National relevance of the project School-In

From a national perspective, the innovation contributed to new, improved forms of organisation and management by answering how local expectations shape school cultures and what measures are needed to achieve change. The innovation was theoretically based and empirically tested for inclusion and for developing new theories on school development (Midtsundstad, 2010; Midtsundstad & Langfeldt, 2020; Dalehefte & Midtsundstad, 2022; Ingebrigtevold Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2022; Horrigmo & Midtsundstad, 2020; Hillen, 2020). The aim of the innovation was to increase the joint competence and professional development of teaching staff in the sense of 'learning communities'. Other groups of communities in the education sector can also benefit from the School-In experiences, such as kindergartens in the surrounding environment of the schools.

According to the project findings, established expectation structures linked to a school can sustain the development of collective responsibility for an inclusive learning environment in the school's context. Such collective responsibility, combined with the involvement of, for instance, the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT), may help prevent a growing diagnostic tendency and avoid fragmentation of the student and classroom community.

School-In profited from other international research, for instance, the IPN Video Study (Seidel, Prenzel, & Kobarg, 2005), the school development programme SINUS for Primary School (Fischer, Kobarg, Dalehefte, & Trepke, 2013), and the programme Learning Regions (Langfeldt, 2015). However, School-In also presented new innovative methods for challenging and motivating teachers to work towards change, such as the ‘democratic method’ or the MMR method (chapter 4), as well as new combinations of existing working strategies, like the combination of the Dialogue Café (chapter 5) and the Reflection Cycle (chapter 6). Altogether these methods fostered a collective, reflective process towards a common understanding and collective responsibility in the schools.

Through our cooperation with the municipalities and with schools, we sought to enhance school quality via network meetings and an international reference group. By focusing on the importance of expectation structures, School-In provided the education sector with new knowledge concerning how to improve the aptitude of schools for change and development. This knowledge is now offered on a website and available for use by teachers, paraprofessionals, head teachers, and others (uia.no/en/school-in).

Knowledge and methods developed in School-In are transferable to different kinds of schools and can strengthen existing strategies for enhanced quality. Based on the mapping of certain school characteristics, school owners and leaders can improve their competence in choosing measures and working methods that can be effective for tailored school development. School-In created opportunities and measures that allow teaching staff to work in a more efficient, less resource-demanding manner. Staff members also gained new, relevant competence based on findings from their schools and local communities, enabling them to select measures more accurately.

School-In has also found access to pre-service teachers. Knowledge and methods from the project have been introduced to students in teacher education courses at the University of Agder. In this way, students who work in schools during their practice periods or after finishing their studies are already familiar with the School-In working methods and knowledge, and with how working together in ‘learning communities’ can be fostered.

11.4 Conclusion and summary

The general perspectives on quality presented in this chapter show how research design, working methods, and dissemination strategies have provided new knowledge to the research community and the public sector. We have reported on ‘hard facts’ from our data collection in articles and book chapters, where quality is guaranteed through review. However, we argue that quality can also become salient by highlighting the extensive and conscientious work carried out in relation to research instruments, working methods, synergies, and implementation processes, which we have done in this book.

The cooperation between the university and the public sector was very fruitful, and we have learnt a great deal. Above all, we have contributed to new knowledge

together. We would like to thank the reference groups, all municipal heads, schools, head teachers, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students who shared their opinions and thoughts with us. This project would not have been possible without these participants and their willingness to share. Thank you!

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