

# Evaluation voices and perspectives:

## Using Patton's Utilization Focused model

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# The subject of the evaluation

- The Australian Government Quality Teacher Program provided funding in 2003-04 to conduct professional learning activities for teachers in NSW
- *Action learning for school teams* was one of the AGQTP funded activities
- 50 individual school-based projects involved 500 teachers in 110 NSW public schools

# The purpose of the evaluation

- The evaluation focused on the collecting evidence to make informed judgements about the model of professional development supporting schools to undertake action learning projects
- The model of professional development had three elements of support:
  - creation of school-based teams engaging in action learning processes
  - academic partners who worked with the schools as a member of the action learning team
  - external resources including substantial funding and access to personnel from state and regional offices

# The context for the evaluation

- The evaluation was situated in a range of diverse contexts in which teachers had variable knowledge of action learning and of *Quality teaching* as a model of pedagogy for discussion in NSW public schools
- The evaluation had multiple audiences who were intended to receive a return from an investment in a large-scale evaluation:
  - The NSW Department of Education and Training
  - The teachers and school teams participating in the evaluation and future action learning projects
  - The broader educational community with whom the report would be shared.

# The importance of the evaluation

- The evaluation was designed to identify the conditions that supported and hindered action learning as an appropriate and effective form of teacher professional learning
- NSW DET was interested in adding to its knowledge base about the effectiveness of school-based professional learning in an educational environment where funds are devolved to schools to design and implement school-based professional learning
- If school-based action learning is a vehicle for school improvement then the NSW DET needed to understand how this is best supported and sustained

# Why Patton's Utilization Focused model?

The commissioners of the evaluation needed to:

- identify the important evaluation issues to make explicit the critical assumptions underpinning the model of professional development
- empirically test the model for effectiveness as it was applied in situ in diverse school-based contexts
- negotiate a methodology that would maximise the utilisation of the data generated within the school-based action learning projects and minimise the impact on teachers' time to participate in collecting the evidence

- identify conceptual gaps on which the assumptions about teachers' capacity to engage in action learning projects were made
- maximise the opportunities for the evaluators to collect evidence within a relatively short timeline
- ensure that the evaluation process and findings provided new knowledge and understandings in a way that the results could be utilised in future programs

# Why Patton's Utilization-Focused Evaluation Model?

- Evaluation as a particular form of research: more than gathering, analysing & interpreting reliable & accurate data; data & information to make critical decisions about efficacy/effectiveness of projects/programs; decisions oriented towards improving practice; 'objectivity' v 'influencing'



# Why Patton's Utilization-Focused Evaluation Model?

- Previous history of evaluation - many recommendations not acted upon because the specific interests of commissioners & stakeholders (practitioners) not sufficiently taken into account
- 1999 - AERA meeting - panel of international evaluators selected this model as the most likely to lead to improved practice & effective change because Patton (1999)'s key purpose *intended use by the intended users* (p.20)

# Why Patton's Utilization-Focused Evaluation Model? - The Evaluators

- All critical decisions in the evaluation of QTAL were negotiated with the NSWDET Management team (purposes, types of data, selection of case studies, evaluation report structure & style) AND school team members (entry to site, arrangements for interviews, records of interviews, case study accounts)

# Framework and strategies for the evaluation

- Two phases: Extensive (Term 4, 2003)  
Intensive (Term 1, 2004)
- Extensive: analysis of 50 successful project submissions; visits to project sites; analysis of progress reports -->
- Intensive: selection & implementation of 8 case studies (observations, interviews, document analysis); interviews/email conversations with 20 academic partners; analysis of 48 final reports -->
- Content analysis of all data --> evaluation report with 9 recommendations

# Issues: Tensions

- Number & complexity of projects (50 projects, 110 schools, 500 teachers, one teacher - large secondary schools across diverse contexts; small teams to all staff to cross school teams)
- Relatively small budget (\$55,000)
- Gathering sufficient, detailed data V intrusions into teachers' work & time

# Issues: Tensions

- Using a negotiated approach V relatively short time frame (18 effective weeks)
- Developing a broad picture of the pattern across projects & detailed understanding of processes, issues behind the pattern
- Matching critical events of school teams with availability of evaluation team members
- Complexity & challenge of phenomena to be evaluated (teacher professional learning)

# Comparisons with other evaluation models & experiences

- Recommendations acted upon by commissioners
- Participants reported that they enjoyed evaluation experience & found it to be a useful reflection tool
- Negotiation feature was appreciated by both commissioners & participants
- Close cooperation of commissioners & evaluation team despite some differences
- Time and compromise (eg negotiation of case studies; format of report)