



## **Educative Evaluation: Putting Theory into Practice**

## This presentation

- The role of educational evaluation
- Educative evaluation in theory
  - A mission or an approach
- Educative evaluation in practice
  - The challenges
  - The benefits
  - Some processes to make it work

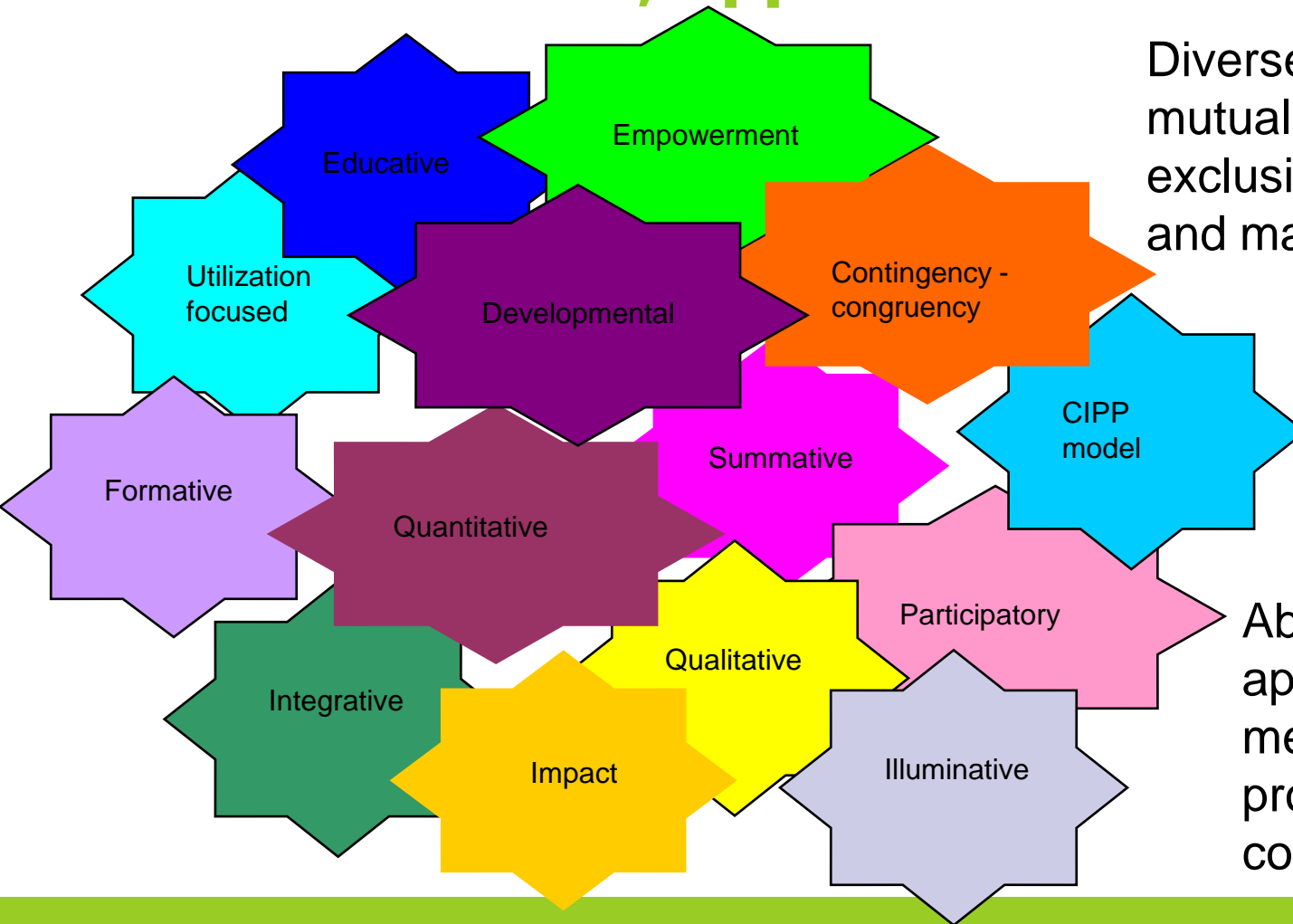
## The need for evaluation in education

- Evidence-based culture in a system that is reform/improvement driven.
- Greater calls for accountability than ever before (external world is now inside schools – protection of loose coupling has gone).
  - Are we heading into a compliance culture?
  - What about professional and moral accountabilities?

## Why evaluation?

- Evaluation determines the merit, worth or significance of something
- Evaluation determines what works for whom under what circumstances (Pawson: realist synthesis)
- Provides evidence on which to make decisions
  - At a policy level
  - At a practice level?

# Models, approaches and methods



Diverse but not mutually exclusive – mix and match

No two evaluations are quite the same

About the right approach and method for the problem being considered

## Some immediate questions

- Does evaluation have a role to play in professional and moral accountability?
- OR is evaluation really only a compliance activity?

**Social betterment rather than use per se is the end of evaluation**

(Mark, Henry and Julnes. 2000. *Evaluation: An integrated framework for understanding and improving policies and programs.* Jossey-Bass)

## Moral and professional accountability

- World Bank evaluation department mission statement is “**enhancing development effectiveness through excellence and independence in evaluation**”
- US General Accounting Office claims that it “**advises Congress and the heads of executive agencies...about ways to make governments more effective and responsive**”

(Grasso, 2003, American Journal of Evaluation)

## Some more questions?

- If the role of educational evaluation is to make things better what are we trying to improve?
- What is the mission statement of educational evaluation?
- What is the role of the evaluator?
- What is the role of the participants?
- What is the role of the client?

## Educative evaluation

- Evaluation which is “**explicitly designed to improve educational policy making or practice**” (Hammersley, 2000)
- Its purpose is to “**bring about worthwhile educational change**” (Elliott, 1990)
- Evaluation should be judged by “**its capacity to resolve educational problems and improve educational practice**” (Carr & Kemis, 1986)

## Evaluation, policy and practice?

- To be educative evaluation has to improve policy and/or practice
- Policy is designed to improve practice to better teaching and learning
- Evaluation acts as the connector/translator between policy and practice – provides information both ways
- To effect change requires practitioners to learn from policy – policy also needs to learn from practice – evaluation can allow this happen
  - Can't change practice unless you understand it
  - Policy which is enacted is that which practitioners understand and share
- Triangle of learning

# Triangle of learning

Evaluation

Informs and  
seeks to  
understand

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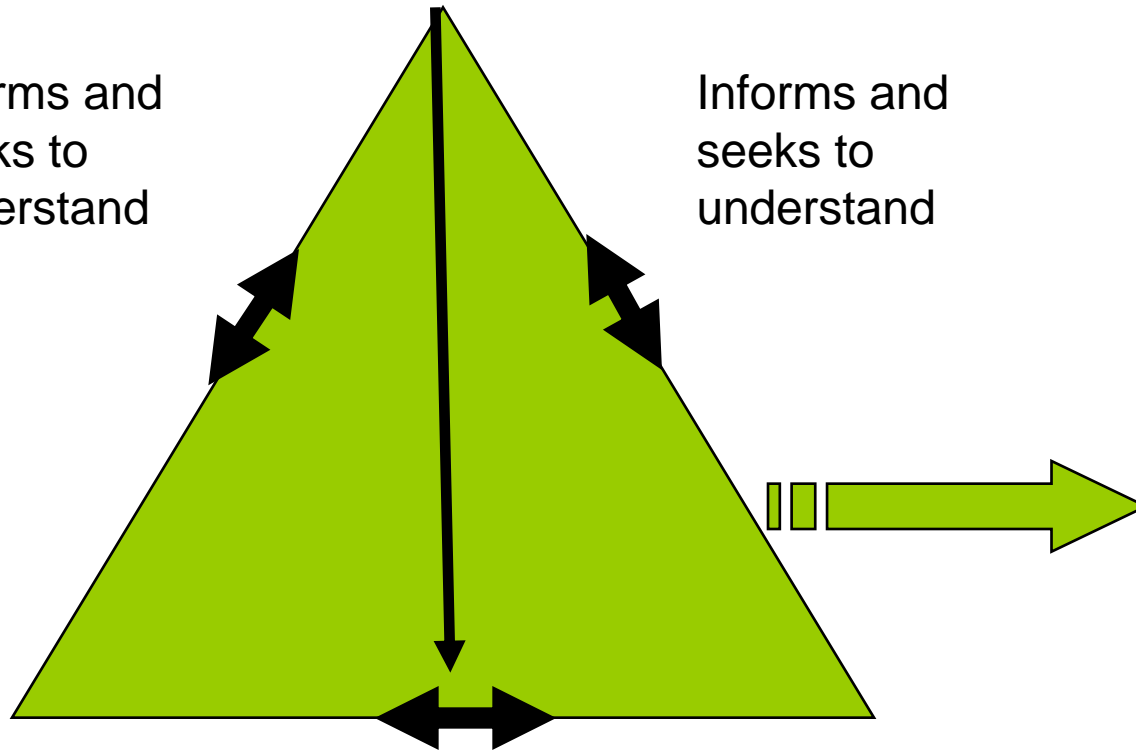
Policy

Practice

Shared understandings  
through translation



Improvement



# What is needed for educational evaluation to be educative?

- It must impact on both policy and practice
- It must be accessible by a range of stakeholders (participants) across diverse contexts and communities of practice
- It must meet the information needs of these diverse stakeholders enabling them to enhance their practice
- It must have integrity, it must be valid and rigorous
- It must be informed by the wisdom of practice
- It must provide answers to problems of practice that all stakeholders recognize
- It must provide all participants with the opportunity to learn
  - Must blur professional learning and evaluation into an iterative cycle
  - Formative and summative in a continuum

## Above all else

- IT MUST BE USED!!!
  - By the right people to make a difference
- It must be utilization focussed (Paton)
  - **If an evaluation is not focussed on being used and on meeting the needs of clients AND other stakeholders it cannot be educative**
- It must reach those who are able to facilitate change and influence practice
  - In education that is school leaders and teachers

# The challenges

- Meeting multiple needs
  - Must meet the needs of those who contract the evaluation and must be useful to those responsible for carrying out the programmes being evaluated
  - These needs must be met without sacrificing the integrity of the evaluation
- Providing information to multiple audiences whose discourses may be different
  - Client may not be the most important audience
  - Those who are generally seen as the secondary audience (school practitioners) are the ones most likely to effect any recommendations or findings
  - “You are eager perhaps to show the audience the clarity and brilliant complexity of the evaluation plan.....DO NOT DO IT. You will bore the audience to death and render the findings indigestible” (Morris et al, 1987)
  - BUT also need a full record of process, a technical report which provides validity and integrity to the work

# The challenges

- Providing timely information
  - Too often the evaluation and policy cycles are not synchronised.
  - Decisions are made before the evaluation is completed
- Managing roles and relationships
  - The evaluator as a hired gun – an expert brought in to complete a specific task
  - Is the client always right? What of evaluation standards and reputations?
  - What is the role of the client in the evaluation – when is there too much involvement?
  - How do you manage expectations that grow as a project develops
- Increasingly there is a need to manage the relationship with reluctant participants – schools increasingly want a valid reason to participate
- Shifting focus and gears when appropriate to do so

## Some solutions

- Use experienced educators in key stages of the evaluation
  - Expertise across the team
- Utilize a range of dissemination methods and discourses during and after the evaluation
  - Summary reports
  - Oral presentations – critical discussion
  - Workshops
- Ensure the methodology and approach is determined by the overriding purpose of the programme in practice
  - Evaluate against authentic, agreed outcomes
  - Be willing to make changes as you discover things

## Some more solutions

- Allow for regular feedback loops and critical discussion at key phases – include professional learning opportunities for all participants as part of the evaluation
- Provide an evaluation which is a continuous process with a shifting focus appropriate for different phases of the project – formative through summative, qualitative and quantitative – need both
- Be flexible – change the recipe – iterative process
  - Needs to be built into the contract!
- Ensure stakeholders are involved to some extent at all stages
- Engage with the client before the contract is signed

## An educative review - Background

- Review of a pilot scheme in schools around NZ
- Intended to support decision making about the future of the pilot
- Had 3 key stakeholders and numerous secondary and tertiary stakeholders
- Was constrained by a tight policy cycle – information demands very early in the review
- Schools had a lot of freedom in the nature of implementation and for the goals of policy to be met they would be crucial

## Some of the practical issues

- Balancing stakeholder involvement with evaluation expertise and rigor – being inclusive and professional!
- Balancing competing stakeholder interests – prioritizing needs and “agendas”
- Retaining a focus and a bounded project
- Professional distance and autonomy – being independent but working with participants
- The audience(s) - a question of discourses
- The nature and role of the final report
- Commercial realities of time and money

## An educative review – The design

- Both formative and summative
- Had 3 key phases - establishment, implementation and impact
- Both quantitative and qualitative (surveys + case studies)
- Iterative in nature – each phase informed the next
- It was developmental in a minimal sense
- Data collection tools were designed immediately prior to each phase – collaboratively with key stakeholders

# An educative review – The reporting process

- At the end of each phase there was a written and oral report
- These reports were summarised for all schools and copies sent to them
- Material was also presented to school advisors working in the schools
- The final report included all the other reports (4 in total) as findings chapters.
  - The report traced the evaluation process and provided technical information & theoretical framework
  - Highlighted key themes which remained constant
  - Was discussion around its usefulness
- Two additional reports have been commissioned to be more accessible to schools

# The reality

- Way over time and maybe budget
  - Collaboration and consultation with stakeholders
  - The extent of feedback to consider & incorporate
  - The added data demands through iterative process
  - The added reporting demands
- The need to manage multiple client interests with evaluation integrity – the false security of distance was lost
- At times it felt like my reputation was on the line for interim or incomplete findings
- It was almost impossible to meet demands of competing interests
- Requires high levels of relationship and project management

## BUT

- The final report and findings did meet the needs of the key stakeholders in terms of decision making
  - It provided an understanding of the successes
  - It described contexts in which the scheme was successful in a manner that could inform practice in other schools
  - It highlighted flaws in the initial policy documents which had not translated well into practice – unintended consequences in time to change them
  - It did make a difference – the scheme did shift for 2007
- The necessary information is out in schools
- Professional learning occurred iteratively across a number of stakeholders

# Professional learning and evaluation merged

- Large scale evaluation
- Aims to answer 2 key questions
- Three way partnership between schools, the Ministry and CCL
- Defined but not yet fully designed
  - Still being held potentially to initial contract
- Each phase of the design process is a learning cycle for participants
- Inbuilt milestones which are learning conversations and workshops

# Professional learning and evaluation merged

- Participants are determining the criteria on which the initiative will be judged in conjunction with the evaluators
  - They bring contextual understanding – we bring expertise and rigour
  - Developing a shared understanding of what is being evaluated and of the evaluation
- Chance to work with participants to make a difference
- Both policy makers and practitioners are participants

# Professional learning and evaluation merged

- Three phases:
  - Relationship building
  - Iterative learning cycles: planning/scoping, evaluation, critical discussions around themes to create shared understandings
  - Final dissemination of recommendations, conclusions in multiple discourses to multiple audiences – there will be a final report – a record of transactions

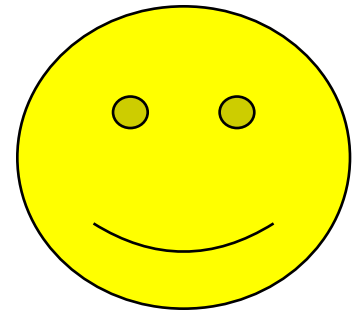
## The big thoughts

- The RFP process makes educative evaluation difficult -  
You get the contract and then you talk
- There needs to be flexibility over time to change things when needed
- There needs to be clear understanding on both sides of the roles and responsibilities of each party – rules of engagement
- The relationships are tricky and time-consuming and this needs to be acknowledged
- Contracts need to be flexible, working documents

Is it worth it?

 YES

 So.....



# Triangle of learning

