
Chapter 1

The Case for Participatory Evaluation: Theory, Research, Practice

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'Show Me'

The teacher's role has and will continue to evolve at a rather sharp pace as schools persevere into the next century with a variety of tensions and conflicts. There seems to be little question that norms of privacy and isolation from peers and colleagues are under siege. At the same time, teachers' resolve to protect longstanding interests and to maintain a territorial stance on classroom decision making is pervasive and strong. Teachers are just plain unwilling to make a fundamental shift simply because a new idea sounds good. Blind acceptance of new direction and expansion in the role is not enough. Not unlike Missouri state automobile licence plates that proudly convey to the world the state's nickname and a people's disposition toward 'high falutin' proposals and ideas, teachers are saying 'show me'.

This book is about the acceptance of a relatively new direction and expansion of the role for educators. In particular, the focus for discussion, debate and deliberation is teachers' and principals' involvement on school- and system-based applied research projects; activities that clearly fall outside traditionally defined reaching roles. All things considered, why on earth would teachers and principals want to become involved in applied research activities, ventures that are entirely likely to spell hard work, heightened anxiety, tension and stress, and general disequilibrium? We have some distinct ideas about the answer to this question. The basis for our ideas is several years of experience working in schools and school systems with educators on applied research projects of local interest. We have seen the benefits and we have seen the pitfalls. We have hurdled obstacles and we have run into brick walls. But we continue to pursue with alacrity, opportunities to work in partnership with our practice-based colleagues and we absolutely delight in their invitations to come back. We understand and accept that our delights are not sufficient to persuade others. We also appreciate that by merely presenting our rationale for embracing collaborative research projects, no matter how coherent, attractive or 'high falutin', we will not even begin to persuade the uninitiated. We know that the proud message of the hearts and licence plates of Missourians defines the path that we must take. That message provides both the starting point and the impetus for this book.
The Case for Participatory Evaluation: Theory. Research, Practice

Professionalization as Inquiry Mindedness

The tensions, pressures and influences confronting schools are many, highly varied and pervasive. As others have cogently considered these influences (see, for example, Glickman, 1993; Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins, 1992; and Murphy, 1991) we will not belabor them here. Suffice it to say that such forces as: rapid movement from industrial to technology-based economies; aging populations; cultural, religious and ethnic diversity; individual rights and freedoms; and the evolving role of the family and its implication for children's educational experiences, provide the dynamic and turbulent backdrop for contemporary schooling. These forces continue to have significant implications for schools, especially in defining the impetus for change and reform.

'Restructuring', yet another over-used and overworked term in educational circles, provides the current handle for intended significant and sustained planned change and school improvement. Restructuring and reform, of course, are by no means peculiar to educators; organizations in both the public and private sector are globally embracing the rhetoric for change. Restructuring in business and industry, however, implies something different from the common understanding in education. There the term suggests a focus on innovation and new product development with the expressed purpose of enhancing competitiveness in the global marketplace. In education, on the other hand, restructuring tends to imply the reconfiguration of organizational roles, relationships, and structures, often in the context of some locally defined and valued end. Elmore and associates (1990) describe what they see as three basic thrusts in educational restructuring

1. raising educational standards, reflected predominantly in calls for 'back to the basics', closer monitoring (testing) of student achievement, and heightened accountability demands on educators;
2. involvements of members of the school community as legitimate and true partners in the educational process, reflected in shared governance initiatives, provision to parents of latitude in selecting their children's school, and general efforts to engage families as working partners in their children's educational experience; and
3. the professionalization of teaching.

This third thrust provides the overarching framework for the present book.

The so-called professionalization of teaching implies significant reform in what teachers do and think. The concept is a slippery one that means different things to different people. Perhaps fundamental to our way of thinking about professionalization is the cultivation and development of a posture of 'inquiry-mindedness' regarding technical core activities, manifest in teachers' genuine participation in the determination of school goals and the means adopted to achieve those goals. The thinking among teachers as professionals transcends the bounds of procedural knowledge or the drive to develop more fully an understanding of 'how' one embraces instructional tasks, and extends more deeply to questioning the very reasons for doing the task at all. Calls for reform in classroom practice and the introduction of educational innovations are not accepted at face value, nor are they rejected out of hand within a general mood of frustration and cynicism. Rather, new ideas are critically evaluated against professional wisdom, a collective understanding of educational purpose and school-specific goals, and a clear and articulated sense of underlying assumptions and values. The emphasis on asking 'why?' invariably precedes questions of technical fidelity.

Organizations as Learning Entities

If we embrace an image of professionalization as inquiry-mindedness, what are the implications for our view of what organizations are and how they operate? One set of theoretical principles called 'organizational learning' provides a suitable framework within which to consider this question.

Although relatively new to the study of educational administration, organizational learning concepts have been considered in the broader study of organizational theory for quite some time (Cousins, in press; Huber, 1991; Louis, 1994). They are premised on the assumption that learning in organizations is not merely the sum of organization member learnings. Herbert Simon (1991, pp. 125-6) comments on the synergistic qualities of learning at this level:

Human learning in the context of an organization is very much influenced by the organization, has consequences for the organization and produces phenomena at the organizational level that go beyond anything we could infer simply by observing learning processes in isolated individuals.

We see here the natural link to the fundamental notions of social interactionism and Bandura's foundational work on social learning theory (1977; 1986). The underlying premise is one of an interactional model of causation in which personal factors associated with individuals, environmental events and behaviors operate as interacting determinants of one another. To follow, we summarize the key features of organizational learning theory as a conceptual context for considering strategies or interventions designed to enhance the learning capacity of organizations.

- **Knowledge representation** Knowledge is represented in organizations in a variety of ways. Theorists (e.g., Argyris and Schön, 1978) differentiate between espoused theories such as one would find in organizational policy documents and spoken utterances and theories-in-use, the image of organizational processes and structures and the causal relationships among them that are held by organization members. When such mental representations are widely held among members, organizational learning capacity is greater. Knowledge in organizations is also captured by organizational routines, codes, documents, stories, jokes, and other symbolic representations. Theorists differentiate between locally created or 'generative' knowledge and knowledge acquired from the environment or 'adaptive' knowledge.

- **Actions versus thoughts** Some organization theorists maintain that organizational learning is reflected in the 'change in the range of potential organization behaviors' (Huber, 1991), but others argue that learning occurs through repetitive error detection and correction, and as such cannot occur unless observable organizational actions are apparent (Argyris, 1993).

- **Levels of learning** Low level, incremental, or 'single loop' organizational learning occurs when the organizational response to stimulus for change is manifest in attempts to build upon existing mental conceptions of operations and their consequences. High or 'double-loop' learning occurs when organization members surface, articulate and reflect on deeply held assumptions about purposes and processes (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Lundberg, 1989). This sort of learning is non-incremental because the
organizational response will occur within a newly formulated ‘mental map’. At an even higher level, one might consider the organization's capacity to learn how to learn, or what Argyris and Schön (1978) call ‘duetero learning’.

- Structural versus interpretive influences Organizational learning theorists maintain that an organizational response to stimuli for change can and, depending on circumstances, will vary from highly rational, deductive and logical to highly interpretive, non-linear and non-rational (Daft and Huber, 1987; Lovell and Turner, 1988). This perspective provides a better fit with what we know about how organizations operate and is a distinct improvement on the highly rational image of organizations portrayed in much of the program evaluation literature, for example.

- Organizational memory A significant feature associated with organizational learning is the organization's capacity to order and store information for future retrieval and, indeed, its capacity to retrieve desired information as the need arises. Organizational memory and production systems are held by organization members and thus susceptible to rapid decay with personnel turnover and forgetting and by physical record keeping and management information systems set up to perform the function (Levitt and March, 1988; Simon, 1991; Tiler and Gibbons, 1991). While the efficacy of storage and retrieval systems is generally regarded as a key dimension in explaining organizational learning, an organization's ability to ‘unlearn’ is also viewed as being critical (Hedberg, 1981; Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984).

Organizations such as schools can engage in a variety of strategies and processes designed to enhance organizational learning capacity and generative and adaptive knowledge bases. Strategies designed to enhance a school's generative knowledge might include, for example, local experimentation or systematic trial and error; ongoing monitoring of performance; simulation and gaming; and general strategies designed to improve internal communications. Strategies designed to enhance adaptive learning, on the other hand, include personnel recruitment; general and focused searches of the school's environment; vicarious learning by observing other schools through, for example, inter-school personnel exchange and visitation; and imitative or mimetic learning (copying). Some strategies such as program evaluation and needs assessment can be thought of as organizational strategies designed to add to either generative or adaptive knowledge bases.

Collaboration as the Key

The implications for schools of moving toward an image of professional and organizational inquiry-mindedness are considerable. Key to this movement is a fully developed conception of teachers' joint work reflected by collaborative curriculum decision making; genuine and direct participation in non-curricular, managerial or organizational governance processes; frequent collegial exchange; and the general dissipation of norms of isolation and privacy when it comes to classroom-based activities. Zahorik's (1987) observation that 'collaboration stops at the classroom door' (p. 391) would give way to norms of professional sharing, joint implementation, and collegial observation and feedback. But if educators accept this image and embrace it as worthy of pursuit they will find the transition to contemporary norms to be fraught with obstacles and challenges.

Researchers in many countries have described the persistence in schools of teacher norms of privacy (Little, 1990), noninterference (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986; Huberman, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Nias, Southworth and Yeomans, 1989), individualism (Hargreaves, 1990), and lack of commitment to opportunities for school-wide decision making (Duke and Gansneder, 1990; Duke, Showers and Imber, 1980; Hallinger, Murphy and Hausman, 1991). These conditions are not particularly consistent with the establishment of collaborative culture as a vehicle for school reform. Huberman (1990) characterized teachers as 'tinkerers' who operate independently in adherence to norms of noninterference, and rely more on their personal, practical knowledge in thinking about their teaching than on interaction with peers. Leinhardt and Greeno (1986) amplify the notion of teacher independence by elucidating expert teachers' preference for on-the-spot decision making with minimal pre-planning. Hargreaves (1990) developed an explanation of persistent teacher isolation based on the merits of individualism rooted in an ethic of care and service. The demand on teachers' time away from class was suggested to be a sufficient deterrent to collaboration. Some researchers (e.g., Campbell and Southworth, 1990) even go so far as to say that teachers are ill prepared to collaborate and lack the capacity to work in groups.

Some critics of collaborative activity as a reasonable route to desired change in schools, have framed their arguments in terms of reward structures, suggesting that collaborative work will diminish intrinsic rewards available to teachers. Intrinsic rewards are defined as feelings of satisfaction arising from personally meaningful intangibles such as pride in student achievement, collegial stimulation and support, the glow of service, and enjoyment of teaching activities (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986). Extrinsic rewards are defined as organizational mechanisms for benefitting individuals, such as pay awards, and promotion to positions of added responsibility that confer prestige and/or power. Such rewards are virtually nonexistent in the 'flat' teaching career (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986). Indeed, leadership strategies focused on the distribution of extrinsic rewards (Blase, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1989), including merit pay and career ladder systems installed to enhance teachers' performance through incentives have met with less than satisfactory results (Bacharach and Conley, 1989; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991; Tyack, 1990). What is not clear is whether intensified teacher-teacher interaction will act to curtail the availability to teachers of intrinsic rewards, or, indeed, to enhance them.

Some would argue that under the right conditions, teachers' joint work may either enhance the availability of intrinsic rewards for teachers or provide an additional source of them (e.g., Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986). Empirical support for this proposition is beginning to accumulate. In an interview study, for example, Lylte and Feeho (1989) reported that teachers involved in a cross-visitatioin program found their own classes more intellectually challenging, changed their own routines, tended to learn more from students, received validation of their own skills, became more reflective, and improved their view of the teaching profession. Kushman (1992) came to similar conclusions in stating that, 'Rewards were derived from meaningful adult contact, from working together with one's colleagues to solve daily problems' (p. 28). He concluded, as did Rosenholtz (1989) and Louis and Smith (1991), that teachers' joint work can enhance their commitment to the organization. Other intrinsically satisfying activities include participating in the initiation of new programs, witnessing the motivation of others to experiment, and the generation of new ideas through brainstorming (Little, 1987; Nias et al., 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Another outcome attributable to collaborative work cultures is the development of
shared meaning of program implementation and a collective theory of work (Little, 1990; Nias et al., 1989). In the UK, Nias and her associates found that, 'everyday talk was the medium through which shared meanings first evolved and then were continuously and implicitly reinforced' (p. 79). Barth (1989) connected collaborative activity to teacher learning, and Rosenholtz and her associates (Rosenholtz, 1989; Rosenholtz, Bassler and Hoover-Dempsey, 1986) concluded that the ease with which teachers give and receive collegial advice is directly related to their acquisition and development of skills. The link between teacher-teacher interaction and student growth has not been well established (Little, 1990; McCarthy and Peterson, 1989), but some evidence suggests that an indirect link may exist through enhanced teacher efficacy and satisfaction (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Kushman, 1992; Newmann, Rutter and Smith, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1990).

In Canada, we studied a sample of three successful schools (Cousins, Ross and Maynes, 1994) and found that individual and organizational benefits derived from teachers' joint work were to some extent a function of 'depth of collaboration' or the type and degree of sharing among teacher colleagues. For example, deeper, more penetrating forms of collaborative implementation of educational innovations were found to be associated with increased understanding of educational innovations, clarity of interpretation and goals, enhanced communication among teacher colleagues, better knowledge and understanding of students, and the development of confidence, self-esteem and sense of belonging within the organizations. These outcomes for teachers were seen to be distinct from, and perhaps in addition to, the normal instrumental benefits of joint work, such as division of labour and time saving, equitable distribution of resources and the development of collectively owned and supported products (curriculum materials, innovations, decisions, etc.). If we concede that under the right circumstances, collaborative activities among teacher colleagues are desirable, then it remains to be seen which sorts of activities will be most beneficial and useful. Collaborative involvement in applied research activities, we propose, constitutes one form of joint work worth a closer look.

The Case for Participatory Evaluation

What is Participatory Evaluation?

By participatory evaluation we mean applied social research that involves trained evaluation personnel (or research specialists) and practice-based decision makers working in partnership (Cousins and Earl, 1992). Usually decision makers are organization members with program responsibility or people with a vital interest in the program - in Alkin's (1991) terms, 'primary users'. Participatory evaluation is best suited to formative evaluation projects that seek to understand innovations (programs) with the expressed intention of informing and improving their implementation.

In participatory evaluation, the evaluator helps to train key organizational personnel in the technical skills vital to the successful completion of the research project. Essentially, practitioners 'learn on the job' under the relatively close supervision of the expert evaluator while both parties participate in the research process. Such learning is crucial to the participatory model since it is intended that key organization members develop sufficient technical knowledge and research skills to take on the coordinating role on continuing and new projects, and need to rely on the evaluator for consultation about technical issues and tasks, such as statistical analysis, instrument design, technical reporting, and the like.

Participatory evaluation is likely to be responsive to local needs, while maintaining sufficient technical rigor so as to satisfy probable critics, thereby enhancing use within the local context. This feature differentiates participatory evaluation from other similar practice-based research activities.

How is Participatory Evaluation Different?

Participatory evaluation is conceptually distinguishable from various forms of action research and other types of collaborative inquiry on two important, although not independent, dimensions: interests (goals) and form (process). First, traditional action research orientations advocate the simultaneous improvement of local practice and the generation of valid social theory (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993; Whyte, 1991). More contemporary 'practitioner-centred' instances of action research (e.g., emancipatory, critical, educative) are explicitly normative in form and function and have as a goal the empowerment of individuals or groups or the rectification of societal inequities (e.g., Carr and Kemmis, 1992; Gitlin et al., 1992; McTaggart, 1991). Such interests are beyond the scope of participatory evaluation. The approach that we advocate is not ideologically bound, nor is it devoted to the generation of social theory. Rather, participatory evaluation has, as its central interest, seeking to enhance the use of evaluation data for practical problem solving within the contemporary organizational context. A second dimension, form, takes shape in participatory evaluation by having the researcher working in partnership with members of the community of practice. Whereas researchers bring a set of technical skills to the research act, practitioners bring a thorough knowledge of context and content. The researcher works as coordinator or facilitator of the research project but fully shares control and involvement in all phases of the research act with practitioners. This thrust is distinguishable both from traditional orientations of action research where control of the research process is maintained by the researcher (e.g., Whyte, 1991), and from practitioner-centred approaches (e.g., teacher research) where such control lies completely in the hands of the practitioner group (e.g., Elliot, 1991; Hustler, Cassidy and Cuff, 1986).

Participatory evaluation boils down to an extension of the conventional 'stakeholder-based' evaluation model best characterized by the following features:

- The stakeholder model attempts to engage a large number of potentially interested members of the organization in order to create support. The participatory model involves a relatively small number of primary users.
- The stakeholder model involves organization members in a consultative way to clarify domains and establish the questions for the evaluation or research project. The participatory model engages the primary users in the 'nuts and bolts' of problem formulation, instrument design or selection, data collection, analysis, interpretation, recommendations and reporting.
- In the stakeholder model, the researcher is the principal investigator who translates the institutional requirements into a study and conducts that study. In the participatory model, the researcher is the coordinator of the project with responsibility for technical support, training, and quality control. Conducting the study is a joint responsibility.
Why Participatory Evaluation?

The underlying justification for this approach is problem solving in professional work which is closely tied to Schön's (1983) terms: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Through participatory evaluation, organization members may be surprised by what they observe and moved to rethink their professional practice. Unlike emancipatory forms of action research, the rationale for participatory evaluation resides in its ability to ensure social justice or to somehow even the societal playing field but in the utilization of systematically collected and socially constructed knowledge. Our orientation toward evaluation utilization (Cousins and Leithwood, 1986) suggests that under certain conditions evaluation or applied research data will be used either in providing support for discrete decisions within the organization (e.g., decisions about program continuation or terminations, and decisions associated with program management) or in educating organization members about program operation and consequences of program practices. These uses of evaluation data are known to be dependent on two main categories of factors: features of the evaluation itself including its timeliness, relevance, quality and intelligibility; and features of the context in which data are expected to be used, such as organizational need for information, political climate, and receptiveness toward systematic inquiry as a mode to understanding (Cousins and Leithwood, 1986).

This framework for understanding participatory evaluation is inadequate in at least two respects. First, it links the use of data to an undifferentiated individual called the decision maker. To assume that organizational decisions supported by data are the product of single individuals processing information and translating it into action is, at best, tenuous, and probably not representative of decision making in most organizations. Rather, decisions made explicitly or implicitly are the product of some form of collective discourse, deliberation or exchange (Kennedy, 1984; Lindblom and Cohen, 1979). As such it is eminently preferable to envision the nature and consequences of participatory evaluation within the context of organizational groups, units, subunits, and the like. A second inadequacy is that the evaluation utilization framework as described fails to recognize the powerful influences of various forms of interaction between practice-based and researcher-based communities. Considerable evidence is accumulating to show the benefits of combining the unique sets of skills brought to projects and tasks by both researchers and members of the community of practice, regardless of whether or not the tasks are research-based.

In a recent article (Cousins and Earl, 1992) we provide a thorough review of a variety of lines of research-based evidence in support of the participatory research process. A brief summary of the conclusions within each is presented in Table I. I. These findings underscore the importance of social interaction and exchange and the need to conceive of organizational processes in collective and social terms. They also support the integration of research and practice specializations as a means to stimulating enduring organizational change. An appropriate theoretical framework within which to situate participatory evaluation then will be one that adheres to such principles. The perspective on organizational learning and teachers' joint work described above provides such a framework.

Participatory evaluation, viewed from within this perspective, is a strategy or intervention that will produce adaptive knowledge to the extent that it monitors and provides an opportunity for the interpretation of program outcomes and generative knowledge such that interpretations lead to enlightenment or the development of new insights into program operations or effects, or especially organizational processes and consequences. In schools, we see participatory evaluation as a powerful learning system designed to foster local applied research and thereby enhance social discourse about relevant school-based issues. When applied research tasks are carried out by school and district staff their potential for enhancing organizational learning capacity will be strengthened. This requirement of direct involvement in the research process and learning about technical research knowledge will heighten opportunities for staff to discuss process and outcome data and to rethink their conceptions and challenge basic assumptions in ways not previously available. Making explicit underlying assumptions about practice is a necessary precursor to individual and group learning (Senge, 1990). Participatory evaluation will also develop within staff their propensity to be consumers of local applied research conducted by colleagues or others. Partial turnover

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**Table 1.7 Research-based evidence supporting the participatory research process**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line of Research</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Themes and Conclusions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions of Use</td>
<td>Kennedy (1984)</td>
<td>• Conceptualizations, research use are too simplistic, not sensitive to dynamic complexities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>King and Pechman (1986)</td>
<td>• Non-use of research is a legitimate outcome of organizations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980)</td>
<td>• Interpretations of facts are used rather than facts themselves</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge is socially constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and Linkage</td>
<td>Cousins and Leithwood (1993)</td>
<td>• Ongoing contacts and connections between researchers and practitioners regarding research projects will create organizational conditions for sharing and thinking about the meaning of data</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greene (1987, 1988a, 1988b)</td>
<td>• Participation helps develop in practitioners skills to do research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hargreaves (1984)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Huberman (1987, 1990)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Louis and Dentler (1988)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior Training</td>
<td>Green and Kvidahl (1990)</td>
<td>• Prior training in research methods enhances practitioners' receptiveness to research, and consumption and use of research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>McColskey, Altshuldf and Lawton (1985)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Walker and Cousins (1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School-University Partnerships</td>
<td>Goodlad and Soder (1992)</td>
<td>• Partnerships are mutually beneficial to school-based and university-based personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vivian (1989)</td>
<td>• Teachers in partnering schools are more likely to participate in school visitations, professional conferences, review research, form new strategies and alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Evaluation</td>
<td>King and Pechman (1984)</td>
<td>• Internal research units and functions are increasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mathison (1991)</td>
<td>• Such units likely to be highly useful given emphasis on formative issues and proximity to program issues and matters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Empirical research in its infancy</td>
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in personnel from one evaluation project to another will naturally engage more and
more organization members in the process and increase the likelihood and the potential
for organizational learning.

While we have provided a strong rationale for participatory evaluation from avail-
able research-based evidence and from a theoretical standpoint we have arrived only at
a starting point. Much remains to be known about participatory evaluation as a learning
system, particularly concerning its fit with the organization and culture of schools. The
case studies in this book represent a variety of different forays into schools and school
systems viewed through the lens of participatory evaluation. Through them we hope to
achieve a better understanding of how, and even whether, this approach can be useful to
schools on the road to continuous improvement. In this quest, we have many unan-
swered questions that we hope to explore. We are particularly interested in the changes
a participatory evaluation model will require in the way schools operate and in the role
of evaluators and researchers.

Unanswered Questions

Participatory evaluation offers a powerful approach to the improvement of educational
organizations by creating learning systems that enhance organizational learning and,
consequently, lead to better informed decisions. Required, however, are a number of
predispositions and adjustments on the part of both the schools and evaluators working
with them. At least some of these conditions are likely to be integral to the success of
participatory evaluation as school or school district learning systems.

What is Required of Schools and School Systems?

For participatory evaluation to become viable, certain organizational realities must be
taken into account. We have identified five requirements that seem especially important.
First, and perhaps key, evaluation and local applied research must be valued by schools
and districts. There is considerable evidence to support the suggestion that organizational
decisions are made in non-rational, haphazard, politically sensitive ways and that
evaluation, which assumes a rationalistic model of organizations, necessarily will have
limited impact (C.H. Weiss and Bucuvalas, 1980; C.H. Weiss, 1988). Yet evaluation
activities appear to be flourishing. In Ontario, Canada, for example, many school systems
are operating on a cycle of curriculum review, development, and implementation (Fullan,
Anderson and Newton, 1986; Leithwood, 1987), which identifies an integral role for
evaluation. Argyris and Schön (1978) refer to a similar cycle of discovery-invention-
production-generalization in their description of requirements of effective organizational
learning systems. Such patterns suggest that organizations, though not entirely rational,
want to use evaluation information and strive to systematize their assessment of
information through review or discovery. While routine use of data may not currently be
within the organizational culture of schools and school systems, there is reason to suspect
that change in this direction is both desirable and possible.

Second, the administration must provide the time and resources required. This
requirement is somewhat, although not exclusively, dependent upon the first. The level of
involvement of teachers and school administrators in the research process will be
necessarily substantial. Anyone who has participated in a serious applied research project
from start to finish will have a clear understanding of this verity. But it must be assumed
that these folks are extremely busy coping with the daily pressures of their own roles:
teachers, for example, are continually being asked to do more in less time (Sarason,
1990). It is vital, then, that organizations sufficiently free up primary users from their
routine tasks in order for them to meaningfully participate in the research.

Third, and also dependent upon the first requirement, school districts need to be
committed to organizational learning as a route toward improvement. This implies a
need to improve organizational memory concerning the applied research process. The
participatory evaluation process is likely to be highly technical and somewhat foreign to
the normal role of teachers and administrators (Walker and Cousins, 1994). While it
will work toward developing within schools the capacity to carry out these complex
tasks, unless organizational memory is enhanced through, for example, assigning key
personnel to subsequent projects in a cascade approach, or explicitly documenting pro-
cedures and processes to be followed, such development is unlikely to occur.

Fourth, teachers and administrators participating in evaluation activities must be
motivated. These people are likely to face significant challenges and relatively tight
time-lines. Are they fully cognizant of the scope of the endeavor before agreeing to
participate? Can they afford to be away from their organizational function to the extent
that would be demanded by the evaluation? Freeing up personnel from their routine
duties may be a source of resentment for some, the consequences of which ought not to
be taken lightly. What are the personal benefits to be accumulated? What are the
assurances that a useful contribution can be made? What will be the consequences of
participation for relationships with others within the school and district (i.e., subordi-
nates, peers, superordinates)?

Fifth, and finally, it is necessary to assume that staff likely to participate in evalu-
ation activities do not have sufficient research experience and knowledge to carry out
such tasks, but that they have the ability to learn given appropriate training. In educa-
tional contexts, for example, it is well documented that teacher training involves, at
best, only cursory exposure to measurement principles or evaluation techniques (Schafer
and Lissitz, 1987). Given the nature of teachers’ work, it is unlikely that they would
have substantial access to technical research knowledge in their normal routines. Since
their initial participation is likely to be in the role of apprentice, and since only some
would continue on subsequent research tasks, it is not necessary to have all participants
develop extensively their research skills. However, it is pivotal that at least some primary
users have the potential to do so quickly and have the leadership skills to aid in
carrying out subsequent coordinator roles.

What will be the Role of Researchers?

The role of trained researchers in participatory evaluation is a significant departure from
more traditional views of the role. We have identified six requirements of evaluators
that must be met in order for the organizational benefits of participatory evaluation to be
realized. First, evaluators must have the necessary training and expertise in technical
research skills. Since evaluation and applied research have flourished as legitimate
enterprises since the 1960s the availability of such expertise to school systems is not
likely to be problematic.

A second dimension of availability may be more troublesome. Evaluators must be
accessible to organizations for participatory activities. Whether located internally within
the organization or externally to it, significant demands on evaluators’ time will be
generated by the participatory model. Furthermore, time will be required for researchers and practitioners to develop a shared language. The critical importance of effective communication cannot be understated.

Third, resources necessary to the research process (e.g., access to support services, budget for incurred costs) must be made available. This assumption is specific not only to participatory evaluation, but, of course, is inextricably tied to organizational needs and administrative commitment to the process. Again, needs will vary depending upon the organizational location (i.e., internal versus external) of the evaluator.

A fourth consideration is an emerging instructional role for evaluators in the participatory process. Although the conception of ‘evaluator-as-teacher’ is not new (Anderson and J. Weiss, 1983; J. Weiss, 1989; Wise, 1980), we refer here to teaching about evaluation rather than teaching through evaluation. In the participatory context, evaluators must be capable of training practice-based staff in the skills of systematic inquiry. An important consideration, however, is that the circumstances under which such training would occur probably will be less than ideal from an instructional standpoint (e.g., interruptions, time pressures, competing priorities). Evaluators must be sensitive to principles of adult learning and ought to have the appropriate interpersonal and communication skills. Since a significant portion of the training is likely to take place as projects unfold, the exercise is likely to be grounded within contexts familiar and meaningful to practitioner participants.

Fifth, evaluators must be motivated to participate. The goal of empowering teachers and administrators with the technical knowledge and skill to conduct useful applied research is vital and needs to be explicitly acknowledged and accepted by all. Evaluators who are able to transcend an edict of expert-novice professional relationships, and who are willing to share and instruct about their technical expertise will be more likely to experience success.

Sixth, and finally, and also related to the foregoing discussion, evaluators ought to have significant tolerance for imperfection. The training task, as a rule, will be a significant challenge particularly where staff not grounded in prior research experience and training are concerned. Evaluators must acknowledge and accept that errors and mistakes are likely to be common. It is incumbent upon them to anticipate and deal with such mistakes so as to maintain the integrity and necessary standards of technical quality for the research process.

Concluding Remarks
Participatory evaluation in education, then, at first blush, has a bright future. It holds the promise espoused by advocates of collegial work, it is likely to provide a practical and cost-effective alternative and it appears to offer a distinct approach for schools and school systems wishing to develop organizational learning capacity. But the current bank of empirical data is much too thin to warrant unreflective change in this direction. In the presentation and critical synthesis of the original empirical studies to follow we hope to add substantially to this knowledge base.

References


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