Institutional Self-Evaluation: Promises and Pitfalls

Helen Simons
University of Southampton

Victorian Education Department
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Context

This is a series of slides which accompanied a presentation and workshop to the Victorian Education Department. February 19th 2008 by Helen Simons on

Institutional Self-Evaluation: Promises and Pitfalls

Printed slides do not always capture or hold the meaning that was conveyed. The slides need to be read in context with what you heard in the presentation and workshops, the dialogue which followed and any notes you took at the time. They are offered here not as a re-presentation of what was said but as an aide-memoire to stimulate further thinking and development.

Two further slides have been added on request. These are the criteria by which participants in the training offered a critique of their colleagues’ case study evaluations.

Helen Simons 19.2.08
Structure

- Brief history of School Self-Evaluation
- Learning from the past SSE efforts
- Roles and responsibilities for school evaluation
- Language of evaluation
- Case and process of SSE
- Relationship of External/Internal
- Design of Evaluation Training Programme
Key Question

How can we best support schools to conduct quality evaluation to promote quality education
Two separate origins of School Self Evaluation (SSE) mid70s

External Evaluation of Curriculum Reform
- context, professional/institutional development
- main form issue-based
- non-mandatory
- focused on curriculum
- on going part of school development
Origins UK (1) contd.

SSE evolved because external evaluations showed that central reforms failed to:

- engage teachers as agents of change
- understand reforms in culture of institutions
- recognize power of students to determine how they learn
- appreciate the micro politics of school organization
Origins UK (2)

Local education Authorities (LEAs)
- context resurgence of accountability
- main form checklists
- rapid growth, comprehensive
- non-mandatory
- not focused on curriculum or teaching
- best had dual function: comp. review & targeted areas
- no strategy for change
Developments

- Context changed UK 1980s: increased external accountability
- School self evaluation over taken by school improvement/school effectiveness movements
- Role of NUT second half of 1990s - evaluation from within - developments in some LEAs & schools
Developments

- Move to greater Europe late eighties/nineties - range of approaches
- 2000 + Ofsted SEF (Self-Evaluation Form)
- SEF seen by some schools as top down review related to criteria of inspectorate
- 2004-7 UK Govt. New relationship with schools - seven element plan
Other Countries

- Aus. mid-seventies, Teachers as Evaluators Project - School based curric. development
- Late eighties into nineties, Australasia - more related to accountability: School Self-Review
- Norway, Denmark, Sweden (national initiatives)
- Other parts of Europe more localized
- Canada/US different initiatives: early accreditation, school evaluation (some states and local)
Promises

- Change schools from within
- Link teacher develop. with curric. develop.
- Develop relevant education for local clientele
- Provide evidence of a school’s achievements
- Meet external accountability demands
Pitfalls

- Tried to cover too much
- Did not focus on teaching and learning
- No strategy of change
- Little thought for support for teachers
- Failed to engage whole school/community
Learning from past SSE Initiatives

- Voluntary SSE initially only worked in committed schools - half way there - or where supported
- Schools viewed process as time-consuming not connected to real job of teaching;

Mandatory SSE often not seen useful by schools, resistance to imposition, danger of compliance
- Over years attitude /climate has changed - more schools undertaking voluntary school self-evaluation
- Currently growing recognition at national level that SSE required for long term school development
- Yet different ways of trying to ensure this happens & still need to convince some schools.
Learning from Research into SSE

- Schools need support with:
  - Establishing criteria
  - Setting boundaries for the evaluation
  - Using methods & skills in context of evaluation
  - Analyzing and making sense of the data
  - Political & interpersonal skills in sharing of evaluative knowledge
Learning from National School Evaluation Schemes

- Focus on accountability may have taken precedence over school development
- Outcome focus may have led to under-emphasis and documentation of other aspects of education
- Need to consider broad range of achievements and both process and outcomes
- Need to consider who responsible for long term outcomes related to aims of education
- Transparency does not necessarily lead to communication - further process may be needed
Preoccupation with accountability has led to excess of forms/frameworks and lack of specificity as to who is accountable for what.

Over pre-occupation with outcomes testing drowning out education.

Singular focus taken as sole indicator of school’s worth.

Conflation of accountability and management.
Where to Now

- Need to develop/strengthen internal review capability
- Increase usefulness of external reviews
- Examine how to strengthen the relationship between SSE & external review
- How best to do this
Informing Professional Practice
### Roles and Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National political</th>
<th>National professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>performance indicators, student testing, inspection, external evaluations cluster reviews</td>
<td>research/evaluation of policies (teacher unions) in-service, curriculum reviews cluster reviews</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local political</th>
<th>Local professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>school self-evaluation, case studies of schools, communities of learning</td>
<td>teacher &amp; student self-evaluation, classroom process, improved teaching and learning</td>
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Adapted from House (1992)
Roles and Responsibilities

- Role for everyone in evaluating schools
- Do not conflate one purpose for another
- Examine relationships between them and how they each contribute
- Schools and teachers need autonomy and to take risks in order to improve
- Decide appropriately what information is shared with which groups
Improving Professional Practice
School Self-Evaluation
Evaluation

Evaluation is the declaration of the worth of something

- no single determination of worth
- worth is complex, personal, political
- even if agreement, differences in criteria/standards

‘Part of an evaluators’ responsibility is to indicate who finds merit in what and what criteria they appear to exercise’. (Stake 1978)
But...

- Who establishes that worth on what criteria?
- Who gets to know about what and whom?
- For what purpose?
- Exactly what is being evaluated? Who decides?
- Whose questions are being answered?
- How will others receive the evaluation?
- Will they respect the educational values of our school?
Monitoring

- Monitoring is the ongoing collection of information for the purposes of:
  - Compliance
  - Diagnosis
  - Development
  - Evaluation at certain points
School Self-Evaluation

School self-evaluation is a process of conceiving, collecting, analyzing & communicating information to:

- Inform decision-making within a school
- Ascribe value or worth
- Establish public confidence in the school
- Demonstrate professional self-accountability

Meets purposes of:
- Accountability, development, knowledge (Chelimsky (1997))
- Creativity

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Case for school self-evaluation

- Quality of education can best be improved by supporting and strengthening collective professional development of teachers, schools & regional offices.

- Best achieved in collaborative culture where all groups can safely, critically and publicly evaluate their work and conditions.

- Schools which implement process of on-going self-evaluation and open this to public scrutiny demonstrate professional self-accountability.

Source: Simons 2002
Self-accountable professionals

- Not only reflect upon their practice to improve internal working of school.
- Evaluate against criteria and standards
- Research shortfalls in provision/performance
- Respond to changes, experiment
- Evaluate & develop new programmes
- Engage in negotiation, make findings accessible
Process of School Self-Evaluation

- Ongoing process built into structure
- Small team/s within school
- Focus on teaching and learning
- Start small - single issue, two or three
- Methods economical in time
- Participatory/democratic ethic
- Collaborative in intent, conduct and results
- Grounded in theory of school development
Theory of School Development

- school basic unit of change (cf w. curric/teacher/child) to facilitate learning and teaching culture for all
- no curriculum development without teacher development
- no curriculum development (and therefore td) without institutional development
- teachers have major role in theorising curric.change
- requires support-all levels/interpreted in local context
- change is a professional community activity- needs a collaborative culture
Interaction: Institutional, Teacher & Curriculum Development

Institutional development

Curriculum development

Teacher development
Collaborative Culture

- Collaborative culture does not always exist
- Maybe needs shift in value structure of organization e.g. from
  - Privacy to openness
  - Territory to shared critical responsibility
  - Hierarchy to rational autonomy
Strategy for Change

- Share aims
- Share responsibility
- Share conduct
- Share analysis
- Share findings
- Share vision
- Share risk
- Share skills
- Share understanding
- Share action
Framework for the process

- what kinds of self-evaluation - students, teachers, parents, community; why and for whom?
- situational analysis - who can do what
- agreed questions/issues for evaluation
- criteria by which valued - external/internal
- create time for data collection/analysis & discussion
- participatory - all involved (at some stage or differently)
- how to ensure validity and credibility
- transparency of process; ethics of data sharing

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Relationship of External/Internal Evaluation: how to get the best of both worlds
Advantages

**External**
- Outside the organisation
- Independence and credibility
- Difficult to manipulate
- Internal may not have time/skills to evaluate all

**Internal**
- Can be champions, advocates, change agents
- Can set own indicators for success
- Knowing dynamics and politics can facilitate use
- Results can be acted on immediately

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Disadvantages

**External**
- Not knowing the full story
- No or little follow through
- Expensive
- Take knowledge away, unless strong negotiated, interactive process

**Internal**
- Only see what choose to see
- May attempt to hide failure or exaggerate success
- Rarely can influence policy decisions alone, but may do through cluster/national reviews
- No check on validity or immediate follow through of results (exception, post review assistance)
External/Internal: how to get the best of both worlds

Questions for reflection

What is the most appropriate relationship? Who responsible for what?

What should be monitored externally? what autonomy given to schools?

What role might external evaluators/reviewers have in supporting SSE?

How might the role of external review need to change, if at all?
External/Internal: how to get the best of both worlds

- Questions for reflection
- On timing - should SSE precede external review, be concurrent or post review?
- Offer framework or suggest schools evolve own?
- What scope for schools who already self-evaluate to offer peer support?
- Will relationships with other agencies be necessary to provide evaluation training?
How to achieve quality evaluation

- Need to engage all levels but differently
- Teachers best resource - require support/training
- Schools not only teachers/principals - students, parents, governing board
- Creating right relationships & infrastructure
- More dialogue/conversation/interaction of external review with school self-evaluation
Design of Evaluation Training Programme
Example of Design of Training Programme

- Three phases over four months
- Multilevel - primary, secondary schools, area office
- Teams of four from each
- Stage 1 training over 6 weeks; stage 2 process in action; stage 3 conference
- Built in peer critique in training & presentation
- Output a) 10 page case study critiqued by other team b) process account of time, resources and effort

Source: Simons 2002; 2008
Evaluation of the training

- Peer critique - most striking effect on quality of results - increased confidence and sharp questioning
- Participants generated own criteria for critique
- Quality of presentation of case studies professional - excellent one page executive summaries
- Conf - celebration of learning & extension of skills
- Process accounts led to production of a template (grounded in practice) for other schools to use
Criteria for Critique of SSE Case studies in training programme

- Is there a clear statement of the focus & purpose of the study?
- Is the issue chosen for study related to school/district development plans &/or Ministry priorities?
- Are the key question/s appropriately linked to the issues chosen for evaluation?
- Is there a clear statement of the context for, and constraints upon, the evaluation?
- Are the methods chosen appropriate to inform the questions asked?
- How has the team aspired to meet impartiality in the conduct and presentation of the study?

Source Simons, 2008
Criteria for Critique of SSE Case studies in training programme contd

- Is the data valid for the purpose of the study?
- Are the implications for action adequately drawn from the data?
- Has the original question/s been answered?
- Is the study accessible and communicable for the audience/s it aspires to reach?
- Has the study been feasible and useful - to participants, the school and other audiences?
- Has the study been conducted and presented imaginatively and creatively?

Source: Simons (2008)
References


Helen Simons

Professor of Education/Evaluation,
University of Southampton
Honorary Professor London Metropolitan,
University Westminster, London

Melbourne, Victoria February 2008
email: h.simons@soton.ac.uk