

**CYCLICAL REVIEWS
IN SELECTED WESTERN SYDNEY
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS (2006–2009):
THE INFLUENCE ON PARTICIPATING PRINCIPALS**

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Ron Ikin 1935–2012:
my adoring husband, confidante, mentor, work partner, and my best friend.

Ron was a passionate educator, a fanatical football supporter, and a builder and handyman; he was actively involved in politics, ran a newspaper, and was a Fulbright Scholar; he was very good at drawing and painting, and playing a range of sports, most notably table tennis, and was always unbelievably competitive; he was a great story teller; he was quick witted and exceptionally intelligent; he was fiercely determined but unselfish and motivated by what was right; he was a great friend and colleague to literally hundreds and loved developing connections between seemingly diverse people; he was fearless in meetings; he relished new challenges and loved ‘occasions’; he did not know how to retire or sit by idly, and he certainly did not know how to give up.

ABSTRACT

Over the period 2006 to 2009, the then Western Sydney Region of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training developed a Framework for School Cyclical Reviews and piloted these reviews in nine regional government schools.

The study examined the influence the Cyclical Review process had on participating school principals. Insight was sought into the use made over time of both the evaluation processes and evaluation results by the participating principals, including impressions from the principals of the factors that had influenced them in the course of the review.

From the insights gained it was expected to make recommendations about the appropriate selection and preparation of principals for reviews and review teams, and the future conduct of reviews, as well as comment on the usefulness of current research into evaluation influence.

The literature of educational evaluation—its functions and forms, evaluation utilisation, use, and influence; factors affecting evaluation; participatory evaluation; and evaluation capacity building (ECB)—were then explored. The literature suggested four key areas of focus including designing a theoretical model to map evaluation influence; uncovering factors that contribute to influence; effects of participation on principals; and determining outcomes of ECB demonstrated by the principals who participated in the Cyclical Reviews.

A qualitative case-study methodology comparing two groups of principals was undertaken.

Data were then collected from the participating principals, their schools, and the regional Cyclical Review Steering Committee by document searches, questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation. A process—Pocket PCs for Organising Data and Sorting (PPODS)—developed specifically for the Cyclical Reviews was also used to select, enter, and sort the data.

It was found that the principals who advised only as team members in other principals' schools were primarily concerned with problem-solving when outcomes fell short of objectives. This is consistent with the limits of single-loop learning.

Principals who had to understand and apply criteria in the evaluation of their own schools, design evaluation strategies and techniques, and later reflect critically on the quality of evaluation practices and capacities in order to improve the values and assumptions influencing their own practices were shown to engage in deep learning. That is, they were engaged in a kind of learning that fully integrated an experiential learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. This is consistent with double-loop learning.

Four areas were considered in the data analysis: the impact of context, human, and evaluation factors along with unique catalytic values identified by the researcher.

It is recommended that theory and policy partly include consideration of relevant values, methodology, context, professional development, double-loop learning, and national agendas.

It is recommended further with regard to school-based reviews that are cyclical that existing strategies and tools be retained while acknowledging contemporary methodologies, that differential strategies depending on roles be identified, and that selection criteria for participation in the reviews be determined.

Further research examining the role and influence of single and double-loop learning, reviews on student learning, and values should also be considered.

CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Signature

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
CERTIFICATION	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xv
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	xvi
 CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	 1
The Study	1
Background to the Study	2
School Reviews	2
Cyclical Reviews	3
Purpose of the Study	5
Significance of the Study	5
Scope of the Study	7
Definition of Key Terms	8
Department	8
Evaluation influence	8
Cyclical Review	9
Participating principals	10
External and internal reviews and reviewers	10
PPODS	11
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study	11
Research Design	12
Structure of the Study	14
 CHAPTER 2 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	 16
Introduction	16
Historical Antecedents	16
The Early Period 1848–1991	16
Quality Assurance 1992–1995	19
The Period 1996–2000	20

The Period 2001–2006	22
Contemporary Australian State and Territory Practices	28
Victoria	28
Queensland	29
Western Australia	29
South Australia.....	30
Tasmania	31
Australian Capital Territory	31
Northern Territory	32
The Place of the Western Sydney Region Cyclical Reviews within the New South Wales School Development and Accountability Framework.....	33
Cyclical Reviews in Western Sydney Region	35
The Cyclical Review Process	36
The Cyclical Review Implementation Plan	40
Working-group	40
Electronic data collection and sorting process.....	41
Approved and trained group of prospective team members.....	42
Devolution of costs	43
Working-group Structure and Role.....	44
The Reviews.....	46
Steering Committee Structure and Role	47
Summary	49
 CHAPTER 3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	51
Introduction	51
Definitions of Educational Evaluation	52
Definitions of Evaluation Use.....	53
Instrumental Use of Evaluation	56
Conceptual Use of Evaluation.....	57
Symbolic Use of Evaluation.....	58
Symbolic versus legitimative use of evaluation	59
Imposed use of evaluation	60
Evaluation Misuse and Pseudo-evaluation.....	62
Process Use of Evaluation.....	63
Limitations of the Term <i>Evaluation Use</i>	65
Definitions of Evaluation Influence.....	66
Kirkhart’s Definition of Influence and Integrated Theory of Influence	67
Source	68
Intention.....	69
Time	69
Henry and Mark’s Definition of Influence and Schematic Theory of Influence.	72
Mechanisms and processes	73
Schematic theory of evaluation influence	76
Evaluation Utilisation, Use, or Influence?	78
Factors that may Trigger Evaluation Influence	82
Functions and Forms of School Evaluation	90

The Influence on Participants in School-level Evaluations.....	92
Cyclical Reviews as Participatory Evaluation.....	96
Cyclical Reviews as ECB	100
Synthesis of Key Questions for Research.....	106
Theme 1: A Model to Record and Analyse the Data in order to Determine Evaluation Influence.....	107
Theme 2: Knowledge, Prior Experiences, and Factors that Influence Principals who Participate in Evaluation Processes	107
Theme 3: The Distinction between Evaluation Use and Evaluation Influence .	108
Theme 4: Cyclical Reviews as Evaluation Capacity Building	109

CHAPTER 4 TOWARDS A PROVISIONAL THEORETICAL MODEL FOR MAPPING EVALUATION INFLUENCE 111

Introduction	111
Applicability and Shortfalls of Kirkhart’s Model to the Present Study.....	111
Applicability and Shortfalls of Mark and Henry’s Model to the Present Study	114
Provisional Theoretical Model for Anaylsis of Evaluation Influence.....	116

CHAPTER 5 METHODOLOGY..... 119

Introduction	119
The Interpretivist–Constructivist Paradigm	120
A Qualitative Approach to Research.....	122
A Phenomenological Perspective	123
Perspectives from Personal Construct Theory	124
The Case-study Technique.....	126
Data Sources.....	129
Document Analysis	131
Category 1: Documents related to the preparation for and implementation of the Cyclical Review process	131
Category 2: Documents related to specific Cyclical Reviews.....	133
Questionnaire Data from Cyclical Review Process.....	137
Immediate questionnaire returns	139
End-of-cycle questionnaire returns	140
Long-term questionnaire return	141
Interviews	142
Participant Observation	145
Data Collection, Coding, Sorting, and Analysis Using PPODS	150
Methods Used to Assure Trustworthiness of Data	154
Sampling	154
Summary	160

CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS ABOUT FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INFLUENCE 163

Introduction	163
Factors Contributing To Influence.....	163

Human Factors	164
Motivations.....	164
Leadership of the review team	166
Leadership by the host principal.....	168
Human relationships.....	169
Evaluation Factors	173
Data-collection processes.....	173
PPODS.....	175
Structures and resources.....	177
Context Factors.....	182
School culture	182
Training.....	183
Duration and timing.....	184
Team size and composition.....	186
Review focus.....	187
Implications of the Findings	190
Implications Related to Theory.....	190
Implications Related to Policy.....	194
Implications Related to Practice.....	200
Summary	202

CHAPTER 7 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS ABOUT INFLUENCE 203

Introduction	203
Section 1: Immediate Influences.....	203
Results-based Influences on Principals.....	203
Principals as individuals.....	203
Principals as school leaders.....	205
Principals as system leaders.....	206
Process-based Influences on Principals	209
Principals as individuals.....	209
Principals as school leaders.....	214
Principals as system leaders.....	214
Section 2: End-of-cycle Influences.....	216
Results-based Influences on Principals.....	216
Principals as individuals.....	216
Principals as school leaders.....	219
Principals as system leaders.....	223
Process-based Influence on Principals	225
Principals as individuals.....	225
Principals as school leaders.....	229
Principals as system leaders.....	232
Section 3: Long-term Influences.....	234
Results-based Influences on Principals.....	234
Principals as individuals.....	234
Principals as school leaders.....	234
Principals as system leaders.....	236

Process-based Influences on Principals	238
Principals as individuals.....	238
Principals as school leaders.....	241
Principals as system leaders.....	245
Implications.....	248
Results-based Influences.....	248
Process-based Influences	251
Interaction between Results-based and Process-based Influences	253
Implications for Theory.....	255
Implications for Policy	257
Implications for Practice	259
Summary	259
 CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	261
Introduction	261
The Research Questions	263
Findings.....	264
Is there a Theoretical Model that can be Designed to Map Evaluation Influence?	264
What Factors, Prior Experiences, and Understandings Contribute to the Influence that the Involvement in Cyclical Reviews in Western Sydney Region has had on the Participating Principals?	268
How does Participation in Cyclical Reviews in Western Sydney Region Influence Participating Principals?.....	270
To what Extent are the Outcomes of ECB Demonstrated by the Principals who Participated in the Cyclical Reviews?	272
Recommendations.....	273
Recommendations for Theory.....	273
Recommendations for Policy	277
Recommendations for Practice	279
Recommendations for Further Research	280
Conclusion.....	281
 REFERENCES	282
 APPENDICES	296
Appendix 1: Questionnaire 1.....	296
Appendix 2: Questionnaire 2.....	297
Appendix 3: Questionnaire 3.....	298
Appendix 4: Interview Questions	300

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Kirkhart’s Integrated Theory of Influence (2000:8)	68
Figure 3.2 Mark and Henry’s (2004:41) Model of Alternative Mechanisms that May Mediate Evaluation Influence	74
Figure 3.3 Correlation between Traditional Use and Mark and Henry’s Model.....	75
Figure 3.4 Schematic Theory of Evaluation Influence (Mark & Henry, 2004:46).....	77
Figure 3.5 Framework for Participatory Evaluation (from Cousins, 2003:248).....	86
Figure 3.6 Dimensions of Form in Collaborative Inquiry (Cousins and Whitmore 2007:93)	98
Figure 4.1 Time dimension: Cyclical Reviews compared with Kirkhart (2000).....	114
Figure 4.2 Model showing the three dimensions of source, intention, and level of analysis (Adapted from Kirkhart, 2000:8; and Mark & Henry, 2004:41).....	117
Figure 4.3 Provisional Theoretical Model for the Analysis of Evaluation Influence (Adapted from Kirkhart, 2000:8; and Mark & Henry, 2004:41).....	118
Figure 5.1 Interpretivist–Constructivist Methodological Structure.....	122
Figure 5.2 The Ladder of Analytical Abstraction (Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994:92 and McClenaghan, 2006:133).....	152
Figure 5.3 Example of data item collected and entered into the spreadsheet following PPODS	153
Figure 6.1 Mapping of Human Factors Triggering Influence.....	172
Figure 6.2 Mapping of Evaluation Factors Triggering Influence	182
Figure 6.3 Mapping of Context Factors Triggering Influence	189
Figure 6.4 Interplay between the Three Categories of Factors	193
Figure 7.1 Immediate Results-based Influences on Participating Principals	208
Figure 7.2 Immediate Process-based Influences on Participating Principals	216
Figure 7.3 End-of-Cycle Results-based Influences on Participating Principals	224

Figure 7.4 End-of-Cycle Process-based Influences on Participating Principals	233
Figure 7.5 Long-term Results-based Influences on Participating Principals	237
Figure 7.6 Long-term Process-based Influences on Participating Principals	248
Figure 8.1 Basic Structure of Patterns of Influence	267
Figure 8.2 Contribution of Context, Human, and Evaluation Factors	270
Figure 8.3 Proposed Model of Evaluation Influence	277

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Characteristics affecting evaluation use (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986:347–348)	83
Table 8.1 Catalytic Values Related to Factors Triggering Influence.....	274

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CEFP	Collaborative Evaluation Fellows Project
DARE	Drug Abuse Resistance Education
ECB	Evaluation Capacity Building
ESL	English as a Second Language
KWIC	Keyword-in-context
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy
OD	Organisational Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PARS	Principal Assessment and Review Schedule
PIP	Principal Improvement Program
P-PE	Practical-participatory Evaluation
PPODS	Pocket PCs for Organising Data and Sorting
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
T-PE	Transformative-participatory Evaluation