Preface

I t's not news that we are living in a time of exponential change. When the education system was designed 100 years ago, most schools were small and fairly homogeneous. A basic teacher preparation program gave teachers most of the core knowledge they would need in their careers. They came into schools with little expectation of having to change the curriculum or even of needing to engage in much more of their own learning. Today's knowledge explosions, new technologies, and global economy set new expectations for teachers' work and learning.

Educators struggle to provide programs that will be effective in this new dynamic era, for they are buffeted, on the one hand, by forces urging quick adoption of new programs, and on the other hand, by supporters of the status quo. While they want to nurture civil, enjoyable, creative, and meaningful learning environments, the means are not easily apparent. Busyness, bombardment, and blaming can mushroom good intentions into a chaotic environment.

Evaluative inquiry—one type of evaluation and the subject of this book—is a process that teachers and principals can use to shift their philosophies and operations to cope with change and to improve learning for all students.

What Is Evaluative Inquiry and What Are Its Benefits?

Evaluation is all around you. Adjusting your speed on the highway to account for icy conditions is just one example of the countless, informal judgments you make every day. Here I present a more formal, systematic process of gathering, processing, and using evaluation to understand the link between the changes you are making in your school and actual student learning. It is a process that schools can use to systematically investigate programs and initiatives to determine their value (for definitions and descriptions of other evaluation approaches, see Guskey, 2000; Patton, 1997; Stufflebeam, 2001; Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). In this book, I use the term "evaluative inquiry" rather than "evaluation" for two reasons. First of all "evaluation" is often seen as something that someone else does "to" schools. Second, the term "evaluative inquiry" balances attention to the investigation itself with its pur-

pose. The benefits of evaluative inquiry are in both the process and its informative results. I define "evaluative inquiry" as others have defined evaluation—a systematic investigation of merit or worth (Guskey, 2000).

Oriented toward the future, evaluative inquiry is about finding what you value and then moving toward it. Contrasting "what is" with "what is desired" involves making judgments but not the kind of blaming and criticism often associated with evaluation. Instead, evaluative inquiry invites self-reflection and offers the perspective of "critical friends" who can identify discrepancies between what you want and what you have (see Preskill & Torres, 1999, for other perspectives on evaluative inquiry).

It emphasizes analysis and synthesis of information (rather than data collection) and places the inquiry process in the hands of teachers rather than outsiders (though outsiders can serve in a coaching role). Because the innovative analyses of data provide a way to interpret data, they help you take advantage of, rather than react against, the national movement toward outcomes, standards, and continuous improvement.

Who Should Use This Book and How?

Many books have been written about evaluation, but typically they are written for evaluators. In this book, I'm writing for those of you in the schools—teachers, principals, and collaborators. Secondarily, I'm writing for those outside the school—in school renewal networks, universities, district offices, professional development centers, and private organizations—who support the redesign of programs, practices, and policies in schools.

If your school is already engaged in systematic ways of determining the effectiveness of new programs and initiatives, this book may help you refine that process. If your school is undergoing major renewal or you are starting a new school, it is a perfect time to build evaluative inquiry into your way of managing the school.

If your school is not engaged in major change, I recommend starting a study group—a small group that meets regularly over several months to discuss evaluative inquiry and to determine how to bring the practice into the school. Even without forming a study group, you can apply the processes described here in your own classroom. Using the basic orientation provided here, you can investigate how the student learning in your classroom is supported by the learning experiences you provide.

Those of you in national school renewal networks, professional development centers, universities, district offices, or private organizations that support schools may find these evaluative inquiry designs useful when coaching schools engaged in renewal, reconstitution, restructuring, and redesign (e.g., schools that are being newly formed or those being divided into small schools or charter schools).

What This Book Is—and Is Not

Throughout the book I use case studies that are composites drawn from my 20-plus years of education-related evaluation. Although the book is built on current theories about social systems, how systems change, and how people learn, my aim is

to provide practical guidelines for using evaluative inquiry to investigate the changes you want to make at your schools.

Along the way, I hope to demystify evaluation, to reduce the sense that it is too difficult, or too time-consuming, or too theoretical. I have discovered that many teachers thrive on conducting evaluations—an opportunity to see the deeper meaning of their work and map patterns of change toward their new vision of schooling. It gives them a way to chart a path, to reduce the sense of overwhelming pressure, to be able to monitor and recognize their progress, to enjoy and learn from the journey as well as the destination. With the tools presented here, you will find that evaluative inquiry presents ways for teachers and principals to inquire systematically into progress toward what they value—their school's unique vision of supporting high-quality learning for all students.

The process of conducting an evaluation inquiry, the focus of this book, does not stand alone. Many closely related issues about the larger field of evaluation, program planning, data use, and system change are important. Rather than discuss these topics here, I provide references to excellent resources that already exist.

Why Now?

We are in a time when teachers are taking greater responsibility for student learning, yet confusion exists around data-based decision making and how to make choices among the many new programs and initiatives available. Processes are missing for managing organizational learning and building an orientation toward the future rather than the past.

1. *Changing teacher roles.* Recent reports such as *Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning: Transforming Professional Development for Student Success* (Rényi, 1996) from The NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education have brought increased attention to new roles for teachers. This book supports the growing movement toward teachers having "whole school" roles as well as classroom roles.

2. *Confusion about data-based decision making.* Data-based decision making has become a popular concept. Yet, much of today's emphasis on data use focuses on the initial diagnosis of a problem. Too little emphasis is placed on data-based selection of new programs/initiatives and insightful ways to analyze their impact on student learning. This is where teachers need more information.

3. *The proliferation of new programs/initiatives.* The wide array of options can lead to confusion rather than clarity. Each school needs its own process for determining whether an option is a good fit.

4. *Lack of processes to manage organizational learning.* Old processes based on hierarchy and control need to be replaced by processes based on collaboration, dynamic systems, and the latest knowledge of how people learn. By instilling habits of self-evaluation and by making systems thinking a regular process within the school, you can achieve a dynamic, flexible system equipped to bring improved learning to all members of the school community.

5. *Need to orient toward the future.* The evaluative inquiry process presented here is guided by the description of your desired vision for your school. When change was

not so rapid, we could rely on what worked in the past. Now the challenge is to face forward. For schools to be effective amidst these dynamic changes, they must make their best estimate of what they want and move toward it even though the path is uncertain and the vision fluid.

It reminds me of the story of the city dweller who went to the country looking for Joe Jones's house. He stopped at a farmhouse and asked the woman who answered the door if she knew where Joe Jones lived. "Oh yes," she said. "Just go three C's down the road and turn left." "Three C's?" the city man asked. "What do you mean?" "Well," she said, "go as far as you can see, then do it again, then again, and then turn left." Frequently, we get a vision as far as we can see based on what our current knowledge is. Then as we get closer and closer, we see something over the horizon that is even more desirable. Thus, the process of evaluative inquiry has a built-in flexibility, an expectation that you will keep adjusting your vision over time and moving toward it.

What's Next?

The book is divided into three parts. Following an overview of evaluative inquiry, the book describes the focus of three evaluative inquiry designs: one to help you determine the QUALITY of your program (Part 1); one to determine its SUSTAINABILITY (Part 2); and one to determine its CULTIVATION of new principles and practices in the school to achieve whole school or whole system change (Part 3). Each part has chapters organized around the five tasks in the evaluative inquiry process.

Each part uses a school situation to illustrate the process. The three schools are composites developed from working with several hundred teachers in over 100 schools through 40-plus evaluations of many types. The names used are not those of real schools. In Part 1, Quality, the inquiry investigates the quality of a new mathematics program at Summit Elementary School. In Part 2, Sustainability, the inquiry looks at the sustainability of an initiative to bring new interdisciplinary content—knowledge of China—into the Clark Community School District. Part 3, Cultivation, discusses Winding Trail High School's involvement in a whole school renewal process. In this case, members of the evaluative inquiry team consider how to expand new principles and practices to move educators, students, and the community closer to their vision for the school.

A separate and concluding chapter looks at how to continually improve your ongoing evaluative inquiry practices. Michael Fullan offers closing comments on how evaluative inquiry helps develop the capacity of the education system to manage and integrate an ongoing array of innovations and choices into its way of being. He discusses how evaluative inquiry helps build continuous learning into the school and is part of the infrastructure of a learning community. The bibliography at the end of the book provides references that you may find helpful as you determine whether the changes you make in your school matter for student learning.

Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed knowingly or unknowingly to the development of the ideas and tools presented in this book. In addition to the published works referenced throughout, I thank the many teachers and other educators whose experiences have been the basis for the ideas and tools presented here. For the Quality design discussed in Part 1, I drew on my work with schools involved in the Colorado Integrated Mathematics Initiative; schools in Washington State that participated in a study of the Math.ed.ology™ program; and numerous schools in state systemic initiatives and other programs funded by the National Science Foundation. The importance of the design was reinforced through my serving on an advisory panel of the National Staff Development Council as it strove to identify professional development programs that demonstrated results for students.

In the Sustainability design in Part 2, I was heavily influenced by evaluating programs funded by the Freeman Foundation, which supports schools and districts as they enhance student learning about China and Japan. Especially influential were schools and districts involved in the China Studies Partnership and the New England China Network, operated by Primary Source, and the U.S.-China Teachers Exchange Program, operated by the American Council of Learned Societies.

At the Education Commission of the States in partnership with the Coalition of Essential Schools, I worked with many dedicated individuals to achieve schoolhouse to statehouse systemic change in support of high levels of learning for all students. Initial development of the Cultivation design in Part 3 was done during my time there. Afterward, the design was enhanced through continued work with schools and communities in the Coalition of Essential Schools; the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Families and Neighborhoods Program; the Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal; and the Danforth Foundation's Policymakers' Program to support collaboration between education and human services systems at local and state levels in support of children and families.

In developing the idea of building teacher-led inquiry teams in schools, I was greatly influenced by my work with the NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education, whose emphasis on teachers taking on greater responsibility for their own learning and for the changes in their schools can be seen throughout this book.

I extend special thanks to the schools and communities as well as to the directors and sponsors of these initiatives and their evaluations.

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I hope this book gives teachers and principals tools to ensure that the changes they make in curriculum, instruction, and professional development produce improved learning for students. Because I consider these tools and designs continually under development, I hope to learn as much from those of you who use them and who share your experiences and refinements as you might learn from what is presented here.