Practice based best evidence: What evidence base counts when evaluating good practice in program delivery?

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Is good practice the key to sustainable service delivery?

- What difference does evaluation make?
- And for whom does it make a difference?
- Is all evidence in the evidence-base equal?
- What happens when policy-based evidence takes over?
What is Families and Schools Together (FAST)?

- An early intervention family strengthening program
- **Goal:** increase the chance of a child being successful in the home, school and community
- Weekly family-based activities
- **Collaborative team**
- **Builds relationships** between parent and child, families and other families, and families and the school and other supportive services
FAST in the Northern Territory

- Since 2003, building relationships between families and schools
- 2014: 22 sites across Urban and remote community schools
- Baby, Kids and Youth FAST
- 160 team trained engaging over 200 families
Program underpinnings:
Building a shared understanding

- Working with people
- Finding solutions to work alongside people
- Ownership: finding the right ‘fit’
- Culturally representative team

“It’s like the FAST program was written for us… to go back to the way how we used to work together and walk alongside our children”
Strengthening relationships
Northeast Arnhem Land
What does good practice look like?

- How does FAST support families?
- What’s good about FAST?
- How do you talk about FAST?
Building the FAST evidence base

- Australian Government Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004-2008
- Invest To Grow and Communities for Children funding
- Partnership origin for FAST
- Promising Practice Profiles approach
- Strengthening model and publishing evidence
- In hindsight this was a great opportunity
- Remains an environment with sustainability issue
How do evaluators measure good practice?

- Tension between policy and effective change
- What is it that is measured?
- Is it about the logic model… or is it about good practice?
- Is it about a service delivery contract? Or is it about community response to the program?
Why we need practice-based best evidence

1. There is only one ‘best’ practice, the rest *might* be ‘good’.
2. Evidence-based practice suggests that what works in one place works in another—this isn’t necessarily so.
3. Using evidence is OK, but shouldn’t creating evidence?
4. Limiting practice to what is evidence-based inhibits risk-taking, experimenting, and creating new knowledge.
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