

Australian Centre  
for Child Protection

# Building Evidence Informed Practice in Child Protection

**Fiona Arney**  
**Resilient Families need Resilient Workers**  
**Symposium, Melbourne**  
**22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> June 2009**



Australian Government  
Department of Innovation, Industries,  
Science and Research

*Working together to enhance the lives of children*

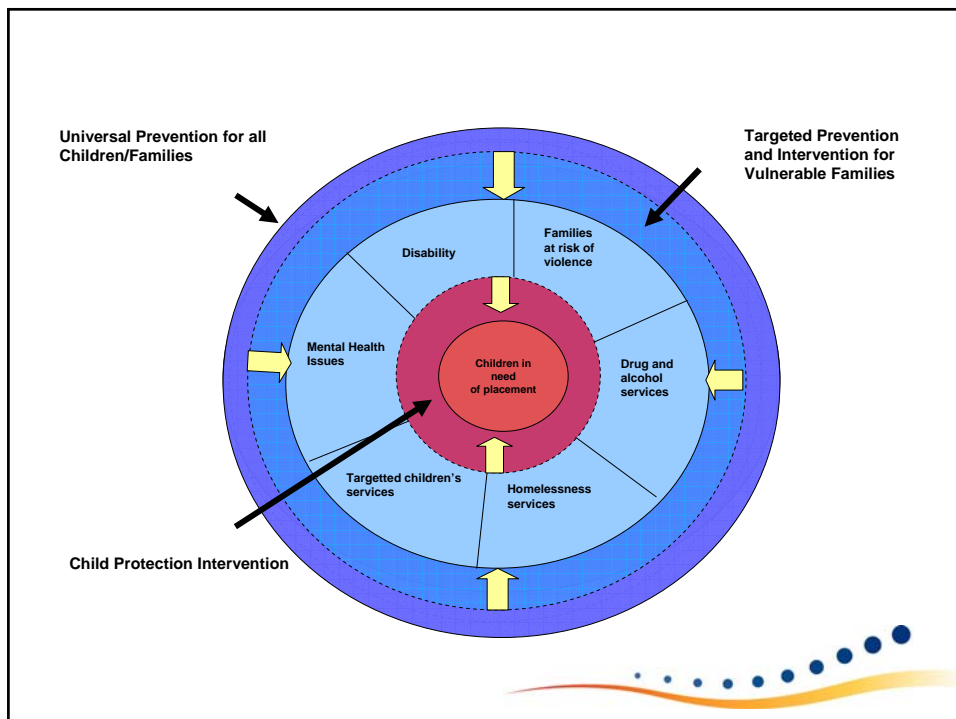
## Acknowledgements

- Staff at the Australian Centre for Child Protection
- The National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies
- The Alfred Felton Chair at the University of Melbourne
- The Benevolent Society and UnitingCare Burnside
- Our colleagues overseas

## The Australian Centre for Child Protection

Through research, professional education and advocacy, the Centre aims to enhance life opportunities for children in Australia who are at risk of abuse or neglect.

Commonwealth Government (DIISR) & University of South Australia Initiative



## A public health approach requires knowledge about:

- Classification, diagnosis, prevalence and incidence
- Aetiology – risk and protective factors, causal mechanisms, and outcomes
- Intervention and evaluation – what will work for whom in what settings and for how much? (practice based evidence, evidence based practice)
- Implementation and policy research – what helps and what hinders the implementation of what works




## Types of knowledge:

- **Organisational knowledge:** from organising services through governance and regulation activities
- **Practitioner Knowledge:** from delivering services – tends to be tacit, personal and context specific
- **User Knowledge:** from using services – tends to be tacit
- **Research knowledge:** from planned strategy, mostly explicit and provided in reports, evaluation
- **Policy community knowledge:** from wider policy context

Source: Walter, Nutley, Percy-Smith, McNeish, & Frost, (2004, p viii).




## Evidence Based Practice and Policy

- Evidence-based practice is the 'conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about individual patients' (Sackett et al., 1996).
  - Incorporating research, practitioner wisdom, client preferences and available resources
  - Policy decisions – for groups and populations
- 

## How is this interpreted...

*Our organisation is continually looking to support new program models from overseas which have been going for a few years and which have already built an evidence base and a reputation, self fund them for the first 5 years and build our own evidence in our own region, then seek external funding to sustain the programs. From our experience government funders are more likely to fund imported programs and are more likely to take their “goodness” on face value because they are from the UK or the USA. We know we are less likely to win funding for home grown programs*



*(Interviewee who had heard about NEWPIN)*

Approaches to practice in child and family welfare

	Non-evidence based practice						Evidence-based practice
Source of knowledge	Accumulated subjective experience with individual cases. Opinion about practice outcomes emphasized. "In my experience..."	○	○	○	○	○	Well-designed, randomized trials and other controlled clinical research. Facts about practice outcomes emphasized. "The data show that..."
Knowledge location and access	Hierarchical. Knowledge is possessed by opinion leaders and gurus. Charismatic expert driven	○	○	○	○	○	Democratic. Knowledge is available to anyone willing to read the published scientific research or research reviews. Information technology driven
Method of achieving progress	Haphazard, fortuitous, based on changing values, fads, fashions, and leaders	○	○	○	○	○	Systematic, predictable, based on incremental and cumulative programs of outcome research
Practitioner expertise	Quasi-mystical personal qualities and intuition	○	○	○	○	○	Specific, teachable, learnable skills and behaviours
View of practice	Art. Creative artistic process with fluid boundaries	○	○	○	○	○	Craftsmanship. Creativity within the boundaries of the supported models and protocols
Research? Practice Link	Indirect. Inferential	○	○	○	○	○	Direct. Integral and fundamental to practice
How is research summarised and applied to practice	Individual subjective practitioner synthesis of whatever literature is consumed	○	○	○	○	○	Best practices workgroup or collaborative summary based on exhaustive reviews of the outcome research and meta-analysis
Program evaluation	Inputs (credentials of practitioners) and Outputs (number of clients served, number of service units delivered)	○	○	○	○	○	Outcomes (measurable "bottom-line" client benefits)
Location of research	Mostly in laboratory settings and divorced from actual practice	○	○	○	○	○	Field clients routinely enrolled in trials in order to test benefits and refine services
Quality control	Focuses on how well service rationales are conceptualized and the credentials of who provides them	○	○	○	○	○	Focuses on how well services are behaviourally delivered vis a vis a descriptive protocol
Practice visibility	Actual practice is seldom observed by anyone other than the practitioner and the client	○	○	○	○	○	Direct peer or consultant observation of actual practice, and specific feedback is common
Assumptions about outcomes	Faith. Service programs in general are seen as good and are assumed to be beneficial	○	○	○	○	○	Scepticism. Knowledge that interventions may be inert or even harmful. Benefit must be empirically demonstrated, not assumed

Adapted from Chaffin, M., & Friedrich, B. (2004, p.1101). Evidence-based treatments in child abuse and neglect. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(11), 1097-1113.

## Challenges/Opportunities

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<i>Families with multiple disadvantage</i>	<i>Develop/implement a range of methodologies, examine resilience</i>
<i>Breadth of area and lack of agreed-upon definitions</i>	<i>Many research areas, identification as a research area itself</i>
<i>What constitutes evidence?</i>	<i>Multiple methodologies, practice wisdom informing research questions</i>
<i>Different jurisdictions and systems</i>	<i>Comparative and contextual research</i>
<i>Absence of prevalence data</i>	<i>Importance of evaluation and outcomes data</i>

Should we be talking about *knowledge* based policy and practice rather than evidence-based?

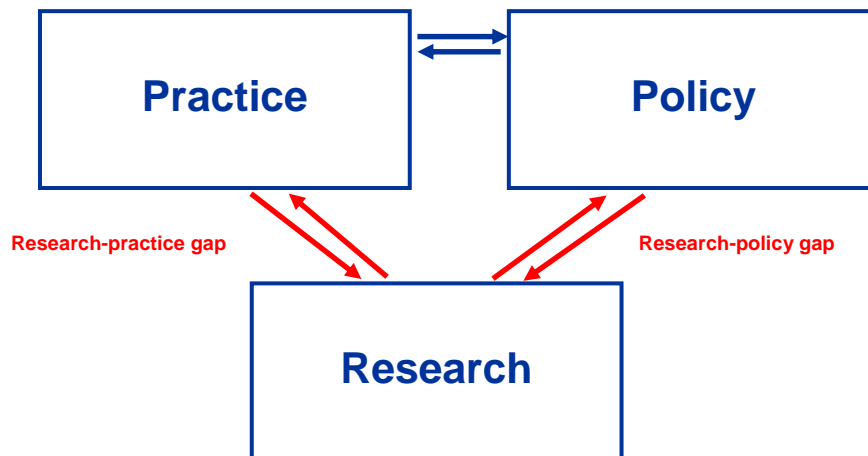


## Examples

- Where evidence has been ignored
- Where evidence has been (mis)used for only one part of the process
- Where evidence is used as part of a continuous process: as part of defining the problem, identifying strategies, implementing them and evaluating them...



## The research, practice and policy cultures



Source: Davies, Nutley & Smith (2000b); Lomas, 2000b; Pyra (2003.); Shonkoff (2000).

Cultural factors	Practice	Policy	Research
<b>Time frames for results:</b>	usually short	usually short or medium	usually long
<b>Languages for communication:</b>	guidelines and protocols	issue briefs, government reports, media	highly technical, expert language
<b>Priorities for knowledge:</b>	efficiency and effectiveness	feasibility, implementation	theory, methodology, scientifically answerable questions
<b>Work environment:</b>	immediacy of service delivery	multiple decision-makers, political, economic and social forces	research rigour, pressure to publish, academic reputation

(Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000; Pyra, 2003; Shonkoff, 2000)

## **Inter- and intra-cultural gaps**

- Different operating environments and expectations
- Perceptions and myths
- Relationships and turnover
- Values and imperatives

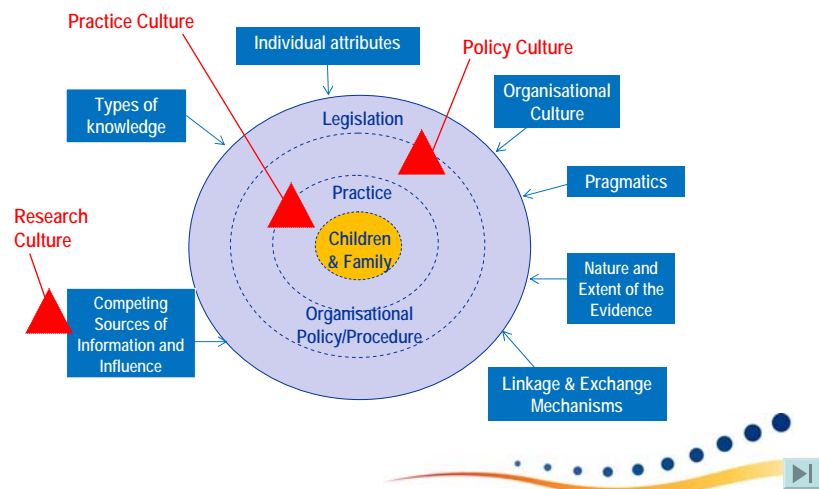


## **From our own internal evaluation....**

- The importance of communication and consultation – building rapport with staff and participants and valuing their expertise
- Establishing constraints, use of language and helping to define programme goals.
- Dissemination strategy and user friendly outputs (matching information to different audiences)



## The “Cultures in Context” model



## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Organisational Culture

- Clarity of mission and goals
  - Leadership
  - Staff cohesiveness & autonomy
  - Work related stress & burnout
  - Openness of communication
  - Openness to change
  - Power relationships
  - Workload
  - Risk
- A decorative graphic of a wavy line with blue dots is located at the bottom right of the slide.

## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Pragmatics

- Economic Climate
- Political Climate
- Community Attitudes
- Decision-making processes (centralised, de-centralised, hybrid)
- Resources
- Statutory vs Non-government
- Organisational & systems capacity
- Work Role
- Time scales
- Funding



## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Nature and Extent of the evidence

- Extent
- Quality
- Ease of understanding
- Relevance
- Complexity
- Relative advantage
- Effective
- Efficient
- Practical
- Non- contradictory
- Definitive



## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Linkage & exchange mechanisms

- Networks
- Opportunity to be involved in research
- Knowledge brokers



## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Competing Sources of information and Influence

- Researchers
- Media
- Lobby Groups
- Networks



## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Individual Attributes

- Ideologies
- Beliefs
- Interests
- Values
- Personal experience



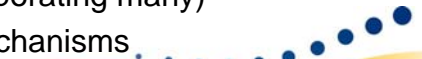
## The “Cultures in Context” model

### Types of knowledge

- Research
- Practitioner knowledge
- Organisational knowledge
- User knowledge
- Policy Community knowledge
- Expert knowledge of individuals, groups, networks
- Economic knowledge
- Family/Parenting knowledge



## Application of the Model

- Clearinghouses
    - The Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse
    - Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse
  - Activities
    - Publications and Oral dissemination
    - Research and information repositories
    - Research
    - Website
  - Domains
    - Nature of the evidence
    - Types of knowledge (incorporating many)
    - Linkage and exchange mechanisms
- 

- Academia
    - The Australian Centre for Child Protection
    - The Alfred Felton Chair in Child and Family Welfare
  - Activities
    - Research
    - Workforce development
    - Advocacy
    - Consultancy – reviewing legislation, evaluation
    - Knowledge brokering
  - Domains
    - Types of knowledge (incorporating many)
    - Linkage and exchange mechanisms - networks
- 


- **Service organisations**
  - The Benevolent Society
- **Activities**
  - Actively working as a Learning Organisation
  - Leadership, knowledge brokering, evidence in practice
  - Strategies to implement evidence – staged approach to practice change: access to evidence, engagement with knowledge, putting evidence to use
  - Embed messages through work plans, supervision, team meetings, performance reviews
- **Domains**
  - Organisational culture
  - Pragmatic barriers to research use




## Identifying resources and strategies in Victoria, Australia and overseas...



## Evidence Based Practice and Policy

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## Multi-dimensional evidence based practice (Petr, 2009)

- Critical appraisal of information from different sources
    - Step 1: Identify the question
    - Steps 2-4: Identify multiple sources of knowledge and evidence re the question
      - Step 2: Consumer perspective
      - Step 3: Professional perspective
      - Step 4: Research perspective
- 

- Step 5: Summarise the findings across the perspectives
- Steps 6-7: Critique current best practices
  - Step 6: Assess potency of identified best practices
  - Step 7: Use value criteria to critique and improve current best practices



## Some useful resources

- Improving research literacy:
  - Lies, Damned Lies and Science by Sherry Seethaler, published by Pearson Education Inc in 2009
- Understanding and applying multidimensional evidence based practice:
  - Multidimensional Evidence-Based Practice: Synthesizing Knowledge, Research and Values, Edited by Christopher G. Petr, published by Routledge in 2009
- The Cultures in Context model and its applications:
  - <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/topics/index.html?tmm=revrrpp>
  - Journal of Evidence and Policy, 2009, 5(2). Free trial <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/ep>



