

A realist approach to programs and evaluation
A two-day seminar
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**Thursday and Friday September 2nd and 3rd
Winnipeg, MA**

There exist many definitions of evaluation. In its simplest form, evaluation is the critical appraisal of human actions in context. It is a value laden feed back response to action. In its most sophisticated form, evaluation research: 1) spans over several years, if not decades; 2) mobilises a large amount of human and material resources to design and implement a complex system of activities to define, gather, analyse and interpret a huge quantity of data; and finally 3) produces knowledge about numerous aspects of interventions. The knowledge produced by such evaluations potentially influences the practice of thousands of professionals and ultimately the health of hundreds of thousands of people.

In this seminar our discussion concentrates on the evaluation of population health interventions that involve actions planned and implemented at a collective level. As Potvin, Gendron, Bilodeau and Chabot (2005) indicate, health promotion practice that advocates collective strategies of actions and that represents one of the most innovative aspects of the Ottawa Charter in terms of practice change for the health sector calls for an approach to evaluation that transcends the shortcomings of both the positivist and constructivist traditions in program conception and evaluation.

The goal of this two-day seminar is to trigger a reflection on the nature and functions of programs and of their evaluation as developed and implemented following the strategies and principles of the Ottawa Charter.

Day 1: Presentation, discussion and small group work
On the nature of programs: programs as systems of action

Day 2: Presentation, discussion and small group work
If programs are made of agents then what are the implications for evaluation?

Preparatory Reading:

Callon, M. (1986). Some elements of a sociology of translation: Domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay. In: J. Law (ed.), *Power, action and belief: A new sociology of knowledge?* (pp. 196-223). London: Routledge.

Hawe P., Shiell, Al., & Riley, T. (2009). Theorising interventions as events in systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 43,267-276.

Hawe, P., & Potvin, L. (2009). What is population health intervention research?. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 100 (1), I8-I14.

Potvin, L., Gendron, S., Bilodeau, A., & Chabot, P. (2005). Integrating social sciences in public health practice. *American Journal of Public Health, 95*, 591-595.

Potvin, L., & Bisset, S. (2008). There is more to methodology than method. In: L. Potvin, D. V. McQueen et al., (eds.), *Health promotion evaluation practice in the Americas: Values and research* (pp. 63-80). New York: Springer.