A REALIST APPROACH TO PROGRAMS AND EVALUATION

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Winnipeg, September 2–3 2010
Objectives

Life is not a textbook; there are good reasons why population and public health practitioners become frustrated with evaluation and the evidence-based rhetoric.

1. Justify uneasiness with a rational planning and evaluation model for population health interventions
2. Develop a systemic and realist understanding of population health interventions
3. Develop a systemic and realist understanding of population health intervention evaluation
Plan

- Day 1: A systemic and realist approach to population health interventions
- Day 2: A systemic and realist approach to population health intervention evaluation
1. Definitions and conceptions of evaluations: evaluation as organized reflexivity

2. The evaluation system of action
   ◦ Purpose
   ◦ Structure
   ◦ Processes

3. Relationships within the program space: Participatory evaluation
Day 2
Part 1:
Definitions and conceptions of evaluations: Evaluation as organized reflexivity
Evaluation: A practical definition

Evaluation assists *sense making about policies and programs* through the conduct of *systematic inquiry* that describes and explains the policy’s and program’s operations, effects, justifications and social implications

(Mark, Henry & Julnes, 2000, p.3)
Evaluation as a practice: Action

TO KNOW – TO JUDGE – TO DECIDE

✓ Produce knowledge
✓ Compare with a reference
✓ Orient or re-orient action

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EVALUATION AS A MIRROR GAME

mirror

reflected image

person

examination judgement

orientation
decision action
EVALUATION AS A MIRROR GAME

mirror

person

orientation

knowledge

jugement

decision action

Allard et al., 2008
EVALUATION
AS A MIRROR GAME

Research Team

information

Participation Devices

jugements

recommendations

Allard et al., 2008
Four dimensions of practice

1: Teleology: What is the aim of the practice? To which project does it contribute?

2: Ontology: What is the object the practice aims to change. What is the nature of this object

3: Epistemology: How can one know about the object of the practice? What is the relationship the subject and the object?

4: Methodology: How is the object transformed? What is the nature of the practice

Potvin & Bisset, 2008
Evaluation as organized reflexivity

- **TELEOLOGY**: elucidate the conditions that produce or reproduce actions and outcomes: \( C \rightarrow M \rightarrow O \)
- **ONTORLOGY**: programs as systems of actions made of actants and their connections
- **EPISTEMOLOGY**: Critical realism. It is the work of the researcher that produce knowledge. Close interaction between researcher and the events that make knowledge possible
- **METHODOLOGY**: Following the actions
Program system in the program space

Program system

Evaluation system

Time

Context

Form
Day 2
Part 2:
The evaluation system of action
Program space

S.T. Network  Program system  Evaluation system

Processes

CONTEXT

 TIME

ENDS

FORM

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Program space

TIME

Processes

S.T. Network

CONTEXT

Ends

FORM

Processes

Egds
Evaluation action system

- **PURPOSE**: Change project in relation to the program system; instrumentation of actor interests
- **STRUCTURE**: Socio-technical network
- **ACTIVITIES**: Action-organizing processes
- **TIME**: Change over time
- **CONTEXT**: The same program space and the program system
Evaluation system’s purpose

- Higher public interest (common good): improvement of society by knowledge (meanings and values) and program practices
- Instrumentation of actors’ interest
- Solve controversies
The evaluation system’s socio-technical network

[Diagram showing relationships between objects and actors]

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The evaluation system’s socio-technical network

- Actor practices are strategic and procedural
- Presence of formal knowledge
- Form investments
- Presence of an actor “external” to the program system
The evaluation system’s processes

- Project specification (negotiation)
- Production of knowledge about the program system
- Application of knowledge
- Reflexivity (meta-assessment)
Project specification

Situating the project in its context and undertaking action – evaluability assessment

- Levelling actor interests (shared and specific)
- Making the evaluation questions explicit
- Modeling the context
- Agreeing on a program’s model
- Exploring possible worlds (change scenarios)

Thurston & Potvin, 2003
Knowledge production

- Negotiation of the subject–object relation; repositioning the program object as an acting subject in interaction the assessment system subject
- For the assessor, negotiation of the space of objectification; for the program system, negotiation of the positioning of the various actors as subjects
- The issue is that of controlling the assessment system’s operations.
Putting knowledge into action

- Shifting the program system’s actor networks as a function of the knowledge produced
- Leads or not to a chain of translations
- Appropriation of knowledge in other networks

Hartz, Denis, Moreira, Matida, 2008
Evaluation processes

Reflexivity

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Program space
Relation between programming system and evaluation system

**Programming system**

- **Structure – Socio technical network**
  - Actors – knowledge – resources
  - STN programming – evaluator OR knowledge and evaluation tools

- **Processes**
  - Planning
  - Implementation
  - Sustainability
  - Reflexivity
  - Definition of the project
  - Production of knowledge
  - Utilization of knowledge
  - Reflexivity

- **Purpose**
  - Reduction of problems
  - Reduction of problems – Improvement of action

**Evaluation system**

- Structure – Socio technical network
- Processes
- Purpose

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Evaluation questions

Implementation

Structure

Process

Impacts

Context

Time

Relevance

Form

Results

Programming System

S-T Network
Questions about relevance

Are we intervening on the right problem?

Are we intervening in the right manner?

Are we intervening for the right population?

S–T Network

Programming System

Context

Process

Time

Form

Purposes
Questions about implementation

Is the program adjusted to the context it is trying to be part of? Does ongoing strategy apply in this context?

What transformations did the program undergo in different contexts and through time?
Questions about structure

Are we succeeding in mobilizing the necessary resources and actors to carry out the program? Are the right actors mobilized?
Questions about processes

Has the expected degree of collaboration been reached?

Have we taken the necessary steps to succeed?

How innovative is the program?

S-T Network

Process

Programming System

Purpose

Form

Time

Context
Questions about results

What results have been achieved?

Have the expected results been achieved?

S-T Network

Programming System

Process

Purpose

Time

Context

Form

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Questions about impact

Does the program really answer the needs?

Does the program help reduce the problem for which it was implemented?

Can we prove the program makes a difference?

What works, for whom, in which circumstances?

S-T Network
Programming System
Context
Purpose
Time
Form
Process
Day 2
Part 3:

Relationships within the program space: Participatory evaluation
Participatory evaluation occurs when actors, other than the evaluators, are included in the evaluation system:

- decision makers, staff, partners,
- users of the program
- perhaps more distanced actors, such as victims or groups which have been neglected or not well served
- or even actors with no direct ties to the program space such as outside experts or citizen participation in a community debating space
Objectives of participatory evaluation

- Questions more relevant
- Better quality of data, analysis and interpretations, judgments
- Greater validity and credibility of results
- Recommendations more feasible
- Greater usefulness of results
Building the participatory space

✔ Who participates? – Scope
✔ To which processes? – Scale
✔ Who controls the decision? – Degree of involvement
✔ Participation as multiple translation for the expansion of the socio-technical network
✔ Power structures and participation

Potvin, 2007
The case of a single translator

- Translation operations are under the responsibility of a unique translator who is also the network’s spokesperson.
- Spokespersons: unique representative of the networks issues and assets; capacity to move and mobilize the network.
- Controversies: Contest of roles and identities imposed by the prevailing problematization; the result of which is the spokesperson incapacity to mobilize the network.
The case of a single translator
Participation : Multiple translations

- Translators are network specific spokespersons and the can mobilize their network
- Translators translate each others according to the interests of their respective networks
- The power of translators in the space where multiple translations occur is linked to their strategic capacity to mobilize and move their network
- Power is the capacity to impose a problematization to a network (identities and roles for network’s actors)
- Formalization of the multiple translation space in a governance structure where tradeoffs and compromises are negotiated.
Participation: Multiple translations
Participatory governance structure

- Continuous negotiation of compromises between interests and problematizations from the various networks
- Not everybody participate; only legitimate spokespersons who then translate compromises to their respective networks.
- Network stability rests on the legitimacy of spokespersons in the governing structure and on the solutions designed to solve controversies
- Zone for innovation et elaboration of compromises that affect all networks mobilized through the multiple translations
### Who participates?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation trend centred on utilization</th>
<th>Pluralistic evaluation trend</th>
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<td>(Patton, 1997)</td>
<td>(Perret, 2003; Monnier, 1992; Guba et Lincoln, 1989)</td>
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Criteria of participation:
- ✓ the actors’ degree of motivation and interest in using the evaluation results
- ✓ the diversity of points of view
- ✓ the democratic representativeness of the stake holders
To (towards) which processes?

1) Project definition
   choice of questions, financing

2) Production of knowledge
   choice of methods, carrying out (realization),
   interpretation/judgement

3) Acting upon knowledge
   development of scenarios for change

The choice of questions and the interpretation/judgement
are crucial activities of participation
Who controls the decision?

Participation runs from the consultation to the negotiation of choices for all evaluation activities:

- Decision controlled by evaluators or negotiated
- Evaluation pilot committee acting as advisor (technical device) OR acting as pilot (strategic device)
Participatory pilot committee

- Advisory or decision making (décisionnelle)
- Not to extensive (not to broad in scope)
- Mobilized by one or another of the evaluation processes
- Importance of clarifying roles, interests and responsibilities
Role and importance of a collaboration agreement

- Defines roles and responsibilities
- Open discussion of each group’s interests in the evaluation
- Potentially a power equalizer device
- Bring into the research space the structuring dimensions of the intervention
- Renders explicit the inherently political nature of the evaluation

Mantoura, Gendron, Potin, 2007
Health Promotion Evaluation Practices in the Americas
Values and Research
Louise Potvin and David McQueen Editors

More and more, health promotion is a crucial component of public health, to the extent that public health interventions are called on to prove their effectiveness and appraised for scientific validity, a practice many in the field consider self-defeating. Health Promotion Evaluation Practices in the Americas cogently demonstrates that scientific rigor and the goals of health promotion are less in conflict than commonly thought, synthesizing multiple traditions from countries throughout North, Central, and South America (and across the developed-to-developing-world continuum) for a volume that is both diverse in scope and unified in purpose.

The book's examples—representing robust theoretical and practical literatures as well as initiatives from Rio de Janeiro to American Indian communities—explain why health promotion evaluation projects require different guidelines from mainstream evaluation work. The editors identify core humanitarian principles associated with health promotion (participation, empowerment, equity, sustainability, intersectoral action, multistrategy, and contextualism), while chapters highlight challenges that must be mastered to keep these principles and scientific objectives in sync, including:

- Building health promotion values into evaluation research projects.
- Expanding the use of evaluation in health promotion.
- Developing meaningful evaluation questions.
- Distinguishing between community-based participation research and evaluation-based participation.
- Evaluating specifically for equity.
- Designing initiatives to foster lasting social change.

The applied knowledge in Health Promotion Evaluation Practices in the Americas: Values and Research can bring the goals of intervention into sharper focus for practitioners, evaluators, and decision-makers and facilitate communication on all sides—necessary steps to progress from study findings to real-world action.
References


References