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Participatory evaluation: accessing and assessing impact
Grounded in democratic forms of evaluation

- Responsive evaluation: heavy reliance on examining personal experience of those involved (Stake 2004)
- Deliberative democracy: stakeholder participation in critical discussion emphasises developing practices that mitigate power imbalances among citizens: builds more free and equal participation. (House and Howe 2000)
- Designed to cultivate a common good: rather than maximising perceived self-interest
- Members of the setting are involved as co-evaluators - included in setting the agenda, ascertaining quality, and interpreting results (Greene 2005)
Participatory Evaluation (PE)

- **Who drives the evaluation?** Those who have a ‘stake in it’ - the community of practice.
- **Who determines indicators of programme progress?** As above, working with the local evaluator.
- **Who is responsible for data collection, analysis and preparing final reports?** As above, working with the local evaluator.
- **What is the role of the local evaluator?** Facilitator, negotiator, “critical friend” enables a communicative space (Habermas, 1970) to allow development of evaluation process and articulating indicators.
Democratic - Participatory

- Democratic evaluation not the same as participatory evaluation.
- In participatory evaluation there's an effort to involve the people as co-evaluators - enabling voice and views and as a capacity-building effort. (Greene 2005)
Issue: People with learning disability do not have access to education about brain function.

Why they feel its an issue: not knowing means you believe people when they tell you you can’t do things.

Impact of knowing: understand own difficulties better; understand their own potential – it is empowering; better able to live their own lives.
Plan for work and evaluation

- Programme
  - Write a play about the workings of the brain (Big Brain Show) using Forum Theatre
  - Tour the play to other people
- Evaluation: what was the impact?
  - Forum Theatre
  - Build a quiz into the play (questionnaire)
  - Run workshops around the play based on developing communicative spaces
Most evaluations don’t

- “get to the heart of the matter” (Alf, 2008)
- “ask questions that are not interesting or are not important to us but important to other people”. (Andrew, Lawnmower)
- “if we do it, then we know what works, and we can do more of it, or stop doing it if it doesn’t – or maybeez we can change it when we are doing it to make it work before the end.” (Debbie, Lawnmower)
Designing the evaluation

- Finding
  - the best questions
  - the best way to ask others (methods)
  - designing indicators of impact

- And
  - Being open to other people having ideas we had not thought of
Communicative spaces

- Habermasian concept
  - Communicative Evaluation - evaluator enables and extends communication. (Ryan: 2005)
- Mess: necessary as a way of delving below rhetoric: takes its place amongst Harbermasian conceptualisation and rationale (Cook, 2009)
- Relational aspect fundamental
- The more things just got blown into the air, the more fun it was...When we were discussing and debating stuff, during some of the discussion that we had, your mind slipped a few times before it settled. It’s like you started it off and someone would say something and it would be like, “Erm, I’m not quite sure of...” And then it started a bit of a debate up. And then by the time you finished the debate you had most of the answers and then it was like, “Erh..., you know, we’ve just answered it.”

  (Cook & Inglis: 2008).
Issues: where to find impact

- evaluation has been seen as a quantitative procedure consisting of the ‘task’ of generating unbiased, precise estimates of the causal consequences of programmes (T.D. Cook 1997)
....there is not participation followed by research and then hopefully action...there are countless tiny cycles of participatory reflection on action, learning about action and then new informed action which is in turn the subject of further reflection. Change does not happen at “the end”—it happens throughout

- Wadsworth (1998)
changes that can be attributed to project, programme or policy: both the intended ones, as well as, ideally, the unintended ones.

contrasts with outcome monitoring, which examines whether targets have been achieved

But in practice the two are often muddled
Issue of weak articulation: insights from participatory research

- **Key impacts articulated as:**
  - Offers participatory researchers new skills
  - Improves confidence of ‘participatory’ researchers
  - Improves dissemination

- **Revealed as:**
  - Improved focus of the research
  - Improved the questions asked and way in which asked
  - Embedded learning with the community of practice
  - Improved embedding of impact

  (APRIL Cook et al 2012)
“Evaluators not only live in the real world of educational politics; they actually influence its changing power relationships” (MacDonald, 1976, p. 132).

Evaluators are those with lived experience – not distanced.
Participatory evaluators don’t wish to make unilateral claims

Historical bias against ‘soft’ impacts - use of ‘measure’ rather than demonstrate

Acknowledging ‘new’ experts leads to methodological and political issues
What is happening?

- Communities of practice are
  - questioning the purposes of evaluation
  - questioning the ability of traditional distanced evaluation to bring about change – to have an impact.
  - Working on improving the way we articulate the quality and impact of participatory (inclusive) evaluation
Lawnmowers: impact

- On themselves:
  - Making the play has already taught us a lot about brains and brain functioning - Improved knowledge of brain science
  - Perceptions of ourselves as learners
  - Consolidate perceptions as powerful educators

- On others: yet to know
Lawnmowers: impact

- On the evaluation
  - Provided initial issues and indicators for capturing change – “heart of the matter”
  - Ongoing “trustworthy” checks
  - Real-time adjustments to improve programme delivery and evaluate the impact of ongoing changes
  - Embedding for the future
Impact of PE?

- Identifies the important questions and indicators of impact
  - for those who are affected by the issue being evaluated.
- Improves the quality of the evaluation design
  - Uses knowledge of those for whom this is daily life to shape methods
- Improves knowledge that is produced
  - Multiple perspectives for critical engagement
- Improves legacy
  - Learning is with the community of practice – embeds in practice.
- Questions power base for knowing and meaning making
  - Actively interrogates the role that privilege and power play in shaping evaluation agendas and the nature of outcomes and impacts
The “fundamental source of legitimacy is the collective judgement of the people” (Gutmann and Thompson 2004: 9)


Odd slides
A group of people with learning difficulties have researched the science of the brain and created a play based on what they found out. The play, Big Brain Show, uses music and humour to focus on the history of understanding brain development, the function of the brain, how people use (and abuse) their brain and how a better understanding of brain function can help people improve their daily life. The Big Brain Show will be performed for other people with learning difficulties who have not had opportunities to engage with brain science. Six performances of the play with follow-up workshops will be hosted by community partners. The workshops will be accompanied by a DVD, EasyRead booklet and on-line materials. Evaluating the impact of this Theatre for Change approach will help us see whether it helps people with learning difficulties to understanding brain functioning and its impact on their daily lives. https://scienceandsociety.blog.gov.uk
Issues of traditional evaluation

- the search for quantifiable information often restricted the evaluator from collecting the important data which was dismissed as 'subjective' or 'anecdotal'
- failed to address the concerns of participants and other interested parties. (Parlett and Hamilton)
“a partnership approach in which stakeholders actively engage in developing the evaluation and all phases of its implementation. Those who have the most at stake in the program — partners, program beneficiaries, funders and key decision makers — play active roles. Participation occurs throughout the evaluation process”

(Zukoski and Luluquisen: 2002)