**Innovating and Evaluating in the Complex Brazilian Context: The Roberto Marinho Foundation Experience**

**Presenters**

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**Relevance**

What distinguishes evaluation from research is it’s rigorous, yet context relevant work (Worthen and Sanders, 1973). Evaluation and context interact and influence each other throughout the process. The context comes from the program it serves – both internal and external to the program. Internally, the needs, values and expectations of groups of individuals are in constant interaction. Additional interactions with its external environment expand the context. Evaluation must take place in this ecological complexity, which can differ from program to program. The case of the Roberto Marinho Foundation (RMF) focused in this paper is highly relevant to evaluation practice, and to the AEA 2012 conference theme. Its projects, of different size and scope, operate in contexts differing in cultural and socio-political values, posing similar and often contrasting challenges to evaluation. Currently the RMF is compiling its evaluation work for publication, and this paper discusses evaluation challenges to three of the projects. All three were large scale operations. The “Education for the Table” project was a national effort to reach Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) through nutrition education in regions of extreme poverty fighting malnutrition-related to health problems. The Companhia Vale Educational project, also large scale, operated in the corporate context of the biggest mining company in Brazil and a world leader. It offered schooling opportunity for the company’s adult workers with incomplete schooling. The Poronga Project was a state level intervention in primary school education in the Brazilian Amazon region, where it offered to correct the grade/age distortion prevalent in the traditional school system, through an innovative alternative instructional track. In effect, it sought to bring students ~~(~~who lagged behind) up to speed and in level with those who did not. Evaluation in all three projects called for sensitive interactions with governmental or corporate partners, as it obtained their concerns as input to evaluative questions; and with diverse participants for a responsive (Stake, 2004) evaluation. Evaluation approaches in the three projects were accordingly different. It was mainly naturalistic(Guba e Lincoln, 1981) in the Education for Table project, within a systems oriented (Stufflebeam, 1971) framework. Inclusion of minority populations, culturally (Ex. Amazonian) and otherwise (Ex. Poor, inaccessible habitats), was a challenge (Mertens, 2003) in two of the projects. In the Poronga project evaluation was summative, focused on results (Scriven, 1973, 1991) and compared the students exiting from Poronga and the traditional school systems. All three projects were use-oriented (Patton, 1997), with a view to reinforce sustainability. Empowerment (Fetterman, 2002) was helpful to guarantee participants the power of action and decision; and appreciative inquiry (Preskill e Coghlan, 2003) was helpful to uncover the good in each locale, emphasizing the values most upheld in the socio-educational action in motion. In the Companhia Vale project, data about desire to continue education, as expressed by student workers, made the evaluation team recognize that not all projects are terminal; they made recommendations for project expansion and consolidation of the innovation in motion, in a spirit of *developmental evaluation* (Patton, 1994, 2011).