

Title: Case Studies of Evaluators' Lives

Session Number: 1075

Track: Theories of Evaluation

Session Type: Panel

Session Chair: David D Williams [Brigham Young University]

Time: Oct 16, 2014 (08:00 AM - 09:30 AM)

Room: Granite B

Order:

Williams

Glass

Fitzpatrick

Hopson

Davidson

Preskill

Brandon

Donaldson

Alkin

Everyone participate in discussion

Here are the titles, abstracts as listed in the online program (modified to take out those who will not be attending), presentation notes, and links to video recordings of the session presentations.

Abstract 1 Title: Rationale and Methods for Case Studies of Evaluators' Lives

Presentation Abstract 1: The chair/organizer, **David Williams**, who is also the principle investigator for the case studies, presented the rationale and methods for this project. A recording of his introduction is available at <http://youtu.be/M5eZwE5vzpY> and <http://youtu.be/34NQJLoEhYE>.

Presentation Notes:

Evaluation theorists suggest we study how people evaluate in daily life. In response, several prominent evaluators/theorists are being interviewed in ongoing case studies. In 2012 and 2013, nine of the earliest influencers of the evaluation field shared their experiences. This year, in this session, several other theorists/practitioners will share one story from their extra-professional evaluation life and how they see that part of their life connecting to their formal evaluation life. In addition, two panel members from the 2013 session will comment on the stories from this new group. This session will begin with a brief description of the project rationale, related literature, and study processes, followed by stories and responses from panelists and discussants, who are case study participants, from the perspectives of their own experiences. Finally, audience members will be invited to ask questions and make comments.

Issues and Purpose

Evaluation theorists (e.g., Schwandt, 2003) have suggested we study how people evaluate in daily life to better understand and build/improve upon these practices. This session reports on case studies of the life-long evaluation experiences of prominent evaluation theorists/practitioners to address these issues. Based on interviews of people who have shaped the field and been shaped by it, this panel will invite these evaluators to share experiences from their extra-professional or informal evaluation life and comment on how their informal evaluation life connects with or relates to their professional evaluations and theories.

Method

Case studies (Stake, 1995) were conducted through conversational interviews (Seidman, 2006). Follow-up interviews invited interviewees to elaborate on their stories and on patterns identified during previous interviews through review of audio recordings and field notes, member checks and negative case analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Panelists will select among the experiences they shared during these interviews to tell and interpret one of their own stories and implications they see for their formal evaluation practice.

Each panelist will now share stories from their informal or extra-professional evaluation life and how they connect these to their formal evaluation lives. Then, discussants, who have presented their own experiences in previous years, will comment on these accounts.

They will be presenting in the order shown in the program except two participants who had to travel too far this year- Helen Simons and Saville Kushner.

We'll begin with Gene Glass (Gene Glass is a Research Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder, a Senior Researcher at the National Center for Education Policy and an Emeritus Regents' Professor at Arizona State University.).

Next, we'll hear from Jody Fitzpatrick (Jody Fitzpatrick was president of AEA in 2013, author of several books and articles on evaluation, a practicing evaluator, and a mother and soon-to-be grandmother.),

Rodney Hopson (Former AEA President (2012), Rodney K. Hopson is currently Professor, Division of Educational Psychology, Research Methods, and Education Policy and Senior Research Fellow in the Center for Education Policy and Evaluation, George Mason University.),

Jane Davidson (Owner and director of Real Evaluation (realevaluation.com) and an evaluation consultant),

Hallie Preskill (Hallie Preskill found evaluation in 1979; or perhaps it found her, she says. She has been a teacher and an academic; she is currently a Managing Director at FSG, based Seattle, where she oversees the firm's strategic learning and evaluation practice.),

Paul Brandon ([Paul Brandon is professor of education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, where he teaches evaluation courses and conducts educational research and evaluation.](#)), and

Stewart Donaldson (Dr. Stewart I. Donaldson [President-elect](#), American Evaluation Association; Dean & Professor, School of Social Science, Policy & Evaluation; Dean & Professor, School of Community & Global Health; Director, Claremont Evaluation Center Claremont Graduate University).

Abstract 2 Title: Reflections on a Story from Gene Glass' Evaluation Life

Presentation Abstract 2: Gene Glass shares stories from his extra-professional or informal evaluation life and his thoughts about connections he makes between them and his professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of his presentation is at <http://youtu.be/GAMu7HG1r1o>.

Presentation Notes:

A Few Thoughts for AEA on October 16, 2014

David Williams has asked us to describe how our thinking about evaluation might have related to how we made some important decisions in our life.

Maybe I've had a dozen big events in my lifetime. Each of them might have involved a decision. Two stand out.

My psychotherapy (of a psychoanalytic type) went on for 6 years between 1965 and 1974. Starting in '74, I undertook the first meta-analysis, specifically to investigate whether psychotherapy "works." I was not disinterested, but I was honest. That work concluded that psychotherapy works and that all brands of psychotherapy work equally well in the long run. In 1979, I entered psychoanalysis – 4 days a week for three years. It was expensive and it was unsettling, but it was a very valuable experience, an After Education (*Nacherziehung*) as Freud once described it. I would have to say that those 3 years in analysis were more valuable to me on a personal level than the 19 years of formal education I received previously, though I credit the latter with having earned me a comfortable living financially.

But the important point about the decision to enter analysis – and to choose a type of psychotherapy and persist in it – is that the meta-analysis of psychotherapy outcome studies – which, I have to report, has been celebrated as a "classic" – had no influence whatsoever on either of those decisions.

Jump forward 25 years.

In 2005, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. It was middling aggressive and needed to be dealt with. In 2008, I had a heart attack; it got dealt with right away. In 2013, I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a treatable but incurable blood cancer. The heart attack got dealt with so quickly that I didn't really ponder any decisions; basically, I laid back and let the doctors do what they considered necessary. Except for a pacemaker installed right after surgery when my heart stopped twice, things worked out well. But dealing with the two cancers did present opportunities to make decisions.

There are meta-analyses for both how to treat prostate cancer and lymphoma. I consulted these and pretty much followed what they said in deciding on treatments. The prostate cancer is basically "cured," a term the doctors do not use; and the lymphoma is maintained in "complete response" by a bi-monthly infusion for two years of an antibody which should extend remission by 25%, after which it will be retreated.

Step Back and Think About It

The different role that evaluation evidence played in these two instances – treating an anxiety neurosis and treating cancer – may say something about evaluation and science and evidence. I'm not sure exactly what it says, but I will hazard a guess.

Some domains are at very rudimentary stages of understanding. Psychology is one of those. Its theories are “soft” (as Paul Meehl once called them), and its measurement of outcomes is shallow.[1] But that doesn’t mean that they cannot be evaluated; but it may mean that evaluations of them may be quite incomplete or unconvincing. Other domains are mature. Certain areas of medicine are mature. Much is known about blood cancers because tons of money were spent researching AIDS in the last 30 years. And the outcomes of some possibly fatal diseases are often pretty well measured.

I can't say I have done many professional evaluations ... one or two little things in the 70s about year round schools, maybe. So I don't think I have much of a theory about how to do evaluation. Mainly, I have been preoccupied with meta-analysis – which is only tangentially related to program evaluation, in fact, less central to evaluation than statistical methods or measurement. I have tried to describe how some meta-analyses played a role in my making some decisions in my personal life – two quite different roles, actually.

I have at times thought that many evaluation questions should be reduced to cost-effectiveness questions. I think effectiveness evaluation is important; that’s why I respect meta-analyses, even though many of them fail. They often fail because people don’t know which outcomes to measure, how to measure them, or when. How good are our measures? Do we really get at the outcomes – the benefits – that count in people's lives? In my case, the answer for psychotherapy was "No." But for cancer, it was "Yes."

~Gene V Glass
September 8, 2014

[1] In 1959, Michael Scriven published a chapter in a book edited by Sidney Hook. The book was entitled *Psychoanalysis Scientific Method and Philosophy: A Symposium*. Scriven had a chapter in that book that was entitled “The Experimental Investigation of Psycho-analysis,” which would be an excellent place to start in writing the history of evaluation. He outlined a design for evaluating the outcomes of psychoanalysis. In spite of its clarity and importance, 55 years later that study has never been carried out. For what its worth, however, that Scriven took psychoanalysis seriously enough to design an evaluation of it was of some influence on my decision to give it a try.

Abstract 3 Title: Reflections on a Story from Jody Fitzpatrick's Evaluation Life

Presentation Abstract 3: **Jody Fitzpatrick** shares stories from her extra-professional or informal evaluation life and her thoughts about connections she makes between them and her professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of her presentation is at <http://youtu.be/uDlyeDJraZE>.

Presentation Notes:

Summary for AEA Panel November, 2014

Jody Fitzpatrick, 5 minutes

A story of using evaluation in my personal life to make a decision:

A simple one: Buying a house. 7 houses

Develop my criteria - quant(price, sq. ft.) and qual (style, yard); other - close to park, nature of neighborhood, distance to things I like to do.

Rate each house on criteria (not always numbers, words)

Do I develop a total score? no

Do I select the top one? Not necessarily

What does this process achieve? Clarifies my criteria (and my husband's), top houses emerge, can make decision in reference to criteria or can consciously diverge

Why use evaluation for this decision? An important decision (costly, major effect on life, could be long). Need something more than just intuition.

Why use evaluation? The articulation of the criteria is important to me; helps communicate with others involved.

Connection to evaluation: YES, we can learn about how to increase the use of evaluation by poking at decisions that might be characterized as informal. What decisions do people use more formal methods to make? controversial ones? Costly ones? Important in what other ways?

What are other sources of information besides evaluation? In representative democracy which U.S. has, democratic principles and views/values of citizens, other stakeholders. Evaluation is never the only source, nor should it be.

May skip this:

Dennis Mithaug: What distinguishes a researcher from a non-researcher? Suspended judgment. Realize the need to collect more evidence, to recognize biases. Example: Meeting a new person at a party. Deciding if you like them, want to get together with them again. Researcher recognizes limited exposure, special exposure. Meet them in a different setting, different time, doing different things.

Abstract 4 Title: Retracing roots, reinventing evaluation: Reflections from a 21st century culturally responsive ethnoevaluator

Presentation Abstract 4: Rodney Hopson shares stories from his extra-professional or informal evaluation life and his thoughts about connections he makes between them and his professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of his comments is at <http://youtu.be/1JzghlcZKMM>.

Presentation Notes:

I intend to refer to the post recent special issue of the New Directions of Evaluation on the AEA GEDI (Graduate Education Diversity Internship) Program and the pursuit of developing more culturally responsive evaluators.

Abstract 5 Title: Reflections on a Story from Jane Davidson's Evaluation Life

Presentation Abstract 5: Jane Davidson shares stories from her extra-professional or informal evaluation life and her thoughts about connections she makes between them and her professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of her comments is at <http://youtu.be/gufyqyvprVM>.

Presentation Notes:

Key points I'm planning to speak about tomorrow, on how my roots, family, and life/professional experiences have influenced who I am as an evaluator.

- I come from a long line of practical occupations, Scottish railway workers, English farmers and agricultural laborers. I'm a 6th generation kiwi and the first generation to go to university.
- My parents: My dad dropped out of high school at 15 and became an electrician with the Merchant Navy; my mum was a nurse trained in a practitioner program (not a degree).
- My dad is a very logical and rational thinker, taught me to debate and reason well, and we could always dig under the assumptions and explore things thoroughly. He knew how to structure an argument and negotiate. After his time at sea, he went into sales, management, and then public affairs.
- My mum, in contrast, is a completely illogical person, apt to throw completely irrelevant anecdotal evidence in that has nothing to do with the argument. So, she taught me (or, I had to learn) how to corral someone back to the fundamental point.
- As the first born, I got to spend a little extra time with my dad while my mum was dealing with babies and toddlers, and that formed a strong bond. The way my mind works is far more like his.
- Studying psychology, I loved the systematic inquiry, but was always uneasy that it seemed narrow and sometimes trivial, focusing on narrow issues that were easily measurable, not the big messy world.
- The first time I sat in Scriven's classes at CGU, I was struck by how much his thinking resonated with my common sense, but how he had much better words and reasoning to be able to convey what my instincts had always been telling me.
- At age 11, I was sent to a private high school, but always felt a bit out of place there because my parents weren't professionals like anyone else. Became the class joker to compensate.
- At university and graduate school, I didn't quite have the academic language that everyone else had, used to struggle to slip into that mode, wanting to write in plain language instead. And with passion and excitement. I remember Stewart telling me to tone it down, lol.
- Over time I found that some people found that refreshing, and that there was a niche for the practical, nuts-and-bolts thinking. That was just the way I was, the way my mind worked, the way I wrote, and it was OK to play to my strengths.
- Practice-based theory and practical methodologies is where I've found my niche, but I absolutely love all the diversity around me. The deep-thinking theorists, the intuitive and the analytical types, the radicals and the gentle persuaders. Long may I continue to learn from them.

Abstract 6 Title: Reflections on a Story from Hallie Preskill's Evaluation Life

Presentation Abstract 6: Hallie Preskill shares stories from her extra-professional or informal evaluation life and her thoughts about connections she makes between them and her professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of her comments is at <http://youtu.be/PWVgivS1OTY>.

Presentation Notes:

I will probably speak more contemporaneously, though I will prepare. If I write something out, I'd be inclined to read it, and I don't want to do that. I think if you share with the others, the place I'll be coming from, I'm confident they will be able to say some very pithy things J.

I think I will take 2 or 3 of the points from my interview to talk about the fact that we don't always use data for our personal decisions, and expecting our clients to use only data for their decisions, isn't really fair or reasonable. I presume this raises the evergreen question around use, rationality, intuition, and the nature of decision-making (age old issues for evaluators!).

Abstract 7 Title: Reflections on a Story from Paul Brandon's Evaluation Life

Presentation Abstract 7: Paul Brandon shares stories from his extra-professional or informal evaluation life and his thoughts about connections he makes between them and his professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of his comments is available at <http://youtu.be/aHtl42PNykQ>.

Presentation Notes:

Brandon Presentation Notes for Williams AEA-2014 Panel

The invitation to participate in this panel and the larger project that it is part of got me to reflect in a number of ways about what I could say of interest about my "extra-professional" evaluation life. One of the ways stems from the contributions of others who presented in the session like this one that David convened at last year's conference. The other way stems from the chapter abstracts that David submitted in a proposal to *New Directions for Evaluation*, for which I have the honor to serve as Editor-in-Chief. Through these, I began to dwell less on extra-professional events and more on the events and turning points in my life that led me *toward* the profession of evaluation. So for my modest contribution, I am going to define "extra-professional" as "pre-professional," similar in some ways to the presentation about his early life that Ernie House gave in the panel last year.

I'm appropriately dubious about assigning causality to my eventual path as a program evaluator, but there certainly is a pattern of characteristics, events, and contexts that lend themselves to serving as markers toward that path. So I will talk a little about them.

Fairly early on in my life, I knew that I wanted to find work in a socially useful profession. The first steps toward this were found in the activities of my folks' Lutheran church, which they involved me in from the time I was born. For a while in high school, I thought I was going to be a Lutheran minister, but it wasn't anything about theology that attracted me (indeed, theology dropped out of my life a long time ago), it was more about *morality* and constructing a social conscience.

I had my first chance to participate in activities that I consider socially useful when I was 16. My dad quit his job as an engineer for Pacific NW Bell Telephone; sold our house, furniture, and car; and moved my mother, four sisters, and me to the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea to become the business manager of a Lutheran mission. Moving to PNG in 1962 was a big deal to me; the Australians (who ran New Guinea at the time) were still going into places where the native New Guineans had never seen outsiders. Now, we can argue about the pros and cons of Christians interfering with the lives of indigenous people, but what I remember are the schools that the Mission established, the hospital that they built and operated, and the entrepreneurial activities for native New Guineans that they encouraged and nourished. The religious teaching was an afterthought to me. My sense of knowing I needed to be engaged in a socially useful activity grew during that time.

Another event that presaged my later desire to have a socially engaged career was when I dropped out of college for a semester in 1968 to work on the presidential campaign of Eugene McCarthy. I was bored as a student and disenchanted about what I was contributing. The presidential campaign was based on an anti-war foundation; participating in the campaign helped diminish my sense of disenchantment. Indeed, it was the first activity in my life as a young adult that I recall being really charged up about.

Three years later, I applied for and was granted status as a conscientious objector (CO) after being drafted into the US Army in 1970. I had applied for CO status before getting drafted but was essentially laughed out of the draft board hearing because my application was morally based, not religiously based. Through a strange turn of events that are too convoluted to go into here, after I was drafted and trained as an infantryman, I was in a situation in which it was clear to me that I had to apply for CO status again. I could not reconcile my military activities with what I considered my social identity. I told myself that I would go to jail instead of serving out my turn. Whether I actually would have gone will forever be unknown, because I was discharged as a CO 11 months and 13 days into my two-year term of service. All in all, the direction I was going in suggests a firming up of my social identity. I was “becoming me professionally.”

When I was a grad student five years later, I stumbled across an evaluation job at Nomos Institute, a little non-profit research and evaluation outfit in California and Hawaii run by Bob Heath, an evaluator at ETS and Stanford who worked with Stake, Scriven, Cronbach, and others in the '60s and early '70s. Bob's political and social mores reflected mine. For example he told me how he had purposefully marched a platoon of ROTC students into the side of a building so that he would get kicked out of ROTC, and he told many stories about participating in anti-war and civil rights marches in the Bay Area. So, quickly after starting the job, it felt like I had taken a step that was consistent with the previous socially active turns in my life.

Now, I do not mean to sound as if I was a paragon of virtue predestined to live some kind of exemplary life. But I think the early experiences that I have described helped me realize in grad school that I was well-suited to be an evaluator.

Interestingly, I have not ended up in the socially-active wing of the community of evaluators. I do not focus on social justice in the way of those such as Jennifer Greene, Karen Kirkhart, or my retired colleague, Morris Lai, who espouses indigenous evaluation principles. To me, a large part of the socially useful aspect of my career has been to study how to go about conducting evaluations in as fair, inclusive, and socially just a manner as possible. I'm a kind of socially-focused methodologist. That direction began with my dissertation about methods of stakeholder involvement—a topic I continue to dabble in. My approach has been on the methods of ensuring fairness and inclusiveness, which I hope have contributed to the broader discussion about social justice in evaluation. But that's for another conversation another time.

Abstract 8 Title: Reflections on a Story from Stewart Donaldson's Evaluation Life

Presentation Abstract 8: **Stewart Donaldson** shares stories from his extra-professional or informal evaluation life and his thoughts about connections he makes between them and his professional or formal evaluation life. A recording of his comments is available at <http://youtu.be/qKWvXb8yTjQ>.

Presentation Notes:

Balancing Emotion and Evaluation in High Stakes Decision-making (5 minutes)

Stewart Donaldson, Claremont Graduate University

Outline

Background - I will briefly discuss my relevant decision making experiences growing across three different cultures – UK, US, and Mexico
High Stakes – Major life decisions I have made balancing the forces of emotion/intuition with logic from my formal evaluation training and experience.

Examples – I will discuss this balancing act across decisions such as:

- The decision to go to college and what to major in
- Major career decisions
- Athletic performance
- Parenting decisions
- Rapid decision making as an academic leader

One of the main take home messages will be that it is much easier to be enthusiastic about using formal evaluation to make decisions when you're the evaluator, rather than the high stakes decision maker influenced by many other inputs including emotion/intuition.

Marv Alkin, from UCLA, participated in a similar session at AEA2013. He offered comments on the previous presentations as a discussant. A recording of his comments are available at <http://youtu.be/KgqQp5ViQo8>.

Open Discussion with Audience:

All presenters and discussants were invited to respond to questions and comments from the audience. A recording of the discussion is available at <http://youtu.be/q7NKFIXauxw>.

The following were unable to attend or present but any comments they submit will be posted here when received.

Presenter:

Helen Simons, University of Southampton, UK

Discussants:

Saville Kushner, University of Auckland

Michael Scriven, Claremont Graduate University