EVALUATION IN ACTION

Theory and Practice for Effective Evaluation

Gillian Squirrell

Supporting resources, such as checklists, assessment exercises, additional tools for participatory evaluation and discussion papers can be downloaded from www.e2rc.net.

Contents

Prologue

The value that a person, an organisation, a community or society places on one thing as opposed to another has come to matter more profoundly than ever in this time of difficult and complex political, economic and moral decision-making during which this book is being published. The ideas and practices explored in this book are often the means used by those making decisions about where scarce money is to be spent for measuring and establishing this value.

Evaluation is a powerful tool: one that may be used to endorse actions and choices that may leave us stuck with existing ways of doing things; or one that may be used to stimulate change and creation. Evaluation is more than a tool, a blunt instrument. There are many ways of thinking about, approaching and undertaking evaluation that can be creative, enabling, inclusive and socially innovative.

A tool of the powerful to preserve the status quo? Or an opportunity for new voices to enable creativity and change? What evaluation becomes in any of our hands is a matter of choice. This book helps make that choice an informed one. It has been written to support and extend professional community practice, to provoke reflection and encourage critical thinking.

Who this book is for

There are many books about evaluation. Some are how-to manuals, others more esoteric drill-downs into particular methodological concerns. *Evaluation in Action* is neither. It seeks to:

- give you the opportunity to understand a range of different approaches to framing and undertaking an evaluation
- help you explore a range of evaluation designs and tools to do the work, some of which are more inclusive, some less so
- encourage you to think how to select the right tools
- encourage you to think about how to work with the learning from an evaluation to stimulate project and organisational changes
- help you to think about some of the methodologies of evaluation, and how to combine them with practice

If you are an experienced evaluator, you will find some stimulating and fresh approaches here. You will be encouraged to reflect on your practice, how you design evaluations, and how you develop contracts to undertake them for others. You will be challenged to think about some aspects of evaluation unfamiliar to you, and feel supported, as aspects of evaluation such as field relationships and the boundaries to an evaluation are explored.

If you are new to evaluation, perhaps not even completely sure what it might be, for example as a new employee, volunteer, intern or student, *Evaluation in Action* has been written with you also in mind. The book is intended to be accessible, to be informative and to offer explanations about some of the terminology which may seem confusing. It puts an evaluation together step-by-step, highlighting many of the points at which choices have to be made, and the implications of those choices. It offers many practical ideas.

If you are commissioning evaluations, this book should help you, when working through the various phases; from discussion about purpose, to commissioning an evaluation, to knowing how to make use of it.

This book is intended to be useful to a broad audience:

- **The commissioner of evaluations**: how can you be sure you are asking for the most appropriate work?
- **The evaluator**: are you aware of different ways of doing evaluation, and how other people may think about each of them?
- **People coming into contact with evaluation**, as stakeholders. Do you want to get involved, or let others make value judgments for you? How might you become involved? Knowing how to do, read, comment on and play a part in evaluations is important
- **Organisations wanting to develop an evaluation strategy**. this book gives a good overview of the role of evaluation and the various ethical and political choices to be made. It helps organisations think about how to learn from an evaluation.
- **Students**, lecturers and researchers

Does evaluation matter?

We live in times where much is questioned; and many people expect to comment on what goes on, locally and nationally, in government and at work, in education and health care and community settings.

With such high expectations about involving people, obtaining value for money, and achieving the best possible results, evaluation has become a key tool in decision-making. It is important that as citizens, we understand that so much about evaluation is political. It is not something that is value-free; nothing is. We need to understand how evaluations are undertaken and, in turn, how to evaluate them.

Evaluation may seem dull, pointless and a waste of money. But, like democracy, if you don't take part in a critical and thoughtful engagement with the world around you, when an evaluation gives you that chance at some level, you are handing over power and authority to those that do.

Its all about people; and it gets emotional

Even when they focus on getting best value for money, many evaluations are about people. Who should the money be spent on? And on whom should it not? An evaluation can shake up how societies, organisations and projects are run; or it can preserve the status quo. It will always involve making choices.

The next section of this book starts out with a provocative statement that evaluation can be frightening. This might be because someone is frightened of the work involved, and have no experience of how to do it. Or it might be because your project is to be evaluated by someone else: will the evaluation recommend that you get fresh resources, and continue, or be shut down? This book sets such fears on their head. With knowledge of what is possible, and what certain decisions might mean, evaluation can be a powerful way of supporting democratic developments, innovations and creativity.

Helpful resources

An associated book*, Engagement in Practice* has been written, like this book, to support and extend professional and community practice, to provoke reflection and to encourage critical thinking.

The two books can be read without reference to each other. But taken together, they stimulate thought and action as to how any individual, organisation or community can play a full part in the systems of citizen, consumer and client involvement that have been developing in recent decades, and which continue to develop.

Engagement in Practice and *Evaluation in Action* both have supporting resources, such as checklists, assessment exercises, additional tools for participatory evaluation and discussion papers. These can be found at http://www. e2rc.net. They are referenced in the main text or the notes at the end of each chapter.

This book

Evaluation in Action offers the reader a smorgasbord of approaches, issues and positions for thinking about, and undertaking, evaluation. It encourages you to find and develop new ways of working. There is no reason to become stuck in methodological or evaluation design ruts.

The book may be enough for you for now, but throughout there are pointers to other resources and lines of enquiry for your developing practice.

About the Author

Dr Gillian Squirrell describes her career as social sciences in action. With an academic background in social sciences and management she has worked for over 20 years in research evaluation, training, organisational development and as a social entrepreneur. She has worked in and been contracted to universities, research and development institutes, the public sector and non-profits.

She founded and was the CEO of a residential, learning and training project for offenders and substance misusers for 10 years.

She has undertaken many national evaluations of social policy and programme interventions, run national consultations and researched and trained extensively in areas of programme development, evaluation, engagement and the interplay of research, policy and practice development.

As an organisational consultant and manager she has been actively engaged in working with change in organisations and mediating the various challenges that changes to programme expectations and budgets can present. She works extensively with action research and action learning and systems theory.

She is currently researching and developing a new vocationally geared social enterprise programme for excluded adults. More information about the author can be found at www.gilliansquirrell.net.

There was high praise for Gillian Squirrell's earlier Russell House publications. The three bestselling training manuals – *Becoming an Effective Trainer* (1998) and *Developing Life Skills* (1998) *Developing Social Skills* (1999) – were acclaimed in many published reviews, and remain both in print and in widespread use. *Becoming an Effective Trainer* was described as 'Particularly valuable . . . It is presented accessibly and balances theory and practice'. *Community Care*. 'An ongoing source of reference and help.' *Youthwork*. 'Promotes all the right messages.' www.trainingzone.co.uk.

Introduction

The history of evaluation is one of fear.

Walker et al., 2000[1]

This provocative statement and one to be explored and challenged in this introduction as some of the more vibrant and socially inclusive aspects of evaluation as a discipline are revealed. This Introduction:

- outlines the intentions of this book
- explores chapter contents
- outlines some developments of the short history of evaluation
- explores some features and themes of evaluation that thread through the book.

The intentions of this book

Evaluation, a word and an activity that can drive some people to defensiveness and which others use to push them there because, while the outputs of evaluation do nothing in their own right, they can be used as justification for serious actions: programme expansions, or closures; employing more staff, or closing lines of provision.

To other people, evaluation can seem dull: a burdensome requirement of a funding bid, or an additional time-consuming chore imposed on the already hard-pressed. For them, when asked about evaluation, what springs to mind is dreariness: a series of questionnaire-style surveys assessing the impact of an intervention and resulting in reports of horrific detail offering minute statistical significances.

While to others, evaluation represents a crashing waste of resources, stating nothing but the obvious but dressed up in jargon. In this vision, an army of evaluators proclaiming their 'mantra of modernity' roam the private and public sectors, inhabiting 'every facet of life from agriculture to zymurgy'. They descend in the huge numbers on managers and administrators, in the UK as elsewhere, claiming that evaluation 'confers the power to make decisions'.[2]

Yet evaluation is something most people engage in most of the time. It is the critical and thoughtful engagement with the world around us. This book is not going to undersell the knowledge and skill involved in evaluation, nor suggest that it is something everyone can or wants to do. But it does intend to take some of the fear out of evaluation, and to counteract any sense that it is a dull pursuit. It shows how:

- it is helpful to find hard evidence of the original intentions behind an intervention, and what actually happened in its delivery
- engaging in evaluative thinking can develop transferable skills
- evaluation helps us make better-informed decisions
- evaluation can be a way to understand what works, and what does not
- evaluation can be a way to think about change, and what change is needed

Combining some of the theory of evaluation with discussion about its practice, the book is intended to be useful to a broad audience, *Evaluation in Action* offers a discussion of purposes and

methodologies of evaluation and is designed to encourage wider thinking about approaches to evaluation.

Evaluation does not have to involve people being treated as the objects of someone else's quasi experiment, nor does it have to exist solely as a bureaucratic imposition. This book explores the ways some types of evaluation can support participation and the development of voice amongst people who have been rendered more marginal in society. It shows how evaluation can be used to support organisational learning, and how a form of evaluation, developmental evaluation, can work at the forefront of social innovation, in real time, with social entrepreneurs informing their decision-making as they creatively tackle complex social issues.

The content of this book

Given the wide claims about it, evaluation can feel confusing. What is it? What should it set out to do? What is its sphere of operation? Is it a discipline in its own right or a sub-branch of the social sciences? Why is there so much of it? How should it be defined? What does it mean to be formative? How can evaluations be inclusive? These are some of the many questions this book addresses.

Setting out to broaden perceptions about the possibilities for evaluation, Chapter 1 explores four reasons for evaluation, from generating knowledge through to supporting innovative programmes, and four approaches to evaluation including Fourth Generation[3] and democratic evaluation.

Chapter 2 outlines some frameworks for programme development and evaluative work including logic models and theories of change.

Chapter 3 discusses organisational learning, and explores the role that evaluations may play in both learning and change.

Chapters 4 to 6 work through a range of important and practical issues: the politics of evaluation and its uses; ethical issues in undertaking evaluations; and the process of contracting an evaluation. It suggests that failure to put time into the contract stage is to invite difficulties into the evaluative relationship.

Chapters 7 to 10 cover the stages from design through to working with the report. Particular attention is given to the discussion of the role of stakeholders, and showing how evaluations may be used to shore up an existing power base, or how they may be crafted and undertaken in ways to challenge the *status quo*.

This introduction opened with statements about some of the more negative ways in which evaluation may be perceived, and throughout the book there is full acknowledgement of the very human dimensions of the evaluative relationship. The final chapter explores the management of feelings in these relationships and the role of the evaluator.

Evaluation in Action offers the reader a range of approaches, issues and positions for conceptualising and undertaking, evaluation. It encourages the view that evaluation is unfailingly interesting. For example, one way it contributes to democratic practice and innovation. At a pragmatic level, it presents complex challenges of how best to combine purpose with appropriate research questions, constituencies of stakeholders and the inevitable management of constraints such as budget and commissioners' reporting deadlines. Evaluations can contribute to theory building or knowledge generation. There is much to take from the smorgasbord offered in this book, and very little reason to get stuck in methodological or design ruts.

The rest of this Introduction helps us locate, and take steps towards defining, evaluation. It then highlights some of its major features, and closes with an overview of themes that run throughout the book.

Locating evaluation: a historical note

Evaluation is comparatively new compared with other traditions within the sciences and social sciences. Patton, a seminal figure in evaulation's development, writes of it becoming a distinctive field within the social sciences only in the 1960s. There remain multiple tensions around it. Is it a discipline in its own right? Is it a branch of applied social sciences? What is the relationship of evaluation to research? What is its relationship to theory?

Evaluation has grown exponentially over the past 50 years; in the prevalence of its use and the number approaches. Pawson and Tilley describe it as a 'vast, lumbering, overgrown adolescent' with the problems associated with adolescence. 'It does not know quite where it is going and it is prone to bouts of despair'.[4] In 2000 Robson[5] described it as not quite yet 'fully professionalised'.

Evaluation is found in huge national programmes and in small locally based non-profit organisations. In thinking about evaluation design there are battles for some between the scientific approaches of positivism and post-positivist or constructionist paradigms. In simple terms, is it a search for 'truth', or are there multiple truths? These battles have real bite in the world of evaluation, perhaps because the stakes are high, ranging from the validation of resource expenditure to the issuing of marching orders for a programme. Much of contemporary life is managed through reviews, appraisals, audits, performance management, performance indicators and evaluation. How have we reached this point of evaluation undergirding managerialism?

The next few pages explore how the landscape of evaluation has come to be this way. This outline history lays out some of the bigger methodological issues and questions of use. It is not a clear history, with each type of evaluation tied to a specific timeline; after its comparatively simple beginnings, the evaluation story began its adolescent sprawl. It includes the emergence of different methodologies and approaches, which are not tied into single decades, but which evolve, and jostle for position over longer periods of time on the menu of evaluation options. There are surges of emphasis and different rationales for use, again, not always tied to particular decades. This account provides an overview of the historical development of ideas, and provides a 'big picture' context, before some of the ideas are discussed in more detail in later chapters.

1940s: positivism, experimental and quasi-experimental models

The early days of evaluative work, from the 1940s, the First, Second and Third Generations of evaluation, were based on an understanding of enquiry based on positivism. The intentions were measurement of the extent to which an intervention worked (First Generation, for example IQ measurement) description of what was working (Second Generation) and judgment about the nature of the intervention (Third Generation).

The work was based on testing people who had experienced an intervention and comparing them with a control group.[6] The evaluator approximated to a natural scientist, whose role in the evaluation was considered neutral as they worked alongside those who devised and managed the programmes under review, and who undertook evaluations on groups of evaluands.[7] The power dynamic in this relationship was not explored because for most it was not considered appropriate. The assumption that the programme under scrutiny was the right programme was likewise not at issue.

1960s: evaluation comes of age

Evaluations continued in this vein, until in the 1960s when they came of age with the first great waves of evaluation in the US Great Society social welfare and reform programmes. With these huge programmes came huge costs, and evaluation had the role of assessing what was happening in order to inform decisions about resource management. It was intended that social policy be grounded within evaluation research.

These evaluations were based on the logic of natural science experiments and the theory of causation. This classic experimental design is explored further in Chapter 1. Evaluation methodology was based on trying to explain the impact of an intervention, the basic design being that of the experimental group, receiving the intervention, and a similar group, a control group, which does not. The model described as OXO works as follows:

	Pre-test or pre-intervention	*Treatment or intervention*	*Post-test or post-intervention*
Experimental group	O	X	O
Control group	O		O

Diagram 1: The OXO Model

While these assumptions and form of research may work well in a laboratory it is harder in the social world to infer causation. As many variables as possible need to be excluded from the situation, so that there can be relative certainty of a causal link.

During the late 1960s and 1970s there was significant social experimentation with large-scale welfare and social programmes in educational and social policy contexts, trying to generate what were considered desirable social improvements by policy makers. The experimenting society was expensive and there was a need to understand in policy terms what worked. This debate rumbled on through the next 30 years.

It became clear that the simple OXO approach did not answer all the questions, and that there may be data both in support of an intervention and against an intervention, based on particular target groups and on context. A more nuanced approach than the experimental or quasi-experimental approaches could offer was required.

Other approaches to evaluation were developed in order to address issues about which interventions were working, so as to inform the development of social policy. Policymaking was demanding information; the history of evaluation continued with a role to play in policy development and the management of resource expenditure. Evaluators saw a need to factor in those very variables that the quasi-experimentalists had tried to factor out: the political and social contexts in which interventions were taking place.

While this Introduction moves on to explore other forms of evaluation methodology, it is important to appreciate that we are just parting from experimental or positivist methodology. These approaches continue to thrive in parallel to other and newer methodologies. It remains a very dominant paradigm within evaluation research; it is just that other contenders join the race.

The 1980s

Rather than see an intervention as something that could be isolated from its social context and from political choices, and be put under the microscope for pre-and post-test review, the social, political and contextual elements were factored in to some methodologies in evaluation research.

Constructivism, an understanding in the social sciences that people create multiple interpretations of the same thing and that people experience multiple realities in parallel, came to inform some of the ways in which researchers began to think about evaluation. Data collection moved beyond the experimental subjects to a far wider group of people involved in the intervention. Their very differing interpretations and understandings of what was happening were valued as data.

One particular development of the constructivist approach was that of Fourth Generation evaluation. Here, working to a protocol, the views of many types of stakeholders in an intervention were sought. The circle of the enquiry was spread beyond the experimental subjects of positivist approaches to a far wider group of people involved in the intervention. The stakeholders moved from being subjects of an evaluation to collaborators. In this way the research moved from the experimenter reporting on causal links to being the go-between between various stakeholders to discover a more consensual view of the intervention and it impacts. In the language of Fourth Generation evaluation this is the 'hermeneutic dialogue circle'.

The importance of realities being understood as constructions meant that the researcher had to be seen as part of the process of constructing, rather than as being something outside the process. Moreover, the researcher was seen as part of the context of what was being researched. This meant that those evaluations which were developed using constructivist or Fourth Generation paradigms did not claim to be generalisable to other contexts.

However, there is more to reality than just individuals' perceptions. Social institutions and structures exert influence in an intervention. Evaluation can sometimes be criticised for its failure to take into account the different power positions of people involved, both in decision-making and in experiencing an intervention. Politics and power relationships in evaluation are discussed at greater length, later in this introduction and in Chapter 5.

Alongside a development of a pluralism of methods ran discussions about why evaluations were being undertaken. The 1980s for example saw the rise of pragmatism or utilisation-focused evaluation. Utilisation-focused evaluation is both a statement about the reason for evaluation and an approach to working to secure this. The intention was that the data be used in some way. Utilisation-focused evaluation suggested, if there was no specification of methodology from those commissioning the work, then the evaluator should use their discretion to collect the data in any ways which would bring issues to the surface, and so make the findings as pertinent and as informative for use as possible.

The 1990s

The developments of the next decade saw greater acceptance of more pluralist approaches to evaluation, specifically the attempt to combine breadth and depth. One such example was theory-driven evaluation; but there were problems in trying to define what was theory, and in making this into something more than another experimentalist approach, with a hunt for the effectiveness of theory built in, while ignoring context. Theory based evaluation is explored in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 1 also outlines Realist Evaluation, which has developed a protocol for ways to pick apart an intervention so as to understand better what elements work, for which groups and in which contexts. As a methodology it breaks with the dominance of quantitative methods.

The development of many more approaches and their acceptance, has been described by Patton as giving rise to a menu of options for evaluators and commissioners. While methodologically evaluators had to align with a positivist or post-positivist approach, there were no rules about the combination of methods which were informed by these two paradigms. In fact adopting a mixed methods approach was seen as likely to strengthen the quality of the data. These ideas represented a significant development from the early days of quasi-experimental evaluations.

There were further new approaches in the 2000s, with for example developmental evaluation gaining in strength at the start of the second decade of the century. This is explored in Chapters 1 and 2.

The 1990s and 2000s: the rise of the trinity of outcome monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance

Meanwhile, there has been continued political commitment to the value and the uses of evaluation in decision-making.

Evaluation had become so much a part of reviewing social and welfare programmes, and scaled-down programmes, that the mid 1990s saw the national evaluation societies founded in UK, US and Australia, evaluation journals published, and cycles of international conferences on evaluation get underway. Within various arenas of social policy and practice development there was systematic development of programmes based on a What Works approach and, in some instances, the sharing of evaluative findings internationally. For example, Scotland, England and parts of the US shared evaluation-based correctional programmes for various groups of offenders in prison.

These decades saw a triumph of quality assurance and quality control movements; management was undergirded by a drive to performance improvement and the institution of excellence-based models for the provision of services and products. Responsibility for ensuring the quality of provision was pushed down the management line to front-line staff, and performance was measured according to targets and results. Evaluation had a part to play in this.

> *Evaluation techniques are essential tools of management practice today. No professional can afford not to take an analytic approach to the job to be done. Evaluation is the first step towards improving your own performance and the performance of others – the precursor to maximising effectiveness, the mechanism for minimising ineffectiveness.*
>
> Breakwell, 1995[8]

Given these sentiments it is easy to understand why evaluation could be perceived in instrumental and management terms as being about decision-making based on efficiencies, with perhaps less regard for nuanced understandings of the intervention. Evaluation could be seen as about rubber-stamping management decisions. Breakwell outlines three purposes for evaluation: validation, improvement and condemnation. She links these to the phases of the life cycle of an intervention; validation at start-up to prove the intervention is a good idea; improvement once it is in full flow; and by the final stage, the primary reason for evaluation will be 'condemnation' and service close down. This is a management based set of reasons for decision-making, perhaps based on funding availability and not on perceived need. Breakwell does argue that managers do need better

understanding of evaluation, to stop it being used for nefarious organisational purposes. This is, however, a very managerialist take on the role of evaluation.

The 2000s and the rise of evidence-based practice

Alongside the links between evaluation and performance management, ran the movement for evidence-based practice. This underscored the need for evaluation as a research tool to support policy developments and expenditure.

In evidence-based practice evaluation is 'seen as a way of investigating what works best', with the purpose of basing future policy and practice upon the results of the investigation. Blunkett[9] (2000) emphasised the importance of Government policies to be underpinned by good research; and that innovations in policy and practice need to be piloted and tested.

Much of the evidence-based practice movement began in health and has moved to other areas of professional practice. Proponents see evidence-based practice as:

- showing whether or not initiatives will be successful and, depending on the spread of pilot work, successful under a variety of conditions
- enabling the testing of new ideas in a transparent and open way before adoption, therefore supporting transparency of decision-making in policy adoption and government
- supporting the choice of developments which are efficient and which do not waste public resources
- selecting programmes which are proven to deliver value for money
- playing a role in needs analysis to show gaps in services

The era of evidence-based practice ushered in new ways to undertake professional development. There was an emphasis on reflection, on learning-based practice and development of in-house and self-evaluation. Project managers and front-line staff were expected to monitor outputs and outcomes against pre-set targets to demonstrate progress, and to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes. Evaluation became part of process management and of learning why targets were realised, or not.

Alongside this rise of evidence-based practice was the development of partnership working and working across organisational boundaries. This required increasing work-place reflection and a focus on process. Evaluation was an in-built element of these partnership processes and an indication of the extent to which partnership working could contribute to enhanced and effective service delivery.

Where we are now

The preceding pages have outlined something of the history of the evolution of evaluation from its early decades of fairly straight-forward measuring and judging interventions of an experimental approach, through its use in measuring outcomes and for management decisions to the rise of evidence-based practice and helping to shape policy, and so channel financial resources.

Recent decades have seen a development of methodologies, as awareness of the importance of power, politics and uses of evaluation have come to be appreciated. This forces choices on evaluators and commissioners to work with a menu of options, and brings the roles played by evaluators, and those who are involved in the intervention, under scrutiny. The links between evaluation and social policy development, evaluation and resource use, and evaluation and management decisions have been tabled. These threads are taken up in the remainder of the book.

It is clear, however, why Pawson and Tilley described evaluation as an overgrown adolescent with a number of uncertainties about identity and direction. To add a new metaphor, evaluation is expected to play handmaiden in a number of situations, and to fulfil a number of roles.

So far no definition of evaluation has been offered. The next section rather than offer a definition, suggests a number of defining features.

Features of evaluation

'All evaluations are a combination of the social, political and technical'.[10] This is a statement which would be hard to argue with.

Evaluations are social because:

- there is a range of interpersonal relationships involved in the evaluation involving the researcher and the various stakeholders, amongst the stakeholders themselves, and the balance of power between them
- they are about the social world, the perception of social realities and competing needs

Evaluations are political because:

- the evaluation may be informing decisions about an intervention, the use of resources or the development of a programme
- the roles and status of the various stakeholders and the ways these are used, the position of the commissioner, the design and undertaking of the evaluation, and the way the role of the evaluator is constructed and played can all be political
- the findings can be politically contentious or used to political ends

Evaluations are technical because:

- there is a need to adopt a methodology and to adhere to a coherent design for the evaluation
- there are ways in which data need to be collected and analysed in order for there to be trust in the integrity and comprehensiveness of the findings
- with such a large menu of options for ways of working, complex decisions have to be taken to match design with purpose, based on detailed understanding of different methodologies, for example participatory evaluation, which can develop new ways of working to better meet the demands of different contexts and of various stakeholders' needs
- outputs might include ways to undertake capacity building for individuals and communities

The following are some common features of evaluations; their emphasis may vary depending on approach and purpose.

Evaluations are *tied to social worlds*. They may try to illuminate a social world a little more and generate theory or contribute to knowledge, or they may be concerned with something more pragmatic like the efficacy of a programme. Evaluations are applications of social science. Their links to the world mean they have to *work with constraints* and within timeframes; they are mostly commissioned and have to take account of *a purpose beyond themselves*. Evaluations are mostly intended to *be used*, and so should conform to that purpose in the types of reporting and recommendations they make.

Evaluations *collect and weigh data*. Evaluation is about valuing and making *judgments* about something: an intervention, a plan or proposal. It is about assessing needs and making a value judgment of those needs or a judgment of an innovation in the making. How and why the judgment

is undertaken is important. This shades into the politics and power that lie behind the process of commissioning an evaluation. They make judgments about evidence. *They do not make decisions*, this is the role of those commissioning the work. The role of recommendations is explored in Chapter 10.

Evaluations are often intended to *inform the development of changes*. These changes may be improvements, such as in a formative evaluation of a programme, but they may be an appreciation of changing circumstances. The nature of the understanding of change is important, as is the value base of the evaluation.

Themes within the book

This book explores a number of themes that underpin evaluation. These include:

Values. Values permeate an evaluation at many stages, from the shaping of the research area and questions, through choices about methodology and how to conduct the evaluation, to work with the findings. These decisions are linked to power and to politics as is explored below. Which stakeholder groups will be given priority is a question of values. It is a matter of whose opinions count, and whose interests are considered significant.

Power. There are many ways in which power may manifest. Some can be flagged in questions such as who commissions an evaluation. Does it represent everyone's interests or focus more narrowly? What questioning does the evaluation encourage or allow of existing ways of working? How are the findings from an evaluation used? How widely are the findings from an evaluation shared? Are changes a result of an evaluation? Which interest groups provide data for the evaluation? What decisions are taken about methods used in an evaluation? These types of actions and decisions all make statements about power, and about which groups might be in control.

Power in the social sciences has been tabled as an issue, and challenged, through the work of, for example, feminist researchers. Feminist researchers have drawn into the frame the experiences of women and young women along with those of many other social and cultural groups. These experiences had previously been excluded as they did not fit the theories of dominant groups. In terms of interventions and the development of programmes, where there are groups whose voices are not heard it will affect the effectiveness of the intervention for them and so the overall effectiveness of the intervention. Evaluation methodologies informed by the work of feminist researchers and others concerned with those who are marginalised, have developed young people's participatory evaluation, participatory evaluation, democratic and personalised evaluation. Method-ologies and methods are explored in Chapters 1 and 2, and there is discussion about the theme of power throughout the book.

Politics. Evaluations are mostly concerned with interventions, programmes, policy or practice, all of which are reformist in nature. This gives evaluations a reformist nature as well, trying to find other ways to solve or improve social problems or situations. Evaluations are petty political in that they work with solutions which seek to address or improve existing issues. Evaluation research is infrequently undertaken in ways that question the basis of an existing system or the causes of an issue. It rarely engages in blue skies thinking working towards more radical solutions. It rarely questions given political and social situations.

An appreciation of politics is important in thinking about how to make decisions about evaluations. Chapter 1 introduces democratic and personalised evaluation as a methodology that might shift this

balance. Chapter 5 focuses on the politics in undertaking evaluations, both for political or policy development ends and as a means of supporting an existing *status quo*. Chapters 7 to 9 explore decision points in designing an evaluation and in selecting a methodology and methods, which may make evaluation participatory. Chapter 9 focuses completely on participatory evaluation as a methodology and the types of methods and processes at play.

Learning. Evaluation is undertaken to discover something, often about what changes or interventions are working or failing to work. This book is based on the value judgement that evaluations should be useful, that there is little value in an evaluation report that is written to sit in a cupboard. There has therefore to be a process of learning from the evaluation and some action taken. The importance of learning and action are explored in Chapter 3.

The human dimensions. These are often missed in discussions of evaluation. Evaluation is frequently presented as dispassionate, objective and therefore honest. The evaluator is somehow not present, more akin to a natural scientist operating some equipment in an unfeeling and unbiased experiment. Throughout the book this image of evaluation is disturbed. There are discussions of emotions, the skills and needs of internal and external evaluators as they face a variety of field issues and decisions. There are discussions of various elements in the possible interactions of evaluator and evaluand, and discussions of evaluations which are co-created and participatory.

This book

The ideas that have been introduced here show that evaluation is used as a powerful tool, and this power is part of the reason why its theories and methods are so contested. It also explains not only why its products may be destructively employed, and its name taken in vain, but also why it can be used creatively, and be inclusive and enabling.

The choice of how it is used is a personal one.

This book fuses the conceptual, and the analytically descriptive, with engagement in practice. It has been written to support and extend practice, provoke reflection and encourage thinking about the potential value of engagement.

The first part explores some conceptual issues about engagement: its purpose, value, role and developments. The second outlines some of the ways in which engagement may be designed, instigated and undertaken.

Endnotes

1. Walker, P. et al. (2000) *Prove It! Measuring the Effect of Neighbourhood Renewal on People*. London, Groundwork, NEF, Barclays Bank.
2. Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London, Sage.
3. The Fourth Generation of evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) is the development of evaluation based on an understanding of constructionism. This is the break with the logic of experimentalism and moves to an appreciation of the pluralism of views of members of society and appreciation that the social world is constructed. This is explored further in Chapter 1.
4. Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation.* London, Sage.
5. Robson, C. (2000) *Small Scale Evaluation.* London, Sage.
6. A control group is either based on a person-by-person match with someone having the intervention or more broadly as a matched group having similar features to the group

experiencing the intervention. More about controls, experimental and quasi-experimental approaches is found in Chapter 1.

7. The term for those evaluated. It is a term though which is open to debate for it suggests a very passive role for those engaged in the evaluation relationship. This returns to the discussion of purpose and methodology.

8. Breakwell, G. and Millward, L. (1995) *Basic Evaluation Methods.* Leicester, British Psychological Society.

9. DfEE, (2000) *Connexions the Best Start in Life For Every Young Person.* Sheffield, DfEE.

10. Baker, A. and Sabo, K. (2004) *Guidebook for Non-profit Organisations and their Evaluation Partners.* Brunner Foundation.