

Creative & Credible

GOOD PRACTICE IN EVALUATION

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Good practice can be demonstrated in relation to each stage of the evaluation cycle (Daykin et al. 2013). Although there are no agreed codes of practice or ethics for evaluators, as there are for researchers, some key principles emerged from the Creative and Credible Project. These include:

- Establishing evidence and understanding what is already known in order to generate relevant evaluation questions
 - Understanding the boundaries between evaluation and research and seeking appropriate permissions and approvals for the evaluation
 - Consulting with stakeholders including commissioners, funders and project participants at each stage in the evaluation cycle
 - Working through iterative evaluation cycles using appropriate frameworks that do not diminish or interfere with the artistic values that shape the project
 - Working with a valid theory of change
 - Being clear about why information is being collected, avoiding collecting data that are not used
 - Ensuring procedures for ethical conduct including obtaining consent from participants and ensuring they have a choice about whether to take part
 - Ensuring that participants have received sufficient information about the evaluation, its purpose, who is carrying it out, the activities,
 - Using tools that are reliable, practicable and do not diminish or interfere with participants' experience of arts projects and process
 - Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants
 - Ensuring that the people undertaking the evaluation have the appropriate knowledge and skills
 - Ensuring that people undertaking the evaluation understand their role, e.g. they should not attempt to act as counsellors
 - Ensuring that data are stored in compliance with data protection requirements
 - Managing risk, including unanticipated negative impacts of evaluation
 - Producing trustworthy information: avoiding bias in data collection, analysis and reporting
 - Embedding learning from evaluation in programme delivery
- Distinguishing evaluation from advocacy: evaluation findings can be used to support advocacy but advocacy should not drive evaluation.

Ethics and Evaluation

Ethical considerations affect evaluation at a number of levels. Ethical considerations are particularly important in arts and health projects which often engage vulnerable participants. While these projects may seem to be low risk, they often take place with vulnerable people such as children or people with health conditions. This is true for both quantitative and qualitative evaluations. Qualitative evaluation can touch on sensitive topics that could be upsetting for participants (Daykin and Stickley, 2015).

Ethical approval is needed for certain types of evaluation research, including research in the NHS and social care. If the project is not deemed low risk, or it requires access to personal records or confidential information, or is seeking to generate new knowledge, then formal ethics approval from University or NHS committee must be sought. The Health Research Authority (HRA) <http://www.hra.nhs.uk/> is a useful source of information and guidance. Evaluation research that is undertaken with academic partners will usually require approval from a University ethics committee.

Even when formal ethical approval is not needed for evaluation, it is important to understand the ethical principles that underpin best practice. Ethical practice is more than simply adherence to a set of rules or procedures. At the most basic level, ethical practice requires that evaluation or research do no harm to anyone taking part. More broadly, ethical considerations also include ensuring that the evaluation is worthwhile and reliable and that relationships with stakeholders, partners, evaluators and participants are based on trust and respect.

Research ethics

Unlike evaluation, research is governed by formal codes and procedures. Organisations such as the British Psychological Society (2014), the British Sociological Association (2002) and the Royal College of Nursing (2004) publish guidance to help researchers plan ethical projects. The BPS code of human research ethics outlines four key principles for research ethics

(BPS 2010). These are: respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, scientific value, social responsibility, and maximising benefit and minimising harm. Below we consider these principles as they may apply to arts and health.

Respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons. In evaluation practice, this could mean that ensuring that there are procedures in place for valid consent, such as the use of a simple consent form or recording verbal consent. It could also mean protecting the confidentiality of participants. In research it is regarded as best practice to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of people taking part in projects. However, in arts this principle may be challenged, for example, when people wish to be publically acknowledged and associated with their art work. This is not straightforward as people may not anticipate the longer term implications of being identified as having been part of an arts and health project. The repercussions might be damaging to individuals if, for example, the project is taking place in a mental health setting, a prison or with a group who are subject to social stigma or discrimination. It is the responsibility of the evaluator to assess the risks of taking part and to fully respect participant's privacy and choice whether or not to be involved in the evaluation.

Scientific value. While evaluation is not generally concerned with scientific value in the way that research should be, it is still important to ensure that evaluation activities are well designed, and that the information that is collected is actually used. It can be tempting to accumulate lots of information for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation, only to find that there is not time at the end of the project to review this or to report it. Evaluation exercises that are poorly designed or conducted waste resources. They can also place a burden on participants and devalue their feedback.

Social responsibility. In evaluation practice this generally means ensuring that the activity and the knowledge it produces can be used to benefit individuals and society. It could also mean ensuring that evaluation is undertaken with sensitivity to the representation of participants who may be from disadvantaged social groups, who can be further stigmatised by poor evaluation practice. It is also important to ensure that the evaluation is not disruptive or damaging to the activities and settings where it is taking place. This means adopting evaluation procedures that are sensitive and supportive of the arts activity or process.

Maximising benefit and minimising harm. While evaluation of arts and health activities might initially seem to be unlikely to cause harm, evaluators do need to ensure that they have considered any potential threats to participants' psychological well-being, mental health, personal values, or dignity. In evaluation it is difficult to completely avoid discussing sensitive topics. These can range from disappointing experiences of a project, challenging social interaction with peers and complex relationships with health care providers. Evaluation may also encompass issues relating to the experience of long term physical and mental health conditions. Finally, evaluation

usually requires sensitivity to power relationships. These might be damaging if not well managed, for example, when the individuals delivering the arts activity are the same as those undertaking the evaluation, or when evaluators are in authority, management and supervisory relationships with participants.

References

British Psychological Society (2014) Code of Human Research Ethics. <http://www.bps.org.uk/publications/policy-and-guidelines/research-guidelines-policy-documents/research-guidelines-poli>

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