

The Role of Evaluation in Social Change: Perspectives from the USA

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US Historical Perspective

1800s external inspectors of schools/prisons

1960s Great Society/Head Start (objective, social science methods)

1970/80s Paradigm wars; fragile peace accord

1990s Social Justice (House, Greene, Mertens)

Government Performance Results Act (1993) (long range plan; indicators; annual reports)

Program Assessment Rating Tool used to judge programs' budgetary worth— criticized for slow review cycles and findings of incomplete evidence

No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (RCTs=gold)

Policy and Evaluation Developments in the New Millennium

- 2003 American Evaluation Association's Statement on Scientifically Based Evidence
- Discord ensues
- 2009 AEA submits a roadmap to the US Executive Branch: lifecycle evaluation & diverse methods
- President Barak Obama: More rigorous evaluation of federally funded programs in the areas of education, health, and social services
- “What study design would be used, and why is it the most rigorous, cost-effective methodology appropriate to answering the questions outlined?”

Current Government Policy

President Obama (Nov 2011) “Programs are going to be regularly evaluated against a set of clear, high standards,” adding that funding will go to programs that work and will be taken away from those that don’t.

May 2012: “All programs are expected to evaluate their results.” And have a high-level official responsible for program evaluation.
Rigorous evaluation-RCT if possible

Resolving the tensions: Are we back where we started from?



**Rigorous, RCT, appropriate, mixed
methods, culturally responsive,
transformative, social justice, life
cycle evaluation**

Basic Issue

What is credible evidence?

What criteria establish credibility of evidence?

What sources/methods give us insight into credibility?

What is the place of social justice in credibility?

How do voices of marginalized communities enhance our understandings of credibility?

Advances in Evaluation Theory: Theory is Who We Are (Shadish, 1998)

The uniqueness of evaluation is “our willingness to attack value questions by studying merit and worth, our understanding about how to make results more useful than most other social scientists can do, or the strategies we have developed to help us choose which methods for knowledge construction to use depending on the needs of the evaluation client” (p. 5).

Advances in Theory: Paradigms & Branches

Paradigm	Branch
Post-positivist	Methods
Constructivist	Values
Transformative	Social Justice
Pragmatic	Use

Evaluator Roles

Method

Evaluator as objective,
neutral party

Use

Social relations
manager to
facilitate use

Values

Communicator who
engages in
meaningful dialogue

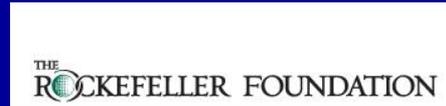
Social Justice

Relationship builder
based on trust and
cultural respect;
investigator of structural
inequities

Series of 17 live webinars on “Equity-focused Evaluations”

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The screenshot shows the MyM&E Virtual Library website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, About, Partners, and Contact. Below this is the main header area with the text "My M&E" and a navigation menu containing icons for Wiki, Community, Webinars, Videos, How to..., Training, Virtual Library, Jobs, and Roster. A blue arrow points from a "New" notification box to the "Virtual Library" icon. The notification box contains the text "New Integrating Equity, Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation" and "Virtual Tool / Recording".

Below the navigation menu, there is a "Virtual Library" section. On the left, there is a language selection dropdown menu labeled "Select Language" with a "Powered by Google Translate" logo. Below this are links for "My account", "Create content", "Administer", and "Log out".

The main content area of the "Virtual Library" section features a "Recommended Virtual Library" section with three links: "Recommended Virtual Library", "Community Virtual Library", and "Contribute Virtual Library". Below these links are four book covers:

- How to design and manage Equity-focused evaluations** (UNICEF)
- Bridging the gap: The role of M&E in evidence-based policy making** (UNICEF)
- Country-led M&E Systems: Better evidence, better policies, better development results** (UNICEF)
- From policies to results: Developing capacities for country monitoring and evaluation systems** (UNICEF)

Rights Based Approach

UN Declarations & Conventions

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Race (1979)
- Disabilities (2006)
- Women (1979)
- Children (1990)
- Migrant workers (1990)
- Indigenous peoples (2006)

Rights Based Programs & Evaluation Strategies

- UNICEF (2010) : equity focused approaches in programme decisions & human rights approach to evaluation
- UN Women: gender equity & rights based approach to evaluation
- UNDP evaluation policy (2011): equity, justice, & respect for diversity

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is a stance taken toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills. A culturally competent evaluator is prepared to engage with diverse segments of communities to include cultural and contextual dimensions important to the evaluation. Culturally competent evaluators respect the cultures represented in the evaluation throughout the process. (American Evaluation Association, 2011)

My hypothesis:

- If we begin by prioritizing social justice and human rights
- And we appropriately involve community members in the evaluation process,
- Then we will increase the probability of social transformation as a result of our evaluation.

Transformative Paradigm

- Is applicable to people who experience discrimination and oppression on whatever basis, including (but not limited to) race/ethnicity, disability, immigrant status, political conflicts, sexual orientation, poverty, gender, age, or the multitude of other characteristics that are associated with less access to social justice.
- To the study of the power structures that perpetuate social inequities.
- Indigenous peoples and scholars from marginalized communities have much to teach us about respect for culture and the generation of knowledge for social change (Mertens, 2009, p. 4).”

Transformative Paradigm

Beliefs	
Axiology	Respect for cultural norms; support for human rights and social justice; reciprocity
Ontology	Issues of power & critical interrogation of multiple realities: social, political, cultural, economic, race/ethnic, gender, age, religion and disability values to unmask those that sustain an oppressive status quo
Epistemology	Issues of power & Interactive link; knowledge is socially and historically located; trusting relationship.
Methodology	Qualitative (dialogic)/ Quantitative mix; Context

Transformative Axiology: Methodological Implications

- What are the ethical principles that guide my work?
- What is the connection between those ethical principles and issues of social justice?
- How do the ethical principles reflect issues of culture and power differences? How are dimensions of diversity such as gender addressed in terms of power differences?
- How can this evaluation contribute to social justice and human rights?
- What rights does this program advance under CEDAW, CRPD, CRIP, and the Millennium Development Goals?
- If I accept that this is a desirable goal for the evaluation, what would I do differently in terms of methodology?
(Mertens & Wilson, 2012)

Nature of Reality

- Is there one reality that we know imperfectly
- Are there many versions of reality
- That require us to delve deeply into understanding factors that lead us to accept one version of reality over another
- That have consequences in terms of who is hurt if we accept multiple versions of reality or if we accept the “wrong/privileged” version?

Ontology: Whose Version of Reality is Privileged? With what consequence?



Hunger or Food insecurity?

Definition of Poverty

- Do you think it is appropriate to add how safe a person may feel, or whether they have psychological well-being as a dimension of poverty?
- What if a young man is fed well, is clothed, has a place to sleep, but must sell his body in order to obtain these assets?
- What if a child lives in a home where they are physically cared for but emotionally abused?
- Would you find poverty in these situations? (Akire & Foster, 2010; Mertens & Wilson, 2012)

Transformative Ontological Methodological Implications

- To what extent will the evaluation be designed to reveal different versions of reality? How will the experiences of diverse groups (e.g., men/women; people with disabilities) be made visible in terms of their versions of reality?
- How will the evaluator determine those versions of reality that have the potential to either support or impede progress towards social justice and human rights?
- What are the potential consequences of identifying these versions of reality? How will the cultural norms and beliefs that have the potential to silence members of marginalized groups be addressed?
- How can this evaluation contribute to the change in understandings of what is real and address discrimination and oppression?

In Transformative Terms

- Epistemology: Assumption about the nature of knowledge and how to relate to that which you want to know
- In addition to asking, what is the nature of knowing and how does the knower relate to that which would be known? We also ask:

If I am to **genuinely** know the reality of something, how do I need to relate to the people from whom I am collecting data?

Philosophical Assumptions: Epistemology

- What should your relationship be as an evaluator to the people in your study? How should you interact with the people in your study?
- Should you be distant and removed so you prevent bias?
- Or, should you be close and involved so you prevent bias? Smile
- What makes it better so you can determine what is real?

Transformative Epistemology

Methodological Implications

- What are the skills necessary to engage in evaluations that promote social justice and human rights in terms of the types of relationships needed to accomplish this work successfully? How does the evaluator take the positioning of marginalized groups in a cultural context into account?
- How can evaluators address issues of power differentials explicitly and insure that the voices of the least powerful are accurately expressed and acted upon? What strategies can be used to enhance the opportunity for marginalized voices to be heard in contexts in which they are traditionally silenced?
- How can evaluators establish trusting relationships with stakeholders? (Mertens & Wilson, 2012)

In Transformative Terms

- Methodology: Assumption about appropriate approaches to systematic inquiry – explicitly addressing issues of power
- Instead of asking, do we do a qualitative or a quantitative study?... We ask:

How do we collect data about the reality of a concept in such a way that one feels confident that one has **indeed captured** that reality and done so in an ethical manner?

Role of Evaluator

- Ask provocative questions
- Advocate for cyclical designs that are culturally responsive
- Be engaged from the beginning
- Provide contextual analysis before the intervention is developed
- Ask provocative questions
- Insure engagement with diverse stakeholders is accomplished throughout the process in culturally appropriate ways

What is the role of evaluation in answering this call?

The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.

Martin Luther King (1967) *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

How easy is it?

- “You cannot be afraid if you want to accomplish anything. You got to have the willin', the spirit and, above all, you got to have the get-up.” (NPR, Hidden Kitchens, March 4, 2005);
- Georgia Gillmore, who was fired after speaking against the white bus driver who kicked her off his bus in 1956 in AL; she opened her own “kitchen”, sold food to raise funds for the Civil Rights Movement, & died 25 years later - still cooking

Back to the Role of Evaluation Theory with a Water Metaphor

How Ocean Currents Work

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Global Conveyor Belt

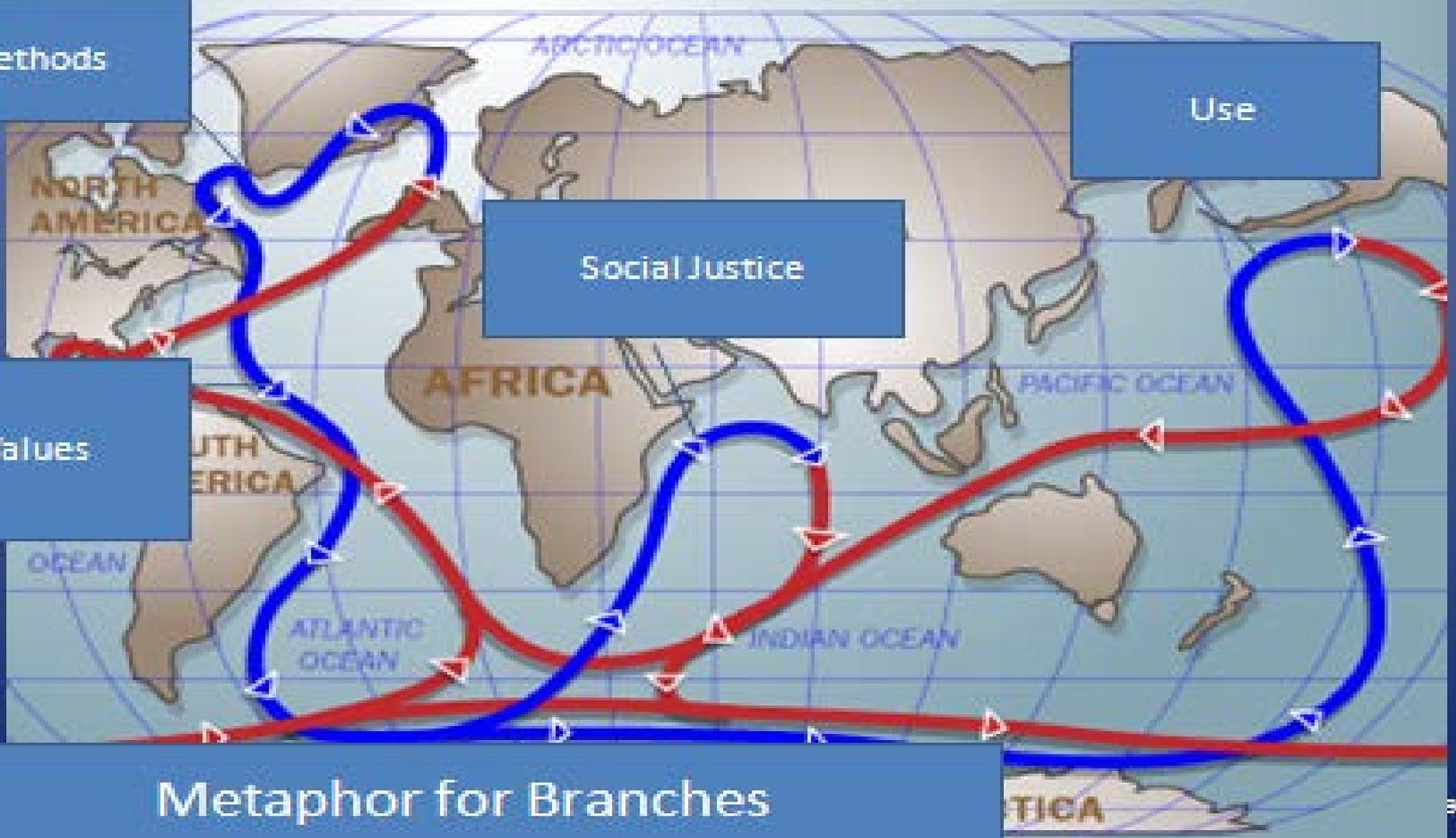
Methods

Use

Social Justice

Values

Metaphor for Branches



Resources

- Alkire, S. & Foster, J. (2011). Understandings and misunderstandings of multidimensional poverty measurement. Oxford: Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative.
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