Pluralist Evaluation for the Real Worlds of Intervention

Dr. John Canavan
Associate Director
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre
Presentation Plan

- Challenges and Positions
- Contexts
- Realist Evaluation
- Evidence Based Practices
- Practice
- Rights
- Thick Outcomes
- Organisational Dimensions
- Imperatives?
Challenges and Positions (1)

• How can we establish whether our existing programmes, services and practices make a difference to children?

and

• What programmes, services and practices should we fund and implement in order to improve children’s lives?
Challenges and Positions (2)

- Aim is to elaborate a set of key themes in forwarding a pluralist evaluation agenda – linking issues of evidence and research design with core elements of intervention and evaluation
- Builds on previous work for Eurochild arguing for a pluralist orientation towards evidence
- Making some suggestions on what evaluation practice might look like
- Biography
Contexts (1)
Contexts (2)
Focusing An Evaluation

- Domain
- Scale
- Complexity
- Stakeholder Requirements
- Orientation
  - Formative / Summative
  - Process / Outcome
- Design / Methodological Approach
  - Experimental, Participatory, Utilization focused ...
- Methods
  - Qualitative
  - Quantitative
Contexts (3)

• Capacity
  – Ireland’s experience of developing capacity

• Cost
  – Expensive RCTs in recessionary times (best research and thin services?)
  – Caution about the relationship between research and policy choices
Realist Evaluation (Pawson, 2006)

• The world is real and not dependent on how we see or understand it
  – Not relativist
• Social science requires an open systems approach
  – Complex world; many factors; evaluator role
• Causality as generative
  – Identifying the mechanisms
• Fit with theory of change / logic modelling approaches
Evaluating EBPs

• Ireland’s experience
• What to do when NO system or cultural barriers
  – Implementation studies and Pre-post studies
• Multiple needs / Utilisation / Attrition / what drives the design?
Common Factors

- Psychological treatment effectiveness
- Client-therapist relationship vs. technique
- Common factors
  - that ensure successful programmes
  - techniques within EBPs
- Develop and test common curriculum (not about menus)
- Time horizons
Valuing Practice in Evaluation (1)

Two Positions

1. Schwandt (2005) highlights the importance of practice as the: ‘“rough ground” where values, personalities, evidence, information, feelings, sensitivities, emotions, affect, ambiguities, contradictions, inconsistencies, and so forth are simultaneously in play as we try to do the right thing and do it well’ (p.99).
Valuing Practice in Evaluation (2)

- Practice is highly significant in evaluation
  - Not about ‘fixing it’
- More than model fidelity
  - e.g. Relationships
- Pedagogical approaches that encourage evaluative thinking among practitioners
  - Developing the capacity for self-evaluation or reflective practice
Valuing Practice in Evaluation (3)

- Narrowsness of evidence base / failure to take adequate account of clinicians’ experience or the experiences of clients in EBPs
- Combine practice wisdom and scientific research
- Developing interventions, or mapping EBPs to existing service ecologies
- Invokes the essentially realist evaluation questions ‘does it work where, for whom, when, and to do what’ as suggested by Walker (2003)
- This leads to an opening up of evaluation to attend to how practice wisdom connects to EBPs
Respecting Rights (1)

• To what extent are the rights of children and parents reflected in the intervention?
  – Their rights to participate in the development and design of policy, programmes and services and in particular, their role in decisions on what the outcomes of interventions should be, and critically the link between the outcomes and their rights.
Respecting Rights (2)

• To what extent are the rights of children and parents reflected in the evaluation?

  – Their right to participate in the design of the evaluation study and to be active participants in it, from governance roles to roles in agreeing evaluation reports.
Respecting Rights (3)

• Well established Evaluation Design Approaches that are ‘rights-focused’ in their orientation
  – Stakeholder approaches (Bryk, 1983)
  – Participatory Action Research (Kemmis et al., 2014)
  – Empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001)

• Link to participatory planning (co-production?)

• Establish if and how these can be well integrated with experimental or quasi-experimental approaches in single studies, in ways that speak to policy makers at national and supra-national levels
‘Thick’ Outcomes

• Pluralist approach at the level of measurement
• Value of perspectives of children and parents
• Combine Status Measures, Standardised Measures and Attitudinal / Perspectival Measures
• Weight differently; use at individual level for intervention planning, aggregate for service improvement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Type</th>
<th>Specific Measure</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status Measure</td>
<td>In community / in care&lt;br&gt;Offences since intervention&lt;br&gt;In community / incarcerated&lt;br&gt;Involvement in supportive community networks</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standardised Measure</td>
<td>Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997)&lt;br&gt;Child Behaviour Inventory (Eyberg and Pincus, 1999)&lt;br&gt;The Adapted Social Provisions Scale (Dolan and Cutrona)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudinal Measure</td>
<td>Child view on effect of service on behaviour&lt;br&gt;Parent view on effect of service on behaviour&lt;br&gt;Referrer view on effect of service on behaviour&lt;br&gt;Practitioner view on effect of service on behaviour</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Organisational Dimensions

• Develop partnerships with university or institutes of higher education towards organisational capacity for evaluation and an organisational culture of evaluation:
  – Building self-evaluation capacity
  – Assisting in information systems design
  – Building the mutual trust necessary for Experimental / Quasi-experiment studies

• UNESCO CFRC – specific experience in partnership working (Tusla, Foróige)
Imperatives

• Adopt a realist epistemology; ask what works for whom, in what contexts.
• EBPs don’t always need experiments, study implementation / gather outcome data through benchmark studies.
• Research common practices inherent in EBPs; develop and evaluate curricula based on these.
• Evaluate practice on its own terms / connect practice wisdom and EBPs in evaluation designs.
• Involve children and parents in the evaluation – design, management and dissemination.
• Develop ‘thick outcomes’ approaches; value the perspectives of children and parents.
• Build partnerships between academic institutions and Government- and Non Government Organisations in order to create pluralist evaluation capacity.