

Action research and evaluation

Negotiating an evaluation
base between stakeholders
with disparate needs,
values and expectations

*Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted*

Albert Einstein

Introduction

- Acknowledgments
- Who we are

Outline of presentation

- Action Research (AR): its characteristics include evaluation
- The setting: SFCS and CfC
- Challenges: of a National programme and its evaluation processes
- Experiences: from East Timor
- AR: bridging National and Local interests

Action Research

- Democratic
- Collaborative
- Participative
- Change-oriented
- Small-scale
- Local

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) and Communities for Children (CfC)

- SFCS – an early intervention and prevention strategy initiated nationally from FaHCSIA targeting children and their families in identified disadvantaged areas

The CfC evaluation strategy

- The National Evaluation Framework targeting 10 sites using demographic profiles; service mapping; surveys; and interviews.
- Local Evaluations designed and implemented locally using a variety of strategies

Challenges - disparate values

- Competing interests - whose goals?
- Evidence based practice and interpretive paradigms
- Competition and collaboration
- Unskilled in processes
- Accountabilities

The experiences from East Timor – a case study

- **Needs:** Re-establish a nation wide education system
- **Expectations:** Development of Parent Teacher Associations across East Timor
- **Values:** Underlying beliefs in community engagement and parental participation

East Timor case study Cont'd

- Consultant applied AR, involving six steps over four phases, over a period of three years.
- Four different groupings
- Three outcomes:
 - Effective government programmes and services demonstrating transparency can result;
 - Staged or phased implementation accommodates local needs and conditions in a form of targeted universalism; and
 - The strengths and abilities of local people enrich the services of government policies/services.

National Positions

	East Timor	Communities for Children
Needs	Re-establish a nation wide education system	Address child health and welfare under-development
Expectations	Development of Parent Teacher Associations across E. Timor	Generation of child supportive communities (good antenatal and maternal health and nutrition, parental communication and positive attention from both parents, family harmony and participation in broader social networks)
Values	Underlying beliefs in community engagement and parental participation	Service partnerships, coordination and cooperation; capacity building

	East Timor	Communities for Children
Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ National decision to ‘engage parents’ ➤ Engagement of AR specialist consultant ➤ Consultative workshops at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ National selection of 45 sites ➤ NGO tender for service (competitive) ➤ NGO contracts out to local community organisations
Performance	<p><i>Action Research Cycles</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Framing and focusing of the issue, ➤ Identification of stakeholders having an impact on the issue, ➤ Gathering information from stakeholders and other relevant sources, ➤ Distilling the information to identify key issue, ideas and elements ➤ Reporting on what has been discovered, and ➤ Formulating next steps (planning the next research cycle) <p><i>with each of the four groups, during four phases</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Coordination and over-sighting of individual programmes by FP ➤ Individual management of programmes by CPs ➤ Information provision/work-shopping topics (ARACY, CAFCA), mainly for LEs and FPs ➤ Evaluation by LE
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development of Parent Teacher Associations across E. Timor actively supporting their schools ➤ Different local activities: e.g. fish-farming as fund-raiser ➤ Differential success ➤ Trained district support teams ➤ Continued support from National government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Skilled local Facilitating Partners ➤ Four years duration of support programmes ➤ Establishment of agency networks and collaborative processes ➤ Increased understanding of importance of Early Years

Action Research: bridging the National and Local in evaluation

Bridging requires:

- Vision
- Identifying groupings
- Time
- Micro involvement
- Trust
- Civil society as mediator
- Working with values (explicit)

Conclusion

Rather than seeking finality, we now
consider ourselves at the beginning ...
of dialogue,
alongside,
towards closing the gap between
national/ local policy practice evaluation
processes.

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