Creativity in evaluation

LIZ AUSTEN & STELLA JONES-DEVITT

You will need tools to enable drawing and writing!
Overview

- Disrupting existing evidence
- Principles of evaluation design
- Can creative approaches help?
- Introduction to storytelling
- Pre-intervention storytelling
- Post-intervention storytelling
- Considerations
- What else could you do?
Activity: Disrupting the evidence hierarchy
Guiding Principles for evidence gathering and use?

- innovative
- dialogic
- empowering
- accessible
- inclusive
- ethical
Can creative approaches help?

(Kara 2020, Artworks 2012)

- Creative approaches offer new ways of knowing
- They are multi-disciplinary
- You can be creative at any stage of the evaluation research process
- Can be fun and engaging
- Whilst creative approaches might be appealing, methods must be chosen because they will help you answer your questions/provide evidence linked to outcomes
- Creative methods are not an excuse for unethical, sloppy or self indulgent practices
- Creative is not necessarily better, conventional methods have their place
- Creativity is not inherently qualitative – seen in quantitative and multi-modal exploration too
- The academic acceptability of creativity varies across the globe – a western lens of creativity?
- Creativity can be intimidating
What's the story?

**TYPES OF STORY**
- Vignettes
- Chronicles
- Testimonials
- Diaries
- Counter-stories (CRT)

**TYPES OF METHOD**
- Story (Theory) of Change
- Most Significant Change technique
- Digital storytelling
- Story completion
- Portraiture
- Life history interviews
Story (Theory) of Change

Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these related to one another causally) for the goals to occur.

The Centre for Theory of Change

(pre-intervention story: participatory)
Theory of Change for volunteer wellbeing

**Activity**
Volunteering with a group, club or organisation

**Key influencing factors**
- Individual circumstances
- What volunteers do, how much and how often
- Volunteering support and management

**Mechanisms of change**
- Connecting with others
- Feeling appreciated
- Doing something purposeful and meaningful
- Developing and using skills and experiences
- Role and group identity
- Enjoyment
- Structure, routine, distraction
- Exposure to outdoors and nature
- Role demands

**Purpose, identity & values**
- Increased sense of purpose and meaning of life
- New/developed sense of identity
- Expression of altruism/giving back

**Personal growth and development**
- Increased self-efficacy
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased confidence
- Increased stress, exhaustion, burnout

**Subjective wellbeing impacts**
- Greater happiness
- Higher life satisfaction
- Better quality of life
- Stronger or clearer sense of purpose
- Reduced anxiety
- Less depression

**DRIVERS and BARRIERS**
- Social relationships and networks (family, friends)
- Individual resources (e.g. health, time, skills, confidence)

**Wider community, societal and global factors**

**Subjective wellbeing**
influences and shapes volunteering

Intermediate outcomes
Story Collection: Most Significant Change (MSC) technique

1. Recruiting and training story collectors
2. Identifying and preparing storytellers
3. Collecting stories
4. Recording and transcribing
5. Editing
6. Discussion day
7. Sharing stories

https://oldfirestation.org.uk/project/storytelling-evaluation-methodology/

What was the most significant change that has occurred/that you noticed....?
Digital Storytelling: Context

There are a number of stages which can be followed to prepare for the creation of a story. These require a mix of independent reflection and story sharing which will take place before any personal components are considered. The researcher/evaluator should firstly decide whether any story parameters need to be set to help to guide the storyteller.

**ACTIVITY TASK 1** – Think about your first year of the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme and the story you might like to tell. Spend 5 minutes reflecting on your chosen story and free writing notes.
Break

Reflections
Why have you chosen this story?
Who is implicated in this story (people, organisations)?
How do you feel about telling this story?
Are there any risks to consider here?

10 MINUTES
Digital Storytelling: The boundaries of sharing

**TASK 2** - Now you have decided on your story, tell your story to another person in a break out room. Reflect on how you felt as the storyteller. Ask the listener to reflect on how they felt as you told it.

NB - if you are unable or uncomfortable telling the story to one person, think carefully about whether you are ready to tell this story as part of the research/evaluation. The process of storytelling can be both empowering and distressing. Researchers should build in processes for storytellers who require support.
Digital Storytelling: Structure

**TASK 3** – Begin to storyboard your story by segmenting into individual screens. Your story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but they don’t need to be in that order!
Digital Storytelling: Production

**TASK 4** – Using digital storytelling software (e.g. Adobe Spark), or simply within Google Images (or alternative stock image website) begin to search for still images which represent the stages of your story. You may need some creative keyword searching. Remember that images can represent events, experiences and emotions.
**Considerations**

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>What participants would be the most appropriate for this form of data collection?</td>
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<td>Could you use storytelling to collect data longitudinally/over time?</td>
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<td>How do you account for the danger of a single story (Adichie 2009), a normalising story, the loudest story?</td>
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<td>How do you ensure that stories do not reinforce cultural norms and otherness?</td>
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<td>Can you avoid the celebratory, prescriptive, sentimental or nostalgic?</td>
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<td>How do you avoid creating space to unpack or off-load of guilt without an obligation to positively change behaviour?</td>
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<td>How will you ensure continuously sought voluntary informed consent to discuss, create, publish and analyse stories?</td>
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What else could you do?

A FEW IDEAS....
Further creative resources:

“Standard questionnaires, tick box forms and interview techniques don’t naturally enable a deep level of imaginative thought or complex recollection of events, and can be easily led by the people seeking the information, as opposed to those giving it.” (Artworks 2021: 4)

Thinking creatively within conventional methods: focus groups

Avoid transactional “you say and we will/might do” approaches.

Try more active learning approaches in groups to gather evidence:

- Ranked prioritisation (e.g. polls in which the top 3 aspects are then discussed)
- Clustered/collaborative decision-making (e.g. ball sort activities)
- Critical thinking gaming (e.g. snakes and ladders, cubing)
- Caricature (e.g. use of templates, drawing & exhibiting responses, 3 minute persuasion)

N.B. Takes a bit more planning but richer data and much more ownership and active engagement
Thinking creatively within conventional methods: surveys

Big Q: Why & could anything else be better?

Consider – optimising the design features. Use evidence-informed Survey Research Design Checklist:

- Access to survey (e.g. embedded, integrated, promoted, for whom?)
- Level of support (e.g. ‘visible’ offer, managing consent/confidentiality, pre-survey discussions?)
- Incentives (e.g. what and why, timing?)
- Optimal length (e.g. piloting, delivery design impact?)
- Information fatigue & timing (e.g. when in student lifecycle, mid survey prompting, shelf-life?)
- Question wording & ordering (e.g. intuitive, meaningful, piloted, unambiguous?)
- Layout (e.g. design, filtering, navigation?)
- Reporting/debriefing (e.g. engagement post-completion, results discussion, use of evidence?)
What next?
References


QAA Scotland Webinars: https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk//en/completed-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement/optimising-existing-evidence/webinar-series