



Caring in Field Research: Acknowledging and Managing a Major Tension of Practice

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Discussion Outline

- Context/discussion approach
- The caring tension
 - *Driving forces* towards caring
 - *Restraining forces* towards caring
- Strategies to address restraining forces (barriers)
- Case examples

Context – Evaluation Field Research

- University-based
- Mixed method/pragmatic (Patton, 2015)
- Formative primarily
- Multi-year

Positionality

Subjectivity:

- Life experiences that inform our opinions.

Reflexivity:

- “...critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 268).
- “Continuous examination and explanation of how [researchers/evaluators] have influenced a research project” (Dowling, 2008).

Positionality will affect perspective, word choice, representation, and so on.

Positionality

- Respect & promote well-being of stakeholders
- Trust and treat all with fairness
- Offer participants a voice (their voice)
- Embrace program context (beyond outcomes)

Today's approach: A force field view of caring (K. Lewin, 1943)



Driving Forces Towards Caring

Profession drivers

University drivers

Personal drivers

Profession Drivers Favoring of Caring

Program evaluation standards <http://www.jcsee.org/>

AEA principles of practice (ethics) <http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51>

EVAl Standards as Caring Drivers:

U2 Attention to Stakeholders

U8 Concerns for Consequences and Influence

P1 Responsive and Inclusive Orientation

P3 Human Rights and Respect

P5 Clarity and Fairness

AEA: Practice Principles as Caring Drivers

Respect for People - respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients and other evaluation stakeholders.

Responsibilities for General & Public Welfare - articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.

University Norms/Culture as Caring Drivers

Expectations and Norms for:

- Community Service
- Conducting of Research
- Informed Consent

Personal Caring Drivers

Social commitment - social betterment is a common evaluator value

Personal ethics – a faculty members moral code

Positionality (Subjectivity/Reflexivity)

**Given these powerful drivers, what is
the problem?**

**There are real-world barriers to caring,
and they are challenging our discipline.**

Caring...Requires Substantial Time

Barrier: Limited evaluation resources & subsequent cuts in evaluation budgets increasingly minimize...

- Travel – time in setting
- Personnel intensive data collection efforts

Caring...Requires a Focus on Process

Barrier: Funding agencies increasingly narrowing their focus towards outcomes

- Preference counterfactual/statistical designs
- Interest in what works, rather than for whom, and in what contexts (Program Assessment Rating Tool – PART)

“The key to assessing program effectiveness is measuring the right things. The Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) contains several questions about the quality of a program's long-term and annual performance goals and measures, as well as questions about how well a program has achieved its performance goals.”

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/OMB/expectmore/faq.html#007>

Caring...Requires Thick Description

Barrier: Funders increasingly mandating...

- A limited # of common “data” tables/elements
- Brief (2 page) executive summaries

Caring...Requires Broader Involvement

Barrier: Clients who increasingly resist more involved and empowered stakeholders

- Clients have indicated “*you don’t need to talk with our board members – this is our program evaluation.*”
- Clients have indicated that we don’t need to involve parents of the participants – “*they don’t know about the program to offer us much.*”
- Preferred evaluation use by client, minimal stakeholder involvement.

Overview of Seven Potential Strategies to Address Barriers

Efficiency Strategies

1. Spread QUAL data collection/costs across project years
2. Use technology promoting audio/visual stakeholder interaction
3. Use volunteers: internships, student volunteering for experience

M & E Strategies

4. Move quantitative data collection to project staff
5. Use creative periodic reporting to tell the larger story

Engagement Strategies

6. Promote written reflections for a data source
7. Community Hotline to reach invisible stakeholders

Efficiency Strategy 1

Spread Data Collection/Costs Across Years

Case example:

We selected one group of stakeholders for special focus *each* project year; by the end of the 5-year project, all major stakeholder groups were reached in a substantive manner.

Efficiency Strategy 2

Use IT to Increase Stakeholder Interaction

Case example:

We used Zoom/Skype/Google Hangout to reach project participants living in multiple states for multiple interviews.

Efficiency Strategy 3

Train Volunteer Data Collectors: Students, Faculty, Community Members, etc.

Case example:

We trained and used:

- Service learning students
- Students seeking to practice research skills
- Faculty seeking service hours

M & E - Strategy 4

Shift Quantitative Data Collection to Project Staff

Case example:

We taught project staff to embed several types of quantitative data collection into the operations of the project. This enabled us to focus more labor intensive interviewing.

M & E - Strategy 5

Maximize Reporting Opportunities

Case example:

We used project quarterly reporting to share extensive qualitative data/findings, enabling us to reference these data in support of the annual progress report.

We used more user friendly data reporting, especially regarding innovate visualization.

Engagement - Strategy 6

Collect Participant Reflections Within Program Activities

Case example:

We had program staff request structured participant reflections on specific questions at selected, strategic times during an intervention.

Engagement - Strategy 7

Find/Involve Unknown Stakeholders

Case example:

For an invisible, hard to reach community we worked with community organizations and student volunteers to create, publicize, and operate a phone hotline for input into the evaluation.

Let's try it!

Now it's your turn



- Take a look at the case example being passed out to you.
- Talk with people sitting near you about the evaluation client.
- Consider the three “Cs” of caring:
 1. Client (what do they want to accomplish)
 2. Community (what are their resources and barriers)
 3. Culture (what empowers their ideas and customs)
- Elect a spokesperson in your group to share your ideas.

Summary: The Seven Potential Strategies to Address Barriers

Efficiency Strategies

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Integration Group

Your client is a large, public-school system in an economically depressed area of the mid-west that is gaining Syrian refugees. Classes for parents and children are being provided at school sites. The goal is to help the refugees find a sense of community.



Growth Group

Your client, a small religiously affiliated university in the southeast, has begun an online degree option for their educational specialist degrees. The goal is to increase enrollment in the university by offering this online option.



Revitalization Group

Your clients are members of a mid-sized, northern city government revitalizing an area of the city by installing pedestrian walkways, repurposing buildings and parking areas. Many of the manufacturing businesses in this area of the city have left. The goal is to entice new businesses and people to come downtown.



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