

## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus de livres

**Goodyear, L., Jewiss, J., Usinger, J., & Barela, E. (Eds.). (2014). *Qualitative inquiry in evaluation: From theory to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ISBN 978-0-470-44767-3.**

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Program evaluation is a complex and subtly political affair that balances social science methodologies with the “real world” challenges of administration. From its emergence as a professional field in the 1960s in the wake of widespread disillusionment over the so-called Great Society initiative in the United States, program evaluation has since blossomed to the point where 2015 was declared the “International Year of Evaluation” by the United Nations and its many affiliates, including the Canadian Evaluation Society. Meanwhile, fiscal constraints across all levels of government and the nonprofit sector, combined with increasing demand for “evidence-based policy making” have created even more space for professional evaluators to ply their wares and for scholars to probe connections to other academic fields. In this vein, *Qualitative Inquiry in Evaluation: From Theory to Practice*, edited by Leslie Goodyear, Jennifer Jewiss, Janet Usinger, and Eric Barela, attempts to unpack and explore the shared space between evaluation and qualitative methods for the benefit of both students and newcomers to the field as well as seasoned practitioners. Overall the book delivers value in terms of its conceptual scope as well as its many kernels of insight, despite a few organizational missteps along the way.

The text of the book is 275 pages including an introduction and 10 chapters delineated along two main themes: “The Intersection of Qualitative Inquiry and Evaluation Approaches” (Part 1), and “Tales from the Field of Qualitative Evaluation” (Part 2). As the editors put it, Part 1 provides “[theoretical] grounding for people who may understand the epistemology of qualitative inquiry, but not necessarily how it dovetails with evaluation approaches,” whereas Part 2 “illustrate(s) these concepts and tell(s) the tales of practitioners faced with real world challenges and opportunities as they implement qualitative evaluations” (p. xv). This balance between theory and practice helps to structure an ongoing exploration over “the intersection of evaluation and qualitative inquiry; that space in a Venn diagram where qualitative inquiry and evaluation overlap.” In an effort to reach as wide a readership as possible, including new and seasoned professionals as well as students and professors alike, the book also includes bulleted “key ideas” at the beginning of each chapter as well as “key concepts” at the end, along with

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thoughtful discussion questions and an impressive list of references to elicit further exploration of the ideas at hand.

The first chapter, “The Origins, Meaning, and Significance of Qualitative Inquiry in Evaluation” by Thomas A. Swandt and Timothy J. Cash, elaborates on the notion of evaluation as more than simply a capturing of program effects, by providing a brief but intense intellectual history of how qualitative methodologies and the underlying questions they seek to address have long informed and strengthened the field of evaluation as a whole. In Chapter 2, “Qualitative Inquiry in Utilization-Focused Evaluation,” Michael Q. Patton delivers a compelling rationale for his famous utilization theory (i.e., the worth of an evaluation ought to be judged to a large degree by its actual use by “real people in the real world”), and he follows with a discussion of the value that qualitative methods add to the evaluation process: namely, their focus on quality, outcomes, individual experience, process, and implementation. Chapter 3, “Qualitative Inquiry for Policy Makers” by George F. Grob, is simply excellent. Grob writes with the salty expertise and bulleted style of a 40-year practitioner in illuminating the rather opaque notion of a “policy-maker,” and follows up with seven points of advice for evaluators working within the policy arena: (a) use mixed methods whenever feasible, (b) balance breadth and depth in the data, (c) “hit the pavement” to observe program operations, (d) represent all stakeholder perspectives, (e) quote judiciously, (f) avoid advocacy, and (g) manage policy makers’ expectations. Chapter 4, “Qualitative Inquiry Within Theory-driven Evaluation” by Katrina L. Bledsoe, takes a similar approach as Patton’s discussion of utilization theory in that she provides an overview of TDE (including logic models, theories of change, norms, and causes) as well as personal insights from her past experience, and concludes with some general observations on the centrality of qualitative methods in conducting theory-driven evaluations, especially as the latter is evolving and becoming more nuanced. Chapter 5, “Conceptual and Practical Intersections Between Participatory Evaluation and Qualitative Inquiry” by Jill Anne Chouinard and J. Bradley Cousins, begins with three “real world” scenarios that may seem more appropriate for Part 2 on evaluation praxis, but then follows with an illuminating distinction between Practical Participatory Evaluation (P-PE) and Transformational Participatory Evaluation (T-PE). Whereas the former is self-contained within the goal of enhancing the value and validity of the evaluation itself, the latter is part of a politically radical or “emancipatory” agenda dovetailing the work of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, Andrea Cornwall, David Fetterman, and others.

Having explored the various theoretical approaches to evaluation in Part 1, the editors segue into Part 2 by acknowledging that theory and practice do not always align, and thus “an evaluator’s theoretical and methodological training [must] meet the real world and encounter its beautiful, complicated, complex, dynamic messiness” (p. 139). In this vein, Chapter 6, “What Does It Take to Be an Effective Qualitative Evaluator?” by Laurie Stevahn and Jean A. King, provides an analysis of “four evaluator competency taxonomies” worthy in its own right as an academic exercise, but also useful in terms of conveying all that is required

to be a truly effective evaluator (e.g., competencies across professional, technical, situational, managerial, and interpersonal domains). Chapter 7, “Dealing with Asymmetric Relations between Stakeholders” by Vivianne Baur and Tinkeke Abma, is based on a case study of an evaluation of a nursing home organization in the southern Netherlands. The takeaway here is that evaluators themselves are in a sense operating within a qualitative context where meaning, values, identities, and perceptions combine and intersect to determine their own “realities” throughout the course of an evaluation, and thus professional evaluators must possess a high degree of self-awareness to serve their clients in an effective and ethical manner. Chapter 8, “Balancing Insider-Outsider Roles as a New External Evaluator” by Norma Martinez-Rubin and Stuart Hanson, further explores the crucial role of perception(s) in terms of evaluator-community relations within the context of a community assessment of childhood obesity among Latino families in Southern California. Chapter 9, “Whose Story Is This, Anyway?” by Sharon F. Rallis, addresses how varying levels of experience, expertise, and indeed power within the evaluation team itself can affect the course of a study, thus raising the interesting point that technical or procedural incompetence is tantamount to ethical incompetence as well.

The final chapter, “Elements of Quality in Qualitative Evaluation,” cowritten by the editors themselves, begins with a reiteration of the structure and scope of the book. They then reflect on how their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives generated a tremendous amount of growth and learning during the course of selecting chapters and executing the project as a whole. They finish with a powerful summary statement outlining the five “distinct elements [needed] to achieve high-quality qualitative evaluation”: self-awareness on the part of the evaluator, stakeholder engagement and trust, sound methodology, data integrity, and shared learnings. These are all worthy points, reflecting both the practical challenges encountered via the preceding case studies as well as the philosophical and methodological questions raised in Part 1. While overall the book succeeds in terms of instilling in its readers (many of whom presumably are or will someday be engaged in qualitative evaluation) greater self-awareness and professional understanding of how qualitative methodology informs program evaluation, the book is not without its flaws. In trying to link theory to method to practice across a range of issues from policy making to community building—in a way that is satisfying for students, scholars, and new and experienced professionals alike—the project suffers at times under the weight of its own ambitions. Perhaps a more disciplined and consistent contrast between theory and practice would have been helpful, as opposed to the tendency for each author to meander back and forth within their respective chapters. Nonetheless, the editors did well to corral the discussion as a whole into two overarching sections, and every chapter delivered at least some insights to the reader along the way, thereby placing it well within the centre of the Venn diagram characterizing the relationship between these two worlds.