

Capturing the Imagination: Arts-Informed Inquiry as a Method in Program Evaluation

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Abstract: *Qualitative approaches in evaluation continue to expand, and this article focuses on the potential for the Arts to contribute to innovation in evaluation. Arts-informed inquiry is an approach that works within, augments, and extends traditional forms of qualitative approaches. This study documents an educational program evaluation that intentionally plans for, uses, and reflects upon arts-informed inquiry. Three considerations found central to arts-informed inquiry are presented: (a) working with layers of context, (b) enhancing access and engagement, and (c) supporting differentiated communication. Arts-informed inquiry emerged as a purposeful methodology that enhances the processes and forms of representation within the field of evaluation.*

Keywords: *arts-informed inquiry, educational evaluations, program evaluation, qualitative inquiry*

Résumé : *L'approche qualitative en évaluation continue à se développer, et le présent article met l'accent sur le potentiel qu'ont les arts de contribuer à l'innovation en évaluation. La recherche fondée sur les arts est une approche qui peut être utilisée dans le cadre d'approches qualitatives traditionnelles, et qui peut élargir la porte de ces approches. La présente étude documente un programme d'évaluation qui tient sciemment compte de la recherche fondée sur les arts, tant en ce qui concerne la planification et l'utilisation que le processus de réflexion. Trois considérations jugées cruciales pour une approche fondée sur les arts sont présentées : (a) l'utilisation des couches de contexte; (b) l'amélioration de l'accès et de l'engagement; et (c) le soutien de la communication différenciée. La recherche fondée sur les arts est devenue une méthodologie choisie pour améliorer les processus et les formes de représentation dans le domaine de l'évaluation.*

Mots clés : *recherche fondée sur les arts, évaluations pédagogiques, évaluation de programmes, enquête qualitative*

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The field of evaluation is concerned with understanding programs that are purposefully designed to address specific social or educational concerns and challenges. As the identified needs of program stakeholders have diversified over time, so have the approaches used to address these needs (Patton, 2008). Some argue that the best way to track the evolution of the field of evaluation may be to track its methodological responsiveness (Greene, 1999; Mertens, 2005). The field of program evaluation now features a full spectrum of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method approaches (e.g., Greene, 1999; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; House, 1993; McClintock, 2003). This range of methods is needed to address the complex scope of questions, concerns, and challenges about programs and their processes (Greene, Benjamin, & Goodyear, 2001). While the acceptance of qualitative inquiry into the field of evaluation has not always been a smooth one, qualitative approaches have been incorporated in several distinctive ways (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Madaus & Stufflebeam, 2000). Greene (1998) expressed her belief that although there are historical methodological traditions, qualitative evaluation practices are highly variable. In this variability, there is room for ongoing expansion to qualitative approaches in program evaluation.

In this article, we concentrate on incorporating arts-informed inquiry as a methodological development within qualitative approaches to evaluation, using a case example to illustrate these ideas. An investigation into the contributions of the Arts in evaluation is both timely and appropriate. This inquiry is also well timed because it revisits an idea developed by Eisner nearly 40 years ago that was almost completely ignored by the field of evaluation; his passing has reawakened interest in the contributions arising from his scholarship (Donmoyer, 2014). Eisner's contributions related to the Arts and evaluation appropriately address evaluators' need for continual methodological innovation. The use of practices drawn from the Arts is not proposed as an alternative to other qualitative approaches, but as a complementary methodology that can be used to develop understanding in program evaluation. The purpose of this article is to introduce arts-informed inquiry as a methodological expansion to existing qualitative approaches currently operating in the field of evaluation.

We position arts-informed inquiry as a novel method for expanding qualitative approaches in the field of program evaluation. A brief overview of the qualitative approaches in program evaluation is offered before situating the Arts as a qualitative approach already operating within the field of evaluation. We then offer a brief theoretical framing of arts-informed inquiry, to identify conditions for operationalizing this theory in the field of evaluation. To provide empirical evidence, we describe the context of an educational evaluation and share research from a case study into the use of arts-informed inquiry in this evaluation. Ultimately, we want to capture your imagination and inspire you to imagine how the crafting of arts-informed inquiry in the field of evaluation can propel innovation.

QUALITATIVE APPROACHES IN PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluators using qualitative approaches describe, understand, and interpret complex phenomena as nested within specific programmatic contexts. These approaches require methodological flexibility as well as an understanding of the origins, scope, and possibilities of qualitative practices (Goodyear, Barela, Jewiss, & Usinger, 2014). Qualitative practices have evolved over the past three decades; this development can be seen as an enlargement, improvement, or expansion of initial ideas (Schwandt & Cash, 2014). For example, as qualitative forms of inquiry gained prominence, responsive evaluation emerged as a complementary approach that addressed social complexities and diverse contexts (e.g., Abma, 1998, 2002; Costantino & Greene, 2003; Stake, 1975, 1980, 2004).

Responsive forms include approaches such as collaborative and participatory evaluation. Each approach has established independent theories, with a shared goal of responding to and engaging stakeholders as well as program users, in various evaluation responsibilities or activities (e.g., Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins & Shulha, 2006; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Greene, 2001; King, Cousins, & Whitmore, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2004; Patton, 1997; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005; Shulha & Wilson, 2003). One of the shared beliefs is the value of integrating multiple voices and views. These approaches encourage plurality through attentive, empathetic listening, to focus on stakeholder experiences and issues. These approaches are predicated on constructivist epistemology and create openings for multiple realities, ways of experiencing, and understandings (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1991; Schwandt & Cash, 2014). In qualitative approaches to evaluation, subjectivity is not considered a negative form of bias. Instead, it is the valued experience of someone who has encountered or dwelled in the program and can speak to his or her interpretations, involvements, and views (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004; Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991). When conflicting values or experiences surface, this multiplicity is not viewed as problematic but rather as an opportunity to promote further questioning and inquiry that can enhance understanding. Responsive, collaborative, and participatory approaches using qualitative methods provide grounding for descriptive, interpretivist practices that are constructivist and pluralistic in nature. This grounding enables serious reconsideration for the contributions made possible when integrating perspectives and practices from the Arts (Donmoyer, 2014; Simons & McCormack, 2007).

Situating the Arts in qualitative program evaluation. The Arts have the potential to make contributions to the evaluation of social programs because of the “interplay between the particular or specific and the more general truths” (Moxley & Calligan, 2015, p. 34). Bates (2011) identified that qualitative research processes and creative processes are strikingly similar; this similarity breeds opportunities for the field of program evaluation. Arts-inspired research is flexible and provides multiple entry points (Loi, 2008). Use of Arts practices generates alternatives for understanding a program, by incorporating multiple perspectives and forms. The Arts “involve multiple forms of self-expression in which people can portray a particular situation or experience in graphic and rich terms while

they simultaneously express a particular truth inhere in their lived experience” (Moxley & Calligan, p. 34). Underpinning the use of creative practices from the Arts is the notion that different forms of data allow for different types of analyses and sense-making. Program evaluation practitioners and researchers who are already using methods situated in qualitative approaches are well positioned to extend their work to include creative processes drawn from the Arts.

The idea of intertwining the Arts and evaluation has a historical presence in the vision presented by Eisner. His (1985) connoisseurship model positioned the evaluator as an expert at noticing, who uses their specialized training to critique and tease out the nuances of the program. He described the role of “rendering the essentially ineffable qualities ... [to] help others perceive the work more deeply ... to talk about the qualities ... that others, lacking the critic’s connoisseurship, will be able to perceive the work more comprehensively” (Eisner, 1994, p. 213). Eisner suggested that connoisseurs possess an “enlightened eye” (1991, 1998) and could use this to structure evaluation projects and reports in other ways through artistic endeavours such as stories and metaphors. He called for evocative language that would allow reports to read more like literary works than social science reports (Eisner, 1976). Yet, concerns surfaced about positioning evaluators as connoisseurs. Concerns such as these may have prohibited Eisner’s model from becoming widespread in the field of program evaluation (Donmoyer, 2014).

One of the other central concerns is that when the Arts are central to the research, the quality of the art becomes an important consideration. Widely written about in scholarly communities are the contributions of Arts-Based Research and Arts-Based Educational Research (e.g., Barone, 2008; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Eisner, 2008; McNiff, 2008). Research that is based in the Arts requires the systematic application of arts tools in pursuit of the creation of artistic products (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 1998, 2008). To produce art of technical or aesthetic quality, one requires the skills, dispositions, and eye of an artist. These are qualities that people conducting or participating in program evaluation may not feel they possess. Yet, interweaving methods drawn from the Arts, but not based in the Arts, provides a different way of accessing, seeing, engaging in, and representing understanding (Simons & McCormack, 2007). Donmoyer (2014) reminded us that Eisner’s legacy makes a lasting contribution to the field of program evaluation because “arts-influenced empirical inquiry could still help readers see educational phenomena in new and different ways” (p. 445). Using inquiry practices drawn from the Arts, but not based in them, can provide a holistic process that is able to unite theory and practice, connect personal and professional, and bridge individuals from various communities of practice.

Some evaluation scholars are using and publishing about their arts-infused work in program evaluation (e.g., Abma, 1998, 1999, 2002; Costantino & Greene, 2003; Dart & Davies, 2003; Donmoyer, 1980, 1981, 1993; Donmoyer & Galloway, 2002; Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995, 2008; Greene, 2001; MacNeil, 2000; McClintock, 2003; Simons & McCormack, 2007; Widdershoven & Sohl, 1999). Many of these published examples focus on the role of stories, narrative, and

dialogue as interpretations that provide a site for constructing meaning from lived experiences (e.g., [Abma & Widdershoven, 2005](#); [Costantino & Greene, 2003](#); [Dart & Davies, 2003](#), [McClintock, 2003](#)). Much of the published work of evaluators using the Arts consists of these word-based strategies that, while valuable, are not reflective of the spectrum of artistic experimentation available ([Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995](#); [Eisner, 1998](#)). For example, there are a few published accounts of performance inquiry in evaluation ([Donmoyer, 1980, 1993](#); [Donmoyer & Galloway, 2002](#); [Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 2008](#)) as well as a couple of evaluators publishing about poetic techniques ([Goodyear, 2001](#); [MacNeil, 2000](#)). There is also theorizing about ideas related to evaluation, creativity, and aesthetics (e.g., [Eisner, 1976, 1979, 1985](#); [Lincoln, 1985, 1991](#); [Simons & McCormack, 2007](#)). Collectively, these examples provide a starting point for investigating the potential of arts-informed inquiry in evaluation.

Arts-informed inquiry as a theoretical framing. Arts-informed inquiry (AI) in program evaluation is distinctly different than suggesting the use of arts-based practices. [Cole and Knowles \(2008\)](#) explained how “arts-informed research is a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts, broadly conceived” (p. 59). The process of art-making is viewed as a playing a supportive role within a holistic inquiry ([Stanley, 2009](#)). Arts-informed inquirers share some concerns that overlap with arts-based researchers about integrity, quality, reflexivity, and creative processes ([Cole & McIntyre, 2004](#)). An important positioning of arts-informed inquiry within the field of evaluation requires noting that the quality of the art is less important than the ways in which the art informs understanding. Two main features distinguish AI: the forms of artistic expression used during the process of the evaluation and the representations of learning that resulted as a consequence of these forms ([Cole & Knowles, 2008](#)). Artistic expressions allow for an evaluator and/or evaluation participants to create artistic works that advance knowledge and are accessible to broad audiences ([Cole, 2004](#); [Cole & Knowles, 2008](#)). The use of creative processes drawn from the arts, coupled with artistic forms, can be used in a program evaluation to uncover aspects of a phenomenon that may not be accessible through other methods.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

An evaluation of how the Tribes program is operationalized across a geographically large school district in the province of Ontario, Canada, provided the context for investigating AI in an evaluation. During the evaluation, the first author of this article adopted dual roles of program evaluator and researcher of arts-informed inquiry. The second author of this article provided mentorship throughout the process. Once the evaluation was complete, the first author conducted postevaluation research over an additional six months, completing the second stage of the research study. The second author provided oversight to all aspects of this study. In identifying the research context first we describe the program and then provide an overview of the evaluation of the program in this district.

The Tribes program (<http://tribes.com/>) focuses on developing a community of learners within the classroom and school. Jeanne Gibbs developed this research-based program in the early 1970s to provide tools allowing people to work together as a team (tribe) to solve problems inside and outside the classroom or school. The program was initially created to address the prevalence of violence, bullying, and negative social behaviours in schools, because unsafe environments prevent learning. Tribes is an international program; in Ontario, teachers can receive certification through extracurricular programs in Faculties of Education as well as through their school district.

The Tribes program was within the portfolio of the two Learning Coordinators for Safe Schools. At the outset of this research, Tribes was being implemented in a group of elementary and secondary classrooms. The evaluation lasted from August 2009 to June 2010 and was carried out by a lead evaluator working in collaboration with the learning coordinators. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide evidence about the program in action, so they could make decisions about its future within the district. Many stakeholders were involved in the evaluation, such as school board personnel, program trainers, school administrators, classroom teachers, and program participants who were elementary school students. In total, 244 people provided data during the evaluation.

METHOD

The case study approach offers an encompassing method that provides a frame for data collection, as well as an approach for data analysis (Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2009). All methods complied with the ethical and proprietary standards outlined by the affiliated university Tri-Council Policy Statement and the school district.

Data Collection

Data for this descriptive case study were collected during the evaluation and in the postevaluation processes. Three data sources were used: (a) evaluation documentation, (b) a researcher-evaluator's commonplace book, and (c) interviews. [Table 1](#) shows data that were collected during the evaluation processes for the purpose of research into AI. [Table 2](#) shows data collected for research purposes once the program evaluation was completed. AI was layered throughout data sources. The data collection strategy and the nature of the AI augmentation are highlighted in the tables. Each of the data sources is described.

Evaluation documentation. Creating a record of evaluation activities is a common procedure in the field of program evaluation, providing a useful foundation for a researcher-evaluator. Examples of these documents included the following: e-mails, evaluation plans, agendas, meeting minutes, summaries of related research, letters of information, consent forms, data collection instruments, informal summaries from evaluation activities, and the final report/presentation. Analyzing the evaluation documentation is a form of document analysis, which provides a body of empirical evidence of a program evaluation that intentionally

Table 1. Data Collected During the Evaluation for the Purposes of this Research

Technique	Primary purpose	Site	Forms of data	Fusion of arts-informed element
Review of evaluation documents	To review the evaluation process dimensions of arts-informed inquiry	Electronic as well as paper copies maintained in a file system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation plan • Meeting agendas • Meeting minutes • E-mails • Protocols • Analysis templates • Concept map • Final report • Report presentation 	All of the documentation is carefully crafted with attention to aesthetic elements
Common-place book	Reflective space to document field notes, a spectrum of observations, questions and ideas that developed nuanced insight about the contributions of arts-informed inquiry during this evaluation	A black bound book with white pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing • Drawing • Graphic organizers • Collage • Poetry • Images 	A compendium of arts forms for recording, reflecting and expressing purposes
Ongoing paired and group interviews	To obtain feedback about the evaluation and specifically, the use of arts-informed inquiry as the evaluation	Board of Education Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paired interviews with Learning Coordinators • Group interviews with Learning Coordinators, Superintendent and Research and Assessment Manager 	Asking for storied data, image elicitation, pilot experimentation with arts-informed inquiry strategies, detailing of anecdotes and experiences, re-collecting with photographs, large concept map for reflective activity

Table 2. Data Collected Post-Evaluation for This Research

Technique	Primary purpose	Site	Forms of data collected	Fusion of arts-informed element
Common-place book	Reflective space to document field notes, a spectrum of observations, questions, and ideas that developed nuanced insight about the contributions of arts-informed inquiry during this evaluation	A black bound book with white pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing • Drawing • Graphic organizers • Collage • Poetry • Images 	A compendium of arts forms for recording, reflecting, and expressing purposes
Individual interviews	To obtain feedback about the evaluation and the use of arts-informed inquiry as the evaluation was in process	Board of Education office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Audio recorded • Verbatim transcription • Note taking 	Asking for storied data, use of image elicitation, recording of anecdotes, and experiences beyond simplistic responses

used diverse forms from AI (Caulley, 1983). Table 3 describes the breadth of data collected during the evaluation and documents the AI processes.

This intentional overlapping of artistic processes across different participant groups provided data about how AI could operate in different aspects of evaluation practice.

In addition to the overview of collected data provided in Table 1, the primary investigator also kept a detailed evaluation log. Entries into the log were made throughout the evaluation interactions. This provided an emergent picture of the evaluation as it was progressing and served as data in a retrospective capability when the evaluation was completed. The log has a recording of actions/interactions, evaluator reflections, and researcher interpretations. This structure is similar to other reflective journaling techniques put forward by researchers (e.g., Stanfield, 2000). The evaluation log reduced some of the complexity of undertaking a research project nested in a program evaluation, while also recognizing that the researcher-evaluator is an instrument of data collection.

Commonplace book. As is standard procedure in many qualitative approaches, the primary investigator of this project kept reflexive field notes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Mruck & Breuer, 2003). These reflexive field notes recognize the evaluator-researcher as a participant in the process, who can use her field notes to illuminate the evolving nature of learning (Patton, 2002). Data collected through the commonplace book allowed the first author to intertwine

Table 3. Data Collected for the Evaluation

Technique	Primary purpose	Site	Selection of participants	Forms of data collected	Fusion of arts-informed element
Document analysis	Review documents related to program to gain comprehensive understanding of program goals, mission, and vision	Home office	N/A	Program-related documents, training manuals, and evaluation forms, memos to staff, support materials such as brochures and fact sheets	Concept mapping of key ideas related to evaluation questions
Participant observation	Understand program in context Build rapport with trainers and teachers. Go through experience as participants do. Understand goals and motivations of participants	Board of Education	Trainers and Teachers	Field notes in commonplace book Pre- and post-survey Photographs of process	Drawing, writing in commonplace book. Photographing of experiences
Pre- and post-survey	Gain perspectives from participants at training sessions	Board of Education	Teachers at training	Copies of the survey and the survey tracking/tally sheet	Use of images and symbols aligned with program values
Individual interviews	Understand program in action Capture multiple perspectives in the context of different school environments	School sites	Administrators	Open-ended questions with recorded responses, notes taken in my commonplace book, photographs and artifacts that supported program	Asking for storied data, anecdotes, and experiences beyond simplistic responses. Photographing school sites for evidence of program in action
Group interviews	Teacher perspectives and experiences during training and implementation	Board of Education	Tribes Trainers Teachers	Open-ended questions answered through arts-informed processes: image-elicitation, folded poetry, and collage Photographs of the process	Use of multiple arts forms (images, collage, poetic technique) to explore program and capture participant voice
Creative arts	Students' perspectives and voices about their experiences in the program	School sites	Grade 6 students Grade 8 students	Group discussing, art-making, photographs of process, journal writing, reflection about the process	An art form at the heart of each grade level approach (video stories and line drawings)

the described previously data collection strategies in a creative, reflexive way. Field notes in the commonplace book included documented observations, interactions, and reflections integrated with theoretical concepts, drawings, collage, and photographs.

The commonplace book goes beyond traditional field notes or writing strategies; it creates a space for intertwining data, reflective thinking, and theory in creative ways (Sumara, 1996). This data collection strategy makes the research, evaluation, and creative processes more visible (Denzin, 1994; Mruck & Breuer, 2003; Ortlipp, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Scheurich, 1997; Wolcott, 2001). In the meta-evaluation phase, the first author slowly, methodically, and attentively worked her way through the completed script of this project. By providing a comprehensive record of learning, the commonplace book became an integral piece of data for this case study. Analysis of the commonplace took part in the reading of it as a holistic text that could be mined for data.

Interviews. There is an abundance of literature to guide the structuring and documenting of interviews, because they are viewed as a powerful way for understanding perceptions (Eisner, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2000, 2005; Patton, 2002). Data were collected through semistructured interviews that took a conversational approach. Artistic processes such as image-elicitation, photo-documentation, and art-making were woven into the interviews to elicit descriptive and evocative details. A total of seven people who had various roles in the program evaluation participated in this research into arts-informed inquiry. These people included 1 research and assessment manager, 1 superintendent, 3 learning coordinators, 1 trainer, and 1 teacher. Interviews provided data in two main ways: as a reflective and probing technique during the evaluation processes and in a meta-evaluation capacity after the evaluation was conducted.

Interviews during the evaluation processes. The ongoing interviews were considered part of a dynamic process to understand how people involved make sense of the AI within the evaluation. Hanssen, Lawrenz, and Dunet (2008) opined that concurrent meta-evaluation improves the opportunity for enhancing evaluation practice. In this research, the “interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience together” (Madison, 2005, p. 25). By engaging in ongoing thinking about the evaluation processes and outcomes, the first author was able to be responsive to their needs and more effectively assess and adjust AI in situ. Conversations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first author also took notes about tone, body, and facial expression in her commonplace book.

The first author met with the learning coordinators nine times over the school year, for approximately one hour each time. A set of topics, rather than specific questions, guided the discussion. Key topics included the role of arts in the evaluation, creative forms during participant facilitation, quality and quantity of information that AI provides, appropriateness of AI to provide relevant program evaluation information, analysis and meaning-making in AI, representation of ideas, and creative strategies for dissemination of the evaluation findings.

There were two occasions in which the learning coordinators were joined by the superintendent, while two other occasions saw the research and assessment manager also join the conversation. Broadening the group kept others informed about the evaluation's progress, and provided opportunities for their input about the evaluation's direction and creative processes. At the initial meeting, the evaluation plan was presented as a dialogical tool, whereas in later meetings artifacts from the evaluation process were included to bring the evaluation processes alive. The artifacts included samples of the folded poetry, photographs from our group interview data technique, and a large graphic organizer summarizing data from a variety of sources. These artifacts allowed everyone to see the types of information being collected from the divergent data collection techniques and to discuss both the quantity and quality of information provided by arts-informed inquiry in an evaluation.

Interviews after the evaluation process. Six months after the evaluation, the first author of this article completed seven individual interviews. Each lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded and transcribed. The questions were drawn from research into the field of meta-evaluation, as defined by Scriven (1991) and more recently defined in *Program Evaluation Standards* (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011). The interviews provided a district, program, and classroom perspective on the role of AI in evaluation. Questions focused on alignment of purpose with AI data collection processes; opportunities for access, inclusion, voice, diversity, and jointly constructed meaning; the reliability/trustworthiness of the data; the quality of the findings; and the contributions AI offered in representing and disseminating knowledge.

Analysis Procedures

Qualitative case study analysis involves a multilayered process of analysis in the continued search for meaningful patterns and themes to emerge within (Yin, 1994) and across the case (Stake, 2005). All of the analysis for this research was completed independently by the first author and reviewed later with the second author. The first author transcribed the data verbatim as it was collected during the evaluation and in the postevaluation. By listening to, reading, and reflecting upon the data since the beginning of this project, the first author was always in the process of studying the data to find connections (Dey, 1993). From the outset, we anticipated analyzing the data according to the heuristic borrowed from Alkin (2004) focusing on methods, valuing, and use. In using a heuristic, these broad categories provided a basic structure for the inductive analysis (Saldaña, 2015).

Review of the evaluation documentation, the commonplace book, and interviews led to the creation of a concept map developed around the heuristic. Concept mapping is a graphic organizer that frames the overall project, helps to reduce qualitative data, analyzes themes, and looks for intersections or displays findings (Novak, 1998, 2010). The concept map provided a cohesive way to sort and display data about AI in an evaluation. It held ideas, interpretive comments, theoretical insights, quotations, and questions, and these were also expanded on

in a “findings” section of the first author’s commonplace book. Sumara (1996) explained that revisiting entries allows one to “notice and locate patterns of repetition and points of resistance—both of which become important sites for personal and collective interpretation” (p. 45). Using my commonplace book and the concept map generated an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the data.

Once the data had been manually coded, the first author completed another layer of analysis by using ATLAS.ti 6, a qualitative software package. Data were recoded for topic identifiers, then codes grouped to identify thematic ideas, and the memo function of ATLAS.ti 6 used to record connections and extensions of ideas. The software provided another way of engaging with the data and drawing out meaning. Ultimately, analysis flowed between the commonplace book, the concept map, and the electronically stored files of ATLAS.ti 6. Together, these three forms provided a way to analyze the evidence and to generate meaning about key aspects of AI in program evaluation.

DISCUSSION

Although there have been other studies that address aspects of the Arts in the field of evaluation, this is the first study to examine AI in evaluation practice. In this case, an augmentation of qualitative methods provided an opportunity for researching AI in an evaluation. Evaluator-researchers who are grounded in systematic forms of thinking and professional practices can also engage in artistic processes. Three considerations emerge for evaluators considering integrating AI into their evaluation practice.

Working with Layers of Context

Context plays an instrumental role in evaluation; it can be thought of as the interplay between people, program, politics, and the environment. In this study, context is the intersection of where the evaluation takes place, the people, and the program as well as the values, knowledge, skills, and theoretical perspectives influencing evaluator behaviour (Alkin, Vo, & Christie, 2012). This evaluation was a good fit for experimenting with AI because of the alignment between many of the qualities of AI and the key tenets of the program philosophy and educational aims more generally. Both are concerned with access, inclusion, voice, and learning through community. As one of the learning coordinators reflected:

Tribes is a kind of process and because it does take so many paths and turns, I found this was a really interesting way to evaluate it. It seems to, you know, fit. Tribes is not all about just scales and numbers and right and wrong; there is a lot of interpretation, a lot of your own personal piece you put into it. (February 22, 2010)

In this case, AI engaged multiple forms in exploration of a complex program, situated in a dynamic environment. Evaluators always need to be sensitive to the contexts they are working in, and not all contexts are appropriate for AI. As Smith (1999) stated, “evaluation must be contextually relevant and useful” (p. 44). AI

represents a relevant and useful form in evaluation contexts that allow for subjectivity, thrive on discovery, and revel in the explanatory.

AI encourages a diverse collection of investigative strategies, allowing for an in-depth examination of experiences and how people make meaning from their experiences (Patton, 2002). Evaluation scholars typically use approaches to guide their evaluation work; many experienced evaluators integrate different aspects from several models (Worthen & Sanders, 1991). AI is a complementary practice within qualitative approaches that are responsive, collaborative, and participatory in nature. The evaluation log reveals that the process evolved slowly, using several modes of communication, reflection, and a compendium of artistic forms. We followed Stake's (2005) advice by using a "holistic mind-set, responding to the activity, the complexity, the situationality, and the quality of education with the fullest interpretation" (p. 207). The holistic nature of AI aligns with responsive methods; both use naturalistic strategies to seek the particular, value individual experience, and purposefully prepare an environment for inquiry.

Context is a layered space where people, programs, and processes shift and come together for the purpose of producing meaning and understanding. A learning coordinator revealed her thoughts on how artistic forms matched both the program's and the evaluation's focus:

I think the choices you made in terms of ways in which we could evaluate Tribes were very well suited for the Tribes process itself ... if we had surveyed ... without so many other kinds of data I think it would have been limited in its worth. Tribes is so much more than that, and I think because of the different strategies that we have a lot more to talk about. We got a lot more perspectives from the various people involved ... I think it was really well suited to the nature of what we were trying to evaluate. (March 9, 2011)

Using multiple forms was an intentional choice that allowed for a comprehensive approach to answering evaluation questions and stimulating engagement, while also providing opportunities for audiences to see and feel the program. Artistic forms slowed down the process, allowing for attention to detail and noticing of nuances. This is a unique contribution. AI brings intentionality that allows people to play with ideas and develop relationships so that new learning emerges.

Enhancing Access and Engagement

Proponents for arts-informed inquiry do not expect that researchers or, in this case, evaluators are artists. The goal is not to make researchers or participants into artists, but to explore the inquiry process using artistic qualities (McIntyre, 2000). Evaluator-researchers were *bricoleurs*, who would ultimately identify and choose the tools most appropriate for enhancing access and engagement. A *bricoleur* blends together many pieces for use in new and unconventional ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The first author acted as a *bricoleur* by choosing artistic forms that enhanced and extended access and engagement in this evaluation. Her goal was to engage others in a way that would lead to the meaningful communication

of process and findings. The creative process offered a mechanism for generating responses in ways that transcend the literal or linear (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Multiple artistic forms were combined to create a dense, complex, reflexive, and interpretive image that represented participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon.

The fusion of qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups, with artistry allowed AI to transform data collection contexts and encourage access across participant groups. Some people were hesitant, sometimes mumbling or exclaiming with downright incredulity, "I'm not an artist" or "I don't know how to do that" (Commonplace book, February 8, 2010). Yet, by the end of the data collection events, some participants expressed regret that it was over. For example, "A few elementary teachers had wondered aloud if there was maybe just one more question we wanted to ask or one more idea we could explore together" (Commonplace book, January 18, 2010). Participants lingered at the end, talking with one another, adding final touches to their work, and appreciating the pieces created by others. In a creative environment, individuals are immersed in expressing and creation in tandem. AI invites people to access the inquiry in ways that are playful, exploratory, and descriptive.

Increasing access and engagement require an evaluator who is also a skilled facilitator. One of the processes in which this was apparent was the use of poetic technique. Poetry reaches people; it may be the language arranged to evoke emotions, images drawn together to represent an experience, or the distillation of emotions laid bare. Ultimately, it conveys experiences and, as such, has limitless potential in our work as evaluators. Inspiration was drawn from the ideas of Kowitz (1995) and Goldberg (1986, 1990, 2004) as well as our own experiences as educators. Folded poetry is not poetry in a strictly artistic sense. It is best described as a piece of collaborative writing that utilizes poetic elements such as line breaks, imagery, metaphor, similes, alliteration, sensory descriptors, and other word craft techniques. These poetic elements include the use of a central theme to draw together disparate ideas, experiences, and emotions from participants. Folded poetry engaged participants without centring on anyone, and contributed data in the participants' own words. Used in an evaluation, folded poetry is more akin to Leggo's (2008) idea of living poetically:

Poetry is a way of knowing and living, a way of examining lived experiences by attending to issues of identity, relationship, and community. Poetry acknowledges how the heart and imagination are always integral parts of human knowing. Poetry seeks the truth about human experience. (p. 171)

Folded poetry is a technique for seeking truth about the programmatic experiences. The first step involves crafting prompts by revisiting the evaluation questions (e.g., see <http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle>). The second step guides participants through the writing experience. Figure 1 shows an image of how the scrolls look once unfolded upon completion of the activity. The third step engages participants in analyzing, revising, and sharing their poems. Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) suggested that "sharing a poem may be a much more effective way

to bring a discussion of research findings back to a group of students or teachers, than sharing a lengthy research article or book-length manuscript” (p.13). In the postevaluation research, we discovered that the poetry enhanced participants’ comfort and confidence because it was a word-based strategy. Participants described that the poems in the final report stood out because they sounded like what the program felt like in schools and heard about it from teachers. Poetic technique is an inclusive, responsive, and generative group writing experience that promotes access and engagement.

The poetic technique, and other forms, revealed that a prepared environment with careful siting is necessary to distinguish AI in an evaluation from what artists do. Once groups were assured of this, they relaxed and were able to access ideas for engaging together. Occasionally, the learning coordinators or first author would model the tasks in ways that sparked laughter and helped to establish a sense of playful camaraderie. As one participant commented:

It [was] not at all what I expected, but better, because it was a chance to roll my sleeves up. I enjoyed working through the activities. Not only did they help me to reconnect with my original goal but it gave me new ideas that I can take back to my classroom. (Teacher, February 8, 2012)

Many participants asked for more sessions, so they could connect with other Tribes-trained teachers and reflect on their practice. Quite a few participants even described the data collection as fun. Creative experimentation with artistic forms promoted engagement that allowed multiple people to access the evaluation in reflective and critical ways.

Supporting Differentiated Communication

There are many ways to communicate, and verbal language is just one of these. When we use more diverse, varied, and rich forms of communication, we provide greater opportunities for participation. AI provides multiple forms of communication with different people at different points during the process. Each artistic form was carefully selected for the contributions that it could make as a data collection technique. [Eisner \(1998\)](#) believed this process does not depict “sloppy planning or wishful thinking ... its function is to highlight the complexity of such work and its dependency on the sensibilities and good judgement of the qualitative researcher” (p. 170). AI supports differentiated modes of communicating that go beyond art making, while remaining attentive to the qualities of art form and interpretive elements. This “work nudges at the boundaries of research conventions, extending notions about process and representation, it creates spaces where new and wider audiences can access the articulation of new knowledge” ([Knowles, Promislow, & Cole, 2008](#), p. 2). This flexible and expansive nature of arts-informed inquiry relies on artistic form(s) and process(es) alongside text as a way of “transcending literal and linear interpretations” ([Ewing & Hughes, 2008](#)). Two examples of supporting differentiated communication are visible through the use of image elicitation and collage.



Figure 2. A Selection of Images for Elicitation

Image elicitation is a well-established technique that uses images to provoke a response (Caldarola, 1988; Harper, 1988; Heisley & Levy, 1991; Tucker & Dempsey, 1991; Weber, 2008). It was used across many participant groups to present perspectives and identify significant programmatic issues. Some participants chose their images quickly and instinctively while others wandered and meandered through the collection (see Figure 2). After the experience, participants often commented about their surprise at how much information was shared and the inherent connections or dissonance elicited. Many participants identified that the images provided a powerful catalyst for reflection.

Collage provided another way to tap into the plethora of learning styles and perspectives within a diverse group of participants. It is an accessible yet flexible medium, which allowed for artful expression about the program. Like many other forms of art, collage can take multiple shapes and use various media (Vaughan, 2008). Butler-Kisber (2008) advocated for the process-oriented understandings revealed through the use of collage:

Whether used as a reflective, conceptualizing, or elicitation approach in the analysis, representation, or both, collage has the potential for providing new and different ways of thinking about phenomena and revealing aspects about everyday life and identity that are unconscious or implicit. (p. 272)

Collage was a reflective process to organize and make program values explicit as nested within pedagogical practices. In my commonplace book, I described a fluid movement between searching for images, sharing a found image, and

discussing potential meanings (January 18, 2010). The collage-making typified the program qualities of appreciation and reflection. One of the learning coordinators described the value of this AI approach:

What teachers need the most is a chance to talk, to share strategies, and find answers to their questions. This evaluation strategy gave us the opportunity to have a common focus, a shared goal, but in [a] way that promoted their discussions. I think they got real value from this. (February 22, 2010)

During collage-making, teachers were actively appreciating their own discoveries as well as those made by others, while they reflected on their program experiences. The collages provided time for individual work, small group exchanges, and whole group reflections. This process allowed an intermingling that brought forward the evocative and expressive nature of the program. Barone and Eisner (2006) described the potential for this versatility as the “enhancement of perspectives” (p. 96). Collage form crafted artful descriptions and vivid portrayals of the program. It allowed for differentiated communication that provided a dialogical and reciprocal learning opportunity that was valued by the participants and evaluator-researchers.

Equally important to AI is that differentiation, which occurs during the processes, is sustained in representing the findings. The multiple forms from the evaluation process were integrated into the final report so that the inquiry could be both seen and felt. The final report included traditional evaluation reporting elements such as program description, evaluation methodology, key learning, reporting by evaluation questions, future steps, and references (see <http://michellesear14.wix.com/michelle-j-searle>). In addition, the report included differentiated forms used to communicate, such as images from the elicitation, photos from the process, poetic form, and stories. Taken as a whole, the report is a mixed media piece that was crafted in collaboration with a graphic designer so that multiple combinations of media were integrated into a single composition. We followed Eisner’s (2008) suggestion to “try telling what we know with anything that will carry the message forward” (p. 9). The evaluative messages are carried forward by all of the traditional and AI processes to support differentiated forms of communication that could engage a range of audiences.

CONCLUSION

Evaluation is aimed at social betterment; recognizing that our society has grown increasingly more diverse and our programs are carried out in ever increasingly complex environments requires the field to continually adapt, to innovate from within the established frameworks. The inclusion of qualitative approaches in program evaluation represented a broadening epistemological perspective that continues to develop in response to recognition of the voices and views that evaluations have the potential to represent (Goodyear, Barela, Jewiss, & Usinger, 2014; Greene, 2000; McClintock, 2003; Simons & McCormack, 2007). Eisner (1982) argued that

the “arts are cognitive activities, guided by human intelligence, that make unique forms of meaning possible” (p. 48). These values are present in the qualitative approaches within the field of evaluation and shared by those who work with arts in scientific contexts, including (a) making use of tools from sciences as well as arts in developing understanding during all phases of projects, (b) recognition of the influence of the researcher-researched position, and (c) enlarging and diversifying audiences while nurturing new and ongoing conversations within the research community (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). While these values may not be unique to Arts methodologies, they do provide a way to reframe traditional evaluation thinking, opening possibilities for new knowledge. AI provides a methodological approach that recognizes and appreciates multiple ways of knowing, reflecting, and sharing what and how we know. Finding artistic ways to engage in evaluative inquiry offers further opportunities to deepen and disseminate what we learn, making it more likely evaluators can stimulate reflective thinking and learning within, as well as beyond, an evaluation. Applying the principles and practices of AI offers a methodological enhancement that includes both strengths and challenges.

Strengths. This research is grounded in the literature from the field of program evaluation and arts research. The key tenets of AI put forward by Knowles, Promislow, and Cole (2008) were brought to life by validating multiple truths over conclusive facts, creating work that is accessible to a range of audiences, striving for a transformative outcome related to inclusion in education, and establishing the researcher’s presence in the artful, yet systematic, process and products. Processes and products that use multiple forms are “humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings” (Richardson, 1997, p. 65). AI humanized this evaluation-research by awakening the senses to fuse intellect with creativity. It revealed the complexities of one program while allowing for context nuances to emerge, addressing issues of engagement and access, as well as stimulating differentiated forms of communication. The potential for AI to account for context, learn from multiple perspectives, embrace inclusion, and honour divergent participant voices is clear.

Challenges. There was an ongoing issue of constrained time and financial limits when conducting evaluation-research within a publicly funded educational system. All responsive, collaborative, and participatory forms of evaluation require an investment of time. Initially, AI may elongate the time required for evaluators and participants to ensure that reliable forms of data are collected. In addition, multiple materials are needed for AI experiences; there are some costs and time related to sourcing the materials. Time and funding raises implications related to feasibility (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). AI remains a feasible approach if evaluators are willing to proceed slowly, starting with a single artistic form in which they have some confidence and required materials. The evaluator-researcher can also work in partnership with others to address the debate about the quality of the art. We followed Finley’s (2005) idea that the attention is focused on encouraging participants to tap into ideas, experiences, and feelings to create

representations. The art made as part of the process of an evaluation does not need to attend to the same aesthetic qualities as art that has been created for art's sake. Yet, the products in this evaluation did consider aesthetic elements, focusing mainly on expressiveness and the final report that was produced with a graphic designer. Ewing and Hughes (2008) described this as “expressive construction” (p. 516). It takes time and resources to generate pieces that communicate understanding, shared experiences, and/or beliefs related to the program.

Closing thoughts. This research into AI depicts one educational program evaluation. While we have learned much about the potential for AI to act as methodological enhancement, the theoretical, ethical, and practical dimensions still need to be explored. As Donmoyer (2014) pointed out, it isn't often that we think of program evaluation and the Arts. Yet, Arts research and the field of program evaluation share a powerful aim—to make a difference in the world (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Knowles, Promislow, & Cole, 2008). Program evaluation and research on program evaluation face challenges in establishing strong partnerships that provide opportunities for applying systematic designs in real-world settings and disseminating this information in ways that captivate others, so that they use it to effect change (Jenson, 2006). It is time we recognize that interweaving AI into program evaluations provides a spark that can capture the imagination of program planners, developers, participants, and audiences. We need more grounded research drawing from the experiences of using AI processes and products in program evaluation contexts. Future research needs to address the theoretical, ethical, and practical strengths and challenges associated with arts-informed inquiry in evaluation.

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