



Uncovering the mysteries of inclusion: Empirical and methodological possibilities in participatory evaluation in an international context

Jill Anne Chouinard^{a,b,*}, Peter Milley^{a,b}

^a University of North Carolina at Greensboro, United States

^b University of Ottawa, Canada



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Participatory evaluation
Inclusion
International development
Participatory process

ABSTRACT

The inclusion of stakeholders in participatory evaluation in highly diverse, culturally complex settings remains a challenge, given issues of inequity, power, voice, capacity and skill. These challenges are well documented, but there is a relative absence of papers devoted to addressing them based on examples and evidence. In this paper, we report our review of 51 empirical studies of participatory evaluations conducted in the international domain, focusing on the methods of inclusion used in the evaluations. Our findings address “the who” (which stakeholders are included and which excluded), “the why” (rationales for participation) and “the how” (by what means and in what manner) of inclusion. We were struck by the scale of some development programs, geographically and in terms of the number of diverse program sponsors and stakeholders, and how this necessitated highly creative, innovative participatory techniques to ensure that anyone (and in some cases everyone) could have a voice in the process, regardless of location, language ability, privilege, power, gender, age or culture.

1. Introduction

“Methodological diversity is an enabling condition for creativity”

(Van Mele & Braun, 2005, as cited in Chambers, 2007 p. 23).

Numerous approaches and methods associated with participatory or collaborative evaluation have emerged over the past three decades (e.g., participatory action research, participatory monitoring and evaluation, transformative evaluation, stakeholder based evaluation), with significant mixing and blending based on rationale, contextual specificity, programmatic emphasis and political orientation (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). The literature also describes a continuum of participation along eight dimensions, from tokenism to partnership and citizen—or stakeholder—control (see Arnstein, 1969), highlighting the “kaleidoscopic” nature of participation (White, Nair, & Ascroft, 1994), as it transforms and changes shape, from one program, evaluation context and evaluator to the next. In common among all approaches is the engagement of stakeholders (albeit to varying degrees) in the evaluation process, moving well beyond the role of data provider to becoming active partners and collaborators in co-producing evaluative knowledge. A key to the success of this partnership is that evaluators and stakeholders each bring a specific focus to the evaluation; with evaluators it is their knowledge of the evaluation process and standards

of practice, and with stakeholders their knowledge of the program and community context. The participatory process varies widely based on the depth and extent of stakeholder involvement, the diversity among stakeholders (e.g., from program managers to program beneficiaries), and the level of evaluator control over the process (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998).

Participation can thus be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the program and community context, the stakeholders involved, the evaluation purpose and client interests, and the evaluator’s own position and values stance. As Oakley (1991) has stated, the “process of participation is not a science” (p. 270), and as such cannot be operationalized in a predetermined or predictable way. In terms of methods, the participatory evaluation literature has always remained vague (Hall, 1992), with evaluators presented, for example, as “creative pluralists” (Chambers, 2007 p. 23) who invent and improvise participatory methods and techniques to meet particular contextual, community and sectoral needs. As Freedman (1998) has noted, collaborative approaches require “treading a fine line” (p. 28) between adopting predefined procedures and then adapting them based on the capacities of the stakeholders involved and their learning and information needs (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). Others highlight the inherent contradiction between two conflicting narratives, between the social justice aspirations of participatory practice and the

* Corresponding author at: Department of Educational Research Methodology, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1300 Spring Garden Street, Greensboro, NC, 27412, United States.

E-mail address: jill.chouinard@uncg.edu (J.A. Chouinard).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.12.001>

Received 8 June 2017; Received in revised form 24 November 2017; Accepted 5 December 2017

Available online 08 December 2017

0149-7189/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

methodological demands of an evidence-based practice agenda (Eybem, Guijt, Roche, & Shutt, 2015), a dynamic that Chinyowa (2011) likens to “walking on a tight rope” (p. 353). For others, participation is considered to be a multidimensional, dynamic process that cannot be understood outside of its social, cultural, and institutional context (Trickett & Ryerson-Espino, 2004), what Kelly (2006) would refer to as its “local ecology” (p. 113). Participation is thus considered a complex, deeply pedagogical, political process (Eversole, 2005; Oakley, 1991), as epistemological and cultural differences, and issues of power, economics, voice, capacity and skill, magnify the challenging dynamics of collaborative practice.

Participatory processes can range across a continuum of evaluation activities; however, the needs of the program and community context, the nature and depth of participation, the lack of evaluation knowledge or research skills among participants, and inequities related to power and privilege among participants, can present significant practical obstacles to successful collaborations (Cartland, Ruch-Ross, Mason, & Donohue, 2008; Lennie, 2005; Oakley, 1991). These challenges are well documented, but as Trickett and Espino (2004) have noted about the large body of literature on collaboration, there is a “relative absence of papers specifically devoted to discussions or examples of *how* to prepare individuals for collaborative work” (p. 56, emphasis added). Their position is validated by others, such as House and Howe (2000), Oakley (1991), Taut (2008), and Tritter and McCallum (2006).

We thus turned to a review of the empirical literature in the context of international development evaluation to explore the ways in which stakeholders are included in collaborative work. We selected the international development domain as we wanted to focus our study on highly diverse, culturally complex program and community settings, expecting to locate among our selected studies creative approaches to the inclusion of stakeholders. We were also motivated by the pioneering work of Robert Chambers in East Africa and South Asia with Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques, where the use of innovative and highly creative approaches are used to ensure the inclusion of community stakeholders (e.g., see Chambers, 2003).

We selected for review 51 empirical studies of participatory/collaborative evaluations conducted in international development contexts between 2000 and 2015, all of which are narrative reflections based on experiences with participatory evaluations in international development contexts. Our focus was on the inclusion of stakeholders as participants in evaluation activities, placing emphasis on who was included, how they were included, and the activities in which they were included. Specific questions guiding our analysis were: How have evaluators responded in practice to key considerations and issues related to inclusion? What does inclusion look like? In practice, what are the methods used to create the spaces for inclusion in participatory evaluations? What are the implications for practice and research in participatory evaluation going forward?

Given cultural, political, economic and linguistic differences, and, more importantly, the privileging of Western methodological practices, we expected to identify a broad range of creative approaches and methods being used to promote stakeholder inclusion. As presented in more detail below, there was indeed considerable discussion in our sample about stakeholder selection and involvement in the studies we reviewed, including striking accounts of highly complex and inventive preparations, arrangements and processes used to garner and ensure participation. At the same time, the explicit use of language associated with notions of “inclusion” was less prevalent than we anticipated. In addition, numerous studies seemed to confuse the involvement of stakeholders as data sources with the idea that evaluation processes were participatory in nature, an error that is not uncommon in the field of participatory evaluation (Cousins & Chouinard 2012). As participatory evaluation in the international setting is a complex endeavor, distinguishable by rationale, contextual specificity, programmatic emphasis and political orientation (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016), methods of inclusion (the *how* of participation) differed quite significantly across all

studies. Our focus on inclusion (who, why, and how) thus also sheds light on practices of exclusion, raising questions about voice, power, politics and privilege, about who gets to speak (and for whom), who is silenced, and whose knowledge is of most value, all of which raises profoundly ethical questions as evaluators make decisions about who is in and who is out.

In what follows, we begin with a discussion of inclusion as an underutilized but important construct related to participatory theory and practice. We then describe our sample of studies and the methods used for analyzing them. The main body of the paper is devoted to the findings about the inclusion of stakeholders in participatory processes, focusing on the ‘why’, ‘who’ and ‘how’ of inclusion. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings for theory and practice in participatory evaluation.

1.2. Situating inclusion in participatory practice

Inclusion has been on the radar of the evaluation community for more than three decades (e.g., Chambers, 1994; Greene, 2000; Mertens, 1999, 2009; Pfohl, 1986), with consideration given to moral-political and methodological arguments for including diverse stakeholders through participatory means. According to the Oxford Dictionary (www.oxforddictionaries.com), the noun “inclusion” was coined in the early 17th century, derived from the Latin verb *includere* which means “to shut in”. Other standard definitions of inclusion address the “act” of including someone and the “state” of being included within a group or structure (www.oxforddictionaries.com, www.merriam-webster.com). These definitions hinge on the meaning of the verb “to include,” which has such senses as “to have” someone as part of a group and “to make” someone part of something (www.merriam-webster.com). Synonyms for inclusion are “involvement” and “incorporation” and antonyms are “exclusion,” “absence” and “omission” (www.oxforddictionaries.com). These definitions provide preliminary insights as to the significance of inclusion (and exclusion) in the context of theorizing and practicing participatory forms of evaluation. We note, however, they make “inclusion” sound somewhat passive, as if someone is doing the including and the recipients have little agency in the matter. This runs counter to many contemporary notions of inclusion, which emphasize marginalized persons having agency and voice. In the field of evaluation, this approach is represented in, for example, transformative participatory evaluation (); and, from a social science perspective, Fraser and Honneth (2003) address inclusion in a multi-dimensional way, pointing out that it involves *recognition, representation, redistribution and rights*. We return to these “4Rs” later.

Concerns about inclusion in participatory processes fall into two broad areas, creating a matrix of considerations in the planning, design and implementation of evaluations (see Fig. 1). As with any social science research involving human subjects, those designing and conducting participatory evaluations must define who to include (and thus who to exclude) as *data sources*. In addition, evaluators pursuing participatory research also have to make decisions about who to include (and thus who to exclude) as *active participants* in the evaluation team and process, as well as why, how and where in the evaluation cycle to include (or exclude) participants.

Although considerations about inclusion (and exclusion) appear to be fairly clear-cut when represented in matrix form, the diversity (Chouinard & Hopson, 2016) and malleability of approaches used in participatory evaluation can muddy the water. In a recent study of evaluators’ perceptions of stakeholder participation in international development evaluation, Cullen, Coryn, & Rugh (2011) found that a lack of precision and specificity in describing *how* participatory evaluation was operationalized was problematic. Of note for our purposes here is that the use of qualitative methods (e.g., interviewing, photovoice) of data collection with stakeholders was frequently seen to be synonymous with their inclusion as active participants in the evaluation process, a misconception also identified in an empirical study of 121

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6792217>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6792217>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)