Drawing the Line: Participatory Evaluation Research with Young People

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A Typical Scenario:

“By youth, for youth”
- Do children benefit from the program?
- How can we replicate the program?

Common struggles:
- Limited funds → limited evaluation time
- Program staff has limited time, evaluation is a “burden”
- Funders’ goals: improve test scores
- Program goals?
- Children’s goals?

How do evaluators negotiate their roles as researchers when they adopt a participatory approach with young people?
Systems or Data-Driven Framework

Statistically valid empirical results demonstrating program effectiveness

- Sufficient data on outcomes and predictors
- Expertise to analyze data

Data collection capacity (internal and/or external to program)

Data analysis experts (often external to program)

Separate funding for evaluation
Improved evaluations
Empowerment Skills Lessons for practice

Process or People-Driven Framework

Evaluation entry point

Adult participation

Youth participation

Evaluation is owned and integrated into program
Youth are given legitimacy, recognition (including financial), and voice

Systemic changes (e.g., funding for evaluation is flexible and not separate from programming)*

*We recognize that “systemic change” is very general and idealistic. With the status quo, evaluation with youth participation can still take place at the “evaluation entry points,” but without bigger changes, we believe that it will always be difficult to sustain youth participation and to make it truly meaningful.
Involving Young People

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making
Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action
Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed
Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed
Rung 3: Young people tokenized*
Rung 2: Young people are decoration*
Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*

Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation

Helpful Strategies for Involving Young People:

1. Theory-driven evaluation
2. Allow youth to define and understand the problem and methods
3. Use creative and appropriate methods
4. Develop relationships among adults, youth, and subgroups of youth
Workshop Instructions:

• Introduce yourself as your assigned character to the group and state your goal for this evaluation.

• Your group should design a participatory evaluation involving young people on your assigned topic.

Keep the following in mind:
- Your group should arrive at a feasible and relevant research question
- Use creative and realistic methods that can yield valid results
- Focus on building capacity
- Address the power relations