Peace
Office
Newsletter

Encounters with Evaluation

Introduction

by Kristen Zimmerman

Evaluation often gets short-changed when discussing and implementing a planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) system. We take pains to set up how we can track the changes we desire from our activities (planning) with standard terminology and templates. We hold workshops to coach staff and partners in articulating services and activities in a structure that permits tracking to know whether the hoped for change resulted from our actions or not. We discuss and plan ways to observe and document using our original plans (monitoring). But what is in danger of being overlooked then is the *use* of data—of project information collected in stories and table frameworks— to reflect and evaluate programming decisions and directions.

The promise of program PME is that it helps us focus on desired change rather than on our goals for service delivery. That is, PME helps us to ask: what does change look like for community participants (defined by them for them)? How will we know that that change has been achieved? With what strategies and resources can MCC support that change process?

We use PME rhythms in our daily lives, without labeling them as such. Think of the route you follow in your commute (to work, to school, to the grocery shop). At some point, you considered different routes, but you follow this route because it gets you to your destination in the shortest time possible. However, one morning on the radio you hear there is a major accident on your normal route, so you re-route (monitoring). The next day, you reflect that the new route actually got you where you needed to go quicker and

with less traffic, so you decide to adopt it as your standard route since your goal all along was to get to work in the shortest amount of time possible (evaluation).

This last step of reflecting and analyzing to make adjustments—really using our plan as living, learning documents--is the whole point of evaluation and is what makes relief, development, and peacebuilding initiatives dynamic and responsive to ever-shifting contexts and needs. Perhaps we should reframe planning and monitoring as the means to the evaluation end.

Of course, evaluation is not the ultimate end in and of itself, which is where the metaphor breaks down (impact is the ultimate program end). But re-emphasizing evaluation as the central concept in PME breathes new life into the process and opens conversations beyond definitions, templates and plans.

Evaluation can be small "e" evaluation or capital letter "E" evaluation. It can be either the ongoing reflective decision-making processes used periodically to make adjustments or some after-the-fact reflection and judgment. The authors in this issue speak to both evaluation and Evaluations, drawing on their personal encounters with using and adapting evaluative processes across a variety of contexts.

At an organizational level, Ronald Mathies reflects on the evolution of MCC evaluation and the questions or challenges prompted by the multiple evaluations with which he has been involved. This article serves as a framework to the challenges explored throughout the issue individually by the rest of the authors and their encounters in practice.

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A theme of ownership and internalization surfaces throughout the issue: Is evaluation perceived as an external demand or does it emerge from local needs? Can evaluation be contextualized in ways appropriate to particular cultures? Such questions emerge in several of the articles presented here. Dana Krushel and Myriam Ullah describe MCC Saskatchewan's efforts critically to reflect on an MCC-implemented program in Saskatoon through a Community Assessment exercise. Leaning on Paulo Freire's idea that authentic praxis requires critical reflection, Aaron Janzen argues that when action is separated from reflection it only reinforces the perception that evaluation is done for others. Janzen and Daphne Hollinger Fowler both cite this tension between evaluation viewed as merely the expectation of donors and evaluation being perceived to have intrinsic value to an agency's operations and management. Janzen describes an Action Learning Cycle tool valued by partner organizations for internalizing evaluation, while Hollinger Fowler illustrates how MCC service workers can relationally accompany programming with eyes wide open, and then translate observations into documentation (rather than documentation leading observation), and demonstrate its utility in decision-making.

Two articles wrestle with insider/outsider dimensions of evaluation: what balance can be struck between intrinsic cultural processes and tools and externally suggested best practices (as derived from praxis)? Sue and Harley Eagle offer some guidance on important considerations for facilitating evaluation when working with Indigenous Peoples, based on their longtime work with First Nations peoples. MCC Kenya Peace Coordinator, Kathryn Mansfield, meanwhile, explores the open questions on insider/outsider applicability from the gathered learnings of a wider world of peacebuilding practitioners.

This issue thus intentionally does not focus on designing the measurements and methods to collect the data necessary to inform aspects of evaluation, but rather on the process and conduct of evaluation. Simply put, the focus in evaluation is on asking: What? So What? What Now? (Patton). This focus on utility of evaluation for the immediate user (project participants, community, organization), is a natural and necessary evolution of the evaluation practice. Utility as a guiding principle, grounded by a growing body of research and practitioner case studies, is countering once prevalent notions that certain program efforts were unknowable or too complex for evidence-based evaluation (for example, peacebuilding).

Discussions are helpfully progressing beyond whether evaluation functions antithetically to relationships. Instead we now acknowledge that evaluation (and the design and capture of the information or data on which to base evaluation) takes place within relationships. Focusing on those relational dynamics, or conduct, involved in evaluation tools and processes means MCC can continue to move beyond mechanics of "how" to measure impact to reflecting and learning from collected evidence. This issue serves as another source of collected evidence to learn by and be mutually transformed by the experiences and processes MCC engages in. The experiences reflected here offer hope that even as MCC systems and process require certain standardization, workers and partners are finding life-giving energy in the "knowing" of program impact when intentional cycles of action and reflection are internalized and contextualized.

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Evaluation: Honoring a Sacred Trust

by Ronald J.R. Mathies

How aggressive and expansive should advocacy be on behalf of a decades-long oppressed people? How should a long-standing partnership be renewed that for too long has been counter-productive and highly stressful on all sides because of being mired in conflict and misunderstanding? How can program monitoring and relationship-building occur when partners and projects are inaccessible because of political volatility and violence?

To even list these few questions is to denote the critical nature of the international assistance enterprise, to say nothing of the dire straits and anguished pleas of those in the context in which they are raised. The issues

at stake are of such consequence—often health, life and liberty are in the balance—that not to evaluate robustly the efforts made to ameliorate the conditions that give rise to them is to diminish the very humanity of those involved.

These are but a few of the questions that surfaced in recent evaluations that attempted to answer the three simple questions of every evaluation process: What? So What? What Now? But the simplicity of these three questions betrays the complexity of the contexts within which the broader urgent issues arise. In the words of one seasoned practitioner, evaluations are carried out within the human condition of "insidious prejudice, stultifying fear of the unknown, contagious avoidance, beguiling distortion of reality, awesomely selective perception, stupefying self-deception, profane rationalization, [and] massive avoidance of truth" (Patton).

The history of evaluations within MCC international programs can be loosely conceptualized in three periods: informal—anecdotal and descriptive collections of information (1920–70); non-formal—the first attempts by the agency to gather information on the efficacy of the programs (1970–90); formal—routine processes agreed upon by the various stakeholders (1990–present). To be sure, evaluations in the first two periods should more properly be labeled as monitoring, consultations, reviews, or appraisals. During these years considerable efforts were made to be culturally and contextually appropriate, but since the program *modus operandi* was almost always one of secondment, and the entire development enterprise was still in its infancy, not as much effort could be made in assessing program impact. MCC's current Planning, Learning and Disaster Response department, with its 2012 manuals on program planning, monitoring and evaluation, can be seen as a logical progression in the ongoing evolution of MCC evaluation methodology.

MCC enjoys an amazing level of trust with its partners. While conducting evaluations this comes through in many ways, most notably by the examples indicating close and long-term relationships. Stories are told, with deep gratitude, about former service workers as though they were there recently, while in many cases it had been many years or even some decades ago. All this notwithstanding, there are a number of challenges faced in the evaluation process exemplified by the following examples.

- An evaluation can too easily focus only on whether or not a program is being carried out well. Is it being done right? What can be easily lost is whether the program, given the context, is the one most needed. That is, is it the right one? This requires a broader perspective, to see how well the program fits into the local, national and regional contexts. For example, how do the changes occurring in the "Arab Spring" inform and impact current programming?

- How does one manage the requirements placed by government or other NGO funding on a program? How can MCC best be the honest broker between the local partner and the North American institutional donor? Timing, conditionality and other requirements can easily obstruct partner relationships and diminish program impact. MCC disregards these funder requirements at its peril. There is much to learn from other agencies. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on MCC to provide alterative options that will meet the needs of all stakeholders. Particularly dangerous is when MCC self-censors its own values and best understandings in trying to maintain funding from these outside sources.

- Increased rigor in the evaluation exercise is a function of the critical issues being addressed, the learning that has accrued over the last several decades, and donor demand. The evaluation process, like the programs being examined, is becoming more complex. It is important, therefore, to resist the temptation to assume that some values—for example, relationships—cannot be assessed. Efforts to peel succeeding layers off the onion often reveal clues to the meaning and operationalization—and consequently the evaluation—of these values. (See, for example, Jantzi 1998 and Getu 2002).

- The danger, of course, in this demand for greater rigor in evaluations is that methodologies and requirements are imposed on partners that are either not understood or incapable of being applied. Words that surface quickly in interviews as well as in the literature include: coercive, bureaucratic, authoritarian, exploitative, and regulation without dialogue (see Hood et al). It is all too easy for Western agencies, which have traditionally provided the lion's share of the financial resources for the programs being evaluated, to exercise the lion's prerogative in dictating the terms for these programs and evaluations (see July 10 issue of the International Bulletin for Missionary Research).

• The language often used in evaluations can be, or at least is perceived to be, paternalistic and imperialist. The word "beneficiaries" has welfare connotations and is better replaced by alternatives such as participant, citizen or community member. Similarly, the widely used term "capacity building", even by local partners, can quickly degenerate into a we/them scenario when not used in the context of mutual learning.

• The follow-up to an evaluation is of great concern to all stakeholders. The program participants of course have had their expectations raised by the very nature of the exercise and the presence of consultants and program personnel. The local partners are very concerned that their voices be heard and that the evaluation report will adequately represent their perspectives. The MCC program team expects the evaluation report to strongly argue its perspectives vis-à-vis organizational policy requirements and program foci. Those in Canada and the U.S., including MCC staff and constituency, expect the evaluation to take into account their directives and perspectives. It is probably this last bridging that is the most difficult.

• It is important to recognize that methodologies evolve and that there is no final correct format for an evaluation. Data need to be gathered continuously to prepare for the next iteration of the paradigm (see Rowley and Rubin).

To be involved in an evaluation is a sacred trust. It is to walk on holy ground. One is given immediate and amazing levels of entry into the personal, vocational, and institutional lives of people with their attendant aspirations and fears. One is often given the mantel of counselor and confidant in addition to consultant. But in the final analysis, it is the participants on location—in homes, fields, and villages—who should have the final word as to the efficacy of the evaluations.

Ronald Mathies is both former MCC Binational Board Chair and former MCC Binational Executive Director. His reflections are based on almost five decades of involvement in church agency international development efforts in various capacities: service assignments in southern Africa; governance leadership at provincial, national and bi-national levels; executive leadership; and academic research on and consultancy for NGOs and governmental agencies.

Reflective Practice: Action Learning Cycle

by Aaron Janzen

"What do you think of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation?"

When I begin working with an MCC partner or a group of participants, this is my standard opening question. At first, most participants are reluctant to respond. After all, I do represent a donor agency. With a bit of encouragement, we eventually get to key perceptions: "PME is about report writing." "It is done for donors, while having little use for us." "It can be stressful because it is for donors." Although much of the response is negative, it is also generally recognized that PME is important for partners and their respective projects.

Upon reflection, I perceive a dichotomization between the work of our partners and their evaluation of that work. The work (or "project") is inevitably prioritized, because this is the organization's primary motivation. The evaluation of the project is relegated to a lesser role because it is often perceived as a donor requirement with little tangible benefit to the implementing organization. The perception that evaluations must be synthesized into a report primarily for the donor's consumption results in evaluations that are merely recollections of progress and of little value to the implementing organization. In this understanding of evaluation, the implementing agency is also relegated to the role of an object within the recollection of events written for others' consumption, rather than author. They feel pressured to maintain this narrative as sudden or unexpected changes, challenges and failures may jeopardize their relationship, perceived identity, or even their funding agreement with the funding partner. Here Paulo Freire's remarks from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are brought to mind:

When the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. In this sense, the praxis is the new

raison d'être of the oppressed; and the revolution, which inaugurates the historical moment of this raison d'être, is not viable apart from their concomitant conscious involvement. Otherwise action is pure activism. (66)

That is, the actions of an organization initiating change will stall unless they are also accompanied by reflection.

Through my own reflections on Freire's assertion, I have learned that as a member of a funding partner I must find a way to encourage an evaluative or reflective practice that will provide tangible benefit to implementing partners. The "critical reflection" sought by Freire demands that evaluation or reflection informs action. The dichotomization of action and reflection results in ineffective action and superficial evaluations.

With this lesson in mind, I have been researching and providing opportunities to develop conscious reflective practices. In particular, I have begun to facilitate the use of action learning cycles as a basis for critical reflection that informs action. My facilitation strategy has focused on intentionally working through the four steps of the cycle in a one-to-two day session, which incorporates a group of key staff members. Partners then choose to incorporate this cycle into their organizational rhythms and schedules. For example, MCC partner Emthonjeni intends to schedule quarterly action-learning cycle sessions.

Applying the same concept of experiential learning back onto my own facilitation work, I have identified several key issues and lessons:

Reflections and lessons from use of Action-Learning cycles

1. *Reflection:* The use of action-learning cycles has been well-received by partners. As Baleseng, director of Emthonjeni, expressed: "I found that it was less stress for myself—the group was able to recall the events easier because they are the ones that do the job daily." *Lesson:* Action-learning cycles are perceived to have value for partners.

2. *Reflection:* The process must be driven by the active participants (members of the implementing organization). My input as a relative outsider is irrelevant, because I have not participated in the actions and experiences that are being reflected upon. *Lesson:* I must work to limit my involvement within a conscious action learning cycle. As a facilitator I must oversee the process but refrain from leading that process in a particular direction.

3. *Reflection:* Challenges and failures are bound to be identified in reflection. These must be openly analysed to enable learning and adaptation. *Lesson:* As a facilitator I must build trust with participants, both within the process and without.

4. *Reflection:* Implementing agents must be able to change, adapt, and refocus. Their future actions must be directed by genuine reflection and learning. They must control their own direction and not feel compelled to plot a course that fits the desired narrative of external agencies. Action must come from those active in the struggle, or as Freire writes: "It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis" (67). *Lesson:* As a facilitator it is essential that I not push for the type of change that I wish to see.

5. *Reflection:* Supporting donor agencies must give space and be flexible enough to enable implementing agents to dictate the actions being undertaken. "To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions" (67). That is, external expectations cannot dominate the process moving forward and implementers must be allowed their own agency to practice genuine reflection and dictate the appropriate action. *Lesson:* As a member of a funding organization I must be flexible in my expectations.

6. *Reflection:* This process involves risk, but risk can be mitigated through open communication. Most donor agencies would be taken aback by serious changes in action by an implementing agency. However, if these changes arise out of legitimate reflection and learning, justification is generally available to describe these changes. *Lesson:* Maintain clear communication to understand the basis for shifts in plans and actions.

7. *Reflection:* Frequency of action-learning cycles matters. High frequency of this type of conscious reflective practice reduces radical shifts as it enables organic adaptations. It allows for more frequent tinkering rather than drastic programmatic shifts. *Lesson:* The frequency of action-learning cycles will enable change to move more smoothly and helps maintain the mutually informative relationship between action and reflection.

Action Learning is a continuous cycle: the end of each learning cycle becomes the beginning of the next cycle.

Action: Doing/experiencing and recalling the experience. Nobody knows your experience of your actions better than you do. To become more conscious of our "experience" while acting can have a dramatic impact on the next phases of a project.

Reflection: Re-examining and thinking about the event or action means to make it more conscious, to analyze it, to evaluate it, to understand it better or on a deeper level. The problem is that we normally do not do this. Often it is only as a result of a crisis that we reflect, that we stop to take a deeper look. A more pro-active approach is vital to become a good action learner. Reflection is very much a "brain storm" activity in which participants look at the event or action in question from different angles.

Learning: Reflection is no guarantee that learning has taken place! Very often people "reflect" on practice and repeat the same mistake over and over again. Therefore the distinction between reflection and learning in the Action Learning Cycle is important. Learning here is the process of distilling or drawing out the core generalised lessons, moving from "what actually happened" to "what tends to happen as a result of such circumstances." Be careful of jumping to learning before adequate reflecting has taken place.

Planning: This is the key link between past learning and future action (and learning). The core "insights" from the previous step must now be translated into decisions that will ensure improved practice and these decisions then need to become part of the plan. Planning that is unrelated to learning from the past is nearly always a waste of time!

Planning

After reviewing this collection of reflections and lessons I have formulated the following plan:

1. Begin transferring the leadership and facilitation of these intentional action-learning cycles to relevant team leaders within each partner organization. In this way I hope to withdraw my influence on the results of these processes.

2. Act as a go-between who can advocate for flexibility in the face of a perceived inflexible system, while also ensuring that the requirements of the MCC system are fulfilled.

3. Continue to work at developing trust and open communication with partner organizations.

4. Encourage partner organizations to increase the frequency of action-learning processes or similar reflective practices.

Aaron Janzen is Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating Coordinator for MCC South Africa.

A View from Relational Evaluation

by Daphne Hollinger Fowler

Has evaluation become defined as merely an expectation of donors, or instead as a useful means of helping an organization truly gain a picture of the impact it is having on a community?

Evaluation has become a buzzword. Not because it is something new to the world of community development, but because it has become an expectation of donor organizations, no matter how big or small. Likewise, even the most isolated of local community organizations have learned the language of monitoring and evaluation and come to anticipate it as part of their programming. But perhaps this is the problem: has evaluation become defined as merely an expectation of donors, or instead as a useful means of helping an organization truly gain a picture of the impact it is having on a community?

I work alongside two local partner organizations in Cambodia's rural Prey Veng province. One of these partner organizations is fairly well established with a solid understanding of monitoring and evaluation, while the other is young and just learning the ropes. Both partners, like me, are continually in the process of understanding how their programs can have a greater impact on the impoverished agrarian communities they serve.

When I first started serving as a Partner Advisor with MCC about 2 ½ years ago, I had a lot of lingo to learn. There are of course the monitoring and evaluation tools used by MCC. Then there are the log-frames and lexicons used by other donors, which I painstakingly attempted to learn to better assist my partner organizations who themselves were dealing with multiple donors, each with its own understanding of evaluation and each with its own definition of

objective or *indicator* or *output*. No wonder my partners, trying to discern these differences in a language other than their own, were confused!

Ironically, it seemed to me that the very system that had been established to ensure successful impact was the same system that sometimes inhibited my partners from having adequate time to pour into the impact of their programs. Evaluation can be reduced to a lot of paper work, a lot of filling in final reports, and a lot of fretting over just which indicator can be used to measure impact most accurately.

Or evaluation can look something more like the following:

One of my partner's projects is a vocational training program for youth, in which students learn sewing and tailoring skills for income generation. Every few months, I have the privilege of visiting these students and recent graduates of the program along with my partner's staff. The visits themselves remind me of the impact this project is bound to have on rural youth with so few other opportunities for employment. The rural dirt roads are either relentlessly rutted or slick with mud. The houses of most students are thatched and patched, with gaping holes where rain (and who knows what else) so easily finds its way inside. There are rice fields for some families, while others are landless laborers. Along the way we rarely pass any other form of business or infrastructure that might provide work for an enterprising young person. In many

of these households, fathers or mothers or siblings have already migrated to find work in Phnom Penh or elsewhere. And yet, as our moto pulls up in front of a tiny home, we will inevitably find a bright 17-year-old student inside, her bare feet determinedly working the treadle of an old sewing machine, orders of shirts and pants from local customers hung neatly in a row behind her.

My partner and I chat informally with the student and then ask some questions about how her life has changed because of her new skills. Her mother smiles shyly but proudly behind her, offering the occasional indicator about how her life too has changed: more vegetables for the family, medicine for the sick grandmother, tutoring classes for the children so they have a greater chance of attending university someday.

These stories of transformation may then be written as simple narratives, or packaged into a logical framework analysis. It is this "repackaging" of information collected that can be most cumbersome for my partners. Often, a disconnect remains between how stories can be reported upon in a way that truly reflects a program's impact, rather than simply detailing numbers of beneficiaries or amounts of money and supplies distributed. Mutual learning is absolutely necessary to ensure we are evaluating programs in a way that makes as much sense to the local field staff as it does to a donor waiting for a report. Numbers are of course important, and the logical framework can most certainly be useful in identifying gaps in a particular program, but apart from

transformative relationships between community members and partner organizations, and between partner organizations and MCC, true evaluation may be overshadowed by a nervous attempt to impress a donor. Good evaluation values patient listening, followed by honest conversations about how to proceed.

In the case of the sewing project, evaluations of the project's impact led to two significant changes after its first year. First, staff added lessons on how to establish a small business into the sewing curriculum. Second, the program provided all students with a hard-copy of the curriculum to use as a resource in their own homes as they practiced sewing or began to establish a business. These changes have served to better meet the project's original goal of providing income-generating skills for young people.

As with other aspects of my role as a partner advisor, I have *much* to continue learning about the balance between professional organizational development and relationship-building with my partners. A good working relationship will not happen unless I take the time to understand my partners' organizational needs when it comes to evaluation. Likewise, a greater understanding of how evaluation can truly be used to bring about lasting impact within a community cannot occur apart from healthy, mutually respectful relationships.

Daphne Hollinger Fowler is MCC Partner Advisor for Capacity Development for MCC Cambodia

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Mindful Evaluation

by Harley and Sue Eagle

Review and evaluation are important within Indigenous worldviews, which value careful reflection on past experiences and the feelings they elicit and on how those experiences foster a sense of accountability, connect to a larger picture, and potentially influence future decisions. Careful attention to process is highly important. In Haudenosaunee (People of the Long House) culture, respected community leaders are persons of whom it could be said, "in their presence, good decisions are made," and who establish a process where all voices, experiences and opinions are solicited in making decisions. Due to the difficult history between

Indigenous nations and the newcomers to this land over the last few hundred years, most Indigenous communities and people are suspicious of any process initiated by dominant (newcomer) society in their lives and organizations.

In working with Indigenous communities, MCC has come to recognize that it is a member of the dominant society system and therefore needs to be extremely careful when initiating an evaluation or review process. In many Indigenous grassroots organizations and communities, Christians and Christianity are not necessarily viewed positively

Indigenous Groups and Cultural Competency

Culturally Competent Evaluation

"Culture shapes the ways in which evaluation questions are conceptualized, which in turn influence what data are collected, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and how data are interpreted" meaning that no evaluation is culture free. This document is the American Evaluation Association's public statement affirming the role of culture, the importance of culturally competence in quality evaluation, and essential practices.

www.eval.org/aea.culturally
.competent.evaluation.statement.pdf

"Telling Our Story with Data: A Guide for and by the Tribes of New Mexico"

Guide written from perspective of the Tribes of New Mexico on using data to increase access to funding resource for improving and strengthening community services.

www.bhc.state.nm.us/pdf/
Telling_Our_Story_With_Data.pdf

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but rather as part of the larger, colonial, oppressive system. The Church has colluded with the government in Indian Residential and Boarding Schools and sanctioned and sanctified the Doctrine of Discovery and its close cousin, Manifest Destiny, which established the legal apparatus that resulted in the genocide of Indigenous Peoples and the taking of their land. Historically, decisions were made by the Church and government for these communities taking into consideration only the values, needs, opinions, and worldview of the dominant society. Many of these decisions were extremely unfair, unjust and catastrophic to Indigenous Peoples and have resulted in what are often referred to as Historical Trauma effects. When we as MCC workers enter into an Indigenous community, we need to keep in mind we are first seen as representatives of the colonizing and dominant culture. We need to behave in ways that show partners we own this legacy and we need to work to undo the oppressive systems that colonization has created, including the way we evaluate.

It is in this context that an evaluation or review finds itself. The patterns of racism which convey that white ways are superior and others are inferior are most often on the forefront of Indigenous Peoples' minds when evaluations or reviews are initiated by organizations like MCC. In spite of our intentions, this is a reality. Most Indigenous communities have their own ways of doing things, their own cultural norms. What follows is a brief list of important points to consider for all aspects of our relationships with Indigenous Peoples, particularly in an evaluation process.

Communication styles are often circular, rather than linear and vague rather than blunt or definitive. Unlike English, which is considered noun based and literal, indigenous languages are more conceptual and verb-based in nature and open to multiple interpretations and movement. Often a story-like narrative is seen as more valuable than a list of facts. There is a distinct difference from non-Indigenous people in the use of body language understood in cultural context. Also in that context, male to male and female to female communication is more respectful than cross-gender communication due to cultural protocols. Lastly, a high value is placed on listening skills rather than on asking questions: silence on the part of a non-indigenous reviewer can help foster trust and respect and influence a partner to share deeply what he or she might otherwise feel uncomfortable conveying when plied with questions.

Time and location are important to consider. Information is best gathered naturally through multiple contexts rather than in one meeting for one topic item. At times it is appropriate to gather information when a partner is already available or present at a previously scheduled meeting or event. Information is best gathered where the partner is on home turf, so the Indigenous partner should be provided the opportunity to choose where to meet rather than assuming that an MCC, church, or partner organization office is the best location. This allows for the reviewer to observe typical interactions and relationships in a more relaxed setting. The partner should be given some control as to the amount of time they wish to speak. Flexibility and patience is important because partners may have to cancel the meeting with reviewers at the last minute due to an issue or event concerning community or family. Sometimes they may not show up and assume understanding that relationships are more important than schedules.

In dominant culture, evaluation processes pay a great deal of attention to *money*, not only the cost of the evaluation or review process, but also the way in which money has been used within a program or project. Concern arises when the value of money is seen in dominant culture terms, rather than within the context of the Indigenous culture's terms.

Often when meeting with Indigenous People or partners there are *protocols* in play beyond those already mentioned. If unsure how to take part appropriately, ask local staff before you interact with partners about protocols you might need to know about. Sometimes a culturally appropriate gift that respects local traditions or an honorarium should be given to the partner being interviewed. Honor invitations to eat or take part in an event as it will show respect and build trust. Lastly, don't assume that one Indigenous culture shares a similarity with another Indigenous culture. Plains cultures may share similarities, west coast cultures may as well, but individual nations may have distinct differences from one another. Be open to listen and learn so that you can adjust your plans or behavior in ways that support and enhance MCC's relationships with partners.

As data is collected, it is important to consider how *information* is treated. Hold the information in such a way that respects the partner who shared it. It is best shared with transparency and reviewed with the author

originator to ensure the written words reflect what the partner was hoping to say. Pay attention to body language and responses as at times partners may not feel comfortable correcting the reviewer out of respect.

It may take some deep cultural understanding to get the best results in a review or evaluation. As we enter into this work with Indigenous partners, it is crucial that we do our best not to perpetuate colonial practices. By attending to the points above, we can respect local cultures and customs and be mindful of them in the evaluation process.

Harley and Sue Eagle are Co-Coordinators of Indigenous Work for MCC Canada.

Suggested Resources

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologie*s (Zed Books 1999).

Shan Wilson, *Research is Ceremony* (Fernwood Publishing 2008)

Assessment: The Flip Side of Evaluation

by Dana Krushel and Myriam Ullah

For the past eight years MCC Saskatchewan has been running "Kids and Youth Club," a weekly neighborhood drop in program for children ages 3 to16 in the Appleby Drive neighborhood of Saskatoon. Appleby Drive is a diverse community that is home to families from over 20 nations. Throughout these years we have grown from 20 to 80 kids a week and have gotten to know hundreds of families who have moved in and out of our neighborhood through weekly programming and other community events (carnivals, movie nights, and sports camp).

During our time at Appleby we have informally had many opportunities to evaluate and assess our work and its impact. We have had countless casual conversations with parents and kids involved in our programming and have used these opportunities to strengthen and improve our strategy. We have been conscious to observe the outcomes of our programs and tried to adapt accordingly. This last summer we decided to take our evaluation and assessment one step further and conduct an in-depth assessment of our programs and community linkages.

In the course of three days we held a "Community Analysis." We met with our volunteers, older and younger participants in the program, families who live within the neighborhood, and community stakeholders who work in a professional capacity within the community (representatives from the health region, the local school, the settlement agency, the city of Saskatoon, and the police). We used the SWOT model of analysis to investigate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats found in the Appleby neighborhood. During our meeting with the stakeholders we were able to create a large resource map of the neighborhood. Collectively, we mapped out the areas of service available to this neighborhood as well as identified opportunities to work together and strengthen the services available.

The rich conversations at our meetings were both encouraging and enlightening. Our eyes were once again opened to the strength of community gatherings and having a space to share from our experiences. These gatherings reminded us of the following:

1. People have meaningful things to say and they want to be listened to. It was amazing to see the ownership and thoughtfulness that our volunteers and parents had in our programming. It was encouraging and challenged us to continue to take intentional time to ask questions and seek out input.

2. People want to be involved. Don't assume that you are or should be running your program on your own. MCC is committed to partnerships and working alongside communities and organizations but sometimes even we need be reminded of our own principle!

3. People appreciate space and opportunities to grow their own sense of community. There is a great sense of commonality that has been created among the young people involved in our programming. It was encouraging to see how young people are empowered when asked their own thoughts and opinions.

At the closing of our parents' meeting one young father, who had participated in the kids programming several years ago, volunteered to drop in to talk to the older boys about what he had been through himself, to offer real-life wisdom and to be a role model to his immediate community. A few months later we saw three of the youth who have grown up in Kids Club come back to vol-

Recommended Resources

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Michael J. Bamberger, Jim Rugh, and Linda S. Mabry. *Real World Evaluation: Working Under Budget, Time, Data, and Political Constraints* (Sage 2011).

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum 2000).

Adrian Hood, Raymond Apthorpe, and John Borton. *Evaluating International Humanitarian Action: Reflections from Practioners* (Zed Books, 2001.)

International Bulletin of Missionary Research 24/3 (July 2010.) See especially the articles by Jonathan Bonk "What about Partnership?" and Cathy Ross, "The Theology of Partnership."

Terrence Jantzi, "Evaluation and Process-Oriented Development: A Reflective Essay (1998).

Ronald J.R. Mathies, "MCC Evaluation Methodology," MCC Research Report (April 1994).

Michael Quinn Patton, *Utilization-Focused Evaluation,* 4th Edition (Sage, 2008).

Robert M. Penna, *The Nonprofit Outcomes Toolbox: A Complete Guide to Program Effectiveness, Performance Measurement, and Results* (Wiley Nonprofit Authority, 2011).

John Rowley and Frances Rubin, *Effective Consultancies in Development and Humanitarian Programmes.* (Oxford: Oxfam 2006)

unteer as assistant coaches at an MCC-run sports camp. It is obvious that many organizations and services have invested in this neighborhood but the community itself is resilient and brimming with people who care and want to get involved.

After the three days of the assessment were completed we walked away asking ourselves "Why have we never done this before?" The feedback and conversation brought us and our programming to a new level of understanding and produced fresh goals to aim for in the future. Based on the assessment, we hope to hire local leaders to coordinate both the Kids and Youth clubs, create an advisory council made up of community members and stakeholders to provide feedback more regularly, and to seek to empower youth to tell their stories to broader audiences- as there is such power in sharing our own stories. We were left with an overarching sense of hope and renewed energies to strive for a peaceful and just neighborhood in which dignity, diversity, and harmony are cultivated.

Dana Krushel and Myriam Ullah are Community Engagement Coordinators for MCC Saskatchewan.

The Evaluation Puzzle: Simple and Complex

by Kathryn Mansfield

Evaluation can be quite simple. Yet it is also puzzling. Is this primarily because so many of us are operating in the midst of cultural transitions and realities of which we're not even aware?

In terms of evaluation, the following story seems to illustrate a great success, addressing issues of power imbalance (along lines of gender and social status), impunity, and girls' access to education.

University student Samuel Kosgei took on a situation in his home community in rural Kenya. Adolescent schoolgirls were becoming pregnant, primarily by schoolteachers. He felt the community was contributing to the problem.

Some didn't feel it was a problem, believing that "the girl is ripe for marriage. If that teacher will marry my daughter, she will have a better life, and I will get a good dowry."

Others, not directly affected, did not respond.

Others perceived that "justice is for the rich," believing there was no way to compete with a teacher, who is of higher social status.

Kosgei set out to learn who was involved, talked to the girls, and generated a list of suspects. He took the list to local government officials, who were unaccustomed to being held accountable for such issues. Within days, they came with the school headmasters to tell Kosgei, "We are going to make a statement to the police."

Over the coming months, Kosgei secured NGO support to help pressure the authorities.

"It was not in their imagination that there would be success. Even the perpetrators of the crime knew that I was wasting my time; thinking 'We will just bribe our way out,'" Kosgei reflects. But when the eight—six teachers and two matatu touts—were arrested and then later five convicted, Kosgei says that "people realized there was a law. The whole community panicked, asking, 'You mean even a teacher can be arrested?'" With international NGO pressure, the suspects could not bribe their way out. The NGO that had supported Kosgei's initiative, World Vision, later conducted awareness campaigns on these issues, using this case as a benchmark.

Kosgei reports: "We don't have that problem in our place anymore."

On the one hand:

Kosgei's story suggests (and meets) some helpful criteria for peacebuilding evaluation:

1. The initiative was generated by a community member perceiving the problem from within (not outsider-imposed).

2. The action focused on a specific injustice/social-political goal, rather than a program for its own sake. (One of the key messages of the Reflecting on Peace Practice project is that for projects to "add up" or make an impact, they must move toward a social-political goal, rather than remaining at the individual or personal change level.)

3. The action was broken down into specific process steps: investigating to identify suspects, contacting relevant authorities, finding creative means to hold them accountable, securing support to assist with the justice process.

4. The initiative worked with community members to ensure they understood their rights (looking beyond resolving one issue, toward transforming the community—a key concept in conflict transformation).

5. Victims' needs were served (a key pillar of restorative justice): the girls received support to complete their education.

On the other hand:

Harold Miller, an MCC peace worker in East Africa for decades, points out that western-style education (focused on preparing for urban jobs) and legal and bureaucratic structures are still "a foreign happening" in many rural communities. If such communities actually owned the school "and all that it implies about future options," then, he suggests, the community itself (e.g. parents and elders) would be identifying and solving the issue, not requiring outside intervention.

He advises: "One of the primary 'findings' of NPI Africa [a Kenyan NGO working in conflict transformation in many African contexts since 1984] has been that 'all' communities 'know' the baselines from which they work and they know when success has been achieved and they know when 'outsiders' have captured and run with the whole process."

As a less-than-two-years-into-it peace worker in Kenya, I am puzzled.

People want new tools—right?

Peace partners often say they want to learn more about monitoring and evaluation. People with integrity want to know that their activities are "adding up," that they are not wasting resources. While there are many "briefcase NGOs"—people who see attaining funds as the primary measure of success, there are also people who care about their success in changing perceptions, improving relationships, decreasing violence and improving justice.

Seeking wisdom, resisting 'malinchismo'

I was once advised: Do not imagine you can create a program in a cultural vacuum. If you want to start something, bring the people together who will start it and stay with it, and let their gifts, their realities, their context, their conflicts and rhythms shape it.

Unfortunately I have found many peacebuilding programs are reaching for outside, generic plans and frameworks more than asking critical questions and seeking wisdom from within their own context. There is a deep bias in some places that the further away you come from—or perhaps, rather, the greater your perceived affiliation with 'the west' or 'modernity'—the more respect you deserve, the more important the "gifts" you bring. I first heard this called "malinchismo" in Mexico—the tendency to value the outsider to the denigration of the indigenous. ("La Malinche" was the indigenous woman who translated for Cortez, the Spanish conquistador.)

An alternative perspective comes from Martin Macwan, who has worked against caste discrimination in India for decades. Asked what he seeks when hiring, he responded: "First, they must be from the place, so they really know what is happening there. Second, they must have anger, because without anger, they are not doing the work from a place of honesty. Third, they must have 'the spark,' which helps them transform the anger into life-giving work."

Questions

Miller's and Macwan's counsel suggests that the only viable solutions come from within a community. Others argue, "If communities really know how to solve their own issues, would they be caught in this much violence?" Another asks, "Who is local enough to know the multiple realities at work, without being too deeply invested in local political divides to be motivated to bring transformation?" While Kosgei's effort sounds very good to me, how do I know what it meant to an elder within his culture? When organizations "partner" in peacebuilding programs, how do they/we do it in such a way that the outcomes are not produced to please someone outside (leaving community members ambivalent or worse)? How do insiders and outsiders alike work toward reducing violence and improving people's experience of justice and healing, while building a future that is not based on some outsider's criteria or tools?

In this article I've tried to present how "simple" it can be—criteria that present themselves from a spontaneous initiative generated by a single community member—as well as how puzzling evaluation can become, because we work amidst many simultaneous realities.

Kathryn Mansfield is Peacebuilding Coordinator for MCC Kenya.

Endings and Beginnings

by Alain Epp Weaver

Faithful readers and subscribers: You have in your hands (or on your computer screen) the final issue of MCC's *Peace Office Newsletter*. But despair not! Beginning in January you will begin receiving the successor to the *Peace Office Newsletter*, a publication entitled *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly*. For over 40 years the *Peace Office Newsletter* has appeared on a quarterly basis (sometimes less and sometimes more frequently), providing readers with constructively critical reflections on peace and justice issues arising from MCC's program contexts around the world. This unpretentious publication featured the best thinking of MCC workers, partners, church leaders, and theologians and other academics as they grappled with challenging topics such as how Mennonites should think about armed humanitarian intervention, interfaith peacebuilding, the role of trauma response in durable peacebuilding, and more. The *Newsletter* also presented the fruit of inter-Mennonite and other ecumenical conversations around cutting edges in Mennonite/Anabaptist peace theology, conversations organized by the MCC Peace Office.

The title of *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* has for a while now been outdated. First of all, the publication has never really been a *newsletter* in the sense of an update about *news*: rather, given the serious and rigorous character of its content, it has always been closer in spirit to an academic publication. Second, the MCC Peace Office has not existed now for nearly six years. The Peace Office's former mandate to foster creative inter-Mennonite and ecumenical thinking concerning peace theology is being taken up by MCC Canada and MCC U.S, while its previous responsibility of promoting innovative peacebuilding work has been assumed by MCC's program best practices department (the Planning, Learning, and Disaster Response department). And finally, in recent years the *Newsletter* began addressing topics beyond the scope of either peace theology or peacebuilding, delving into other program areas such as food security, disaster response, partnership, and as we see in this issue, evaluation. Renaming and revamping the *Newsletter* will reflect these realities.

The inaugural issue of *Intersections* in January 2013 will offer a more extended retrospective look at the *Peace Office Newsletter*. While this publication is changing title and scope, the core strengths of the *Newsletter* will carry over into *Intersections*: a commitment to constructive and rigorous examination of MCC program; a commitment to highlighting the learnings and perspectives of MCC workers and partners alongside those of church leaders, theologians, and other academics; and a commitment to documenting how the church worldwide helps MCC think theologically about the complicated issues it faces as it carries out its mission.

The *Peace Office Newsletter* has been blessed by having many capable and committed editors over its four decades, most recently Krista Johnson: many thanks to them and to her. The *Newsletter* has also been blessed with an amazingly loyal readership, readers (you!) who care passionately about MCC and its mission and who like to think with MCC about challenging and pioneering parts of its work. We look forward to welcoming you as readers of *Intersections*, and, as always, we will gratefully receive any praise or criticism you may have as this new publication gets underway.

Alain Epp Weaver is Co-Director of MCC's Planning, Learning and Disaster Response Department (PLDR) and beginning in January will serve as co-editor of Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly *with PLDR Co-Director Bruce Guenther.*