WORKING PAPERS IN

Early Childhood Development

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Valuing evaluation:

a practical approach to designing an evaluation that works for you

by Alain Thomas

Bernard van Leer Foundation

About the author

Alain Thomas is a freelance researcher and consultant. He has postgraduate degrees in Social Administration (Manchester University) and in Community Work (Swansea University). His work concentrates on reducing the void between theory and practice. As he finds evaluation theory to be often unnecessarily complicated, his approach is to be as clear and easy to understand as possible, so that people can really participate in the process. He has worked with communities in Wales, Turkey, Israel, Ireland and Poland, helping them to plan and conduct their own evaluations.
His book The Cynon Valley Project: investing in the future was published by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in its Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections series in October 1999.

About the paper

Valuing evaluation is based on an evaluation workshop that took place in Tel Aviv, Israel, in May 1997. As the workshop participants included staff from 11 projects, the discussions centred around very practical issues. The participants looked at what is evaluation, different types of evaluation, why people evaluate, the aims of evaluation and so on.
As this paper recounts the findings of the workshop, it is very practical. This paper is particularly useful to project staff and resource centres, and is of great interest to project directors, policy makers, and academics.

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Introduction

Background

This paper is based on a workshop held in Tel Aviv, Israel, in May 1997. The one day workshop, facilitated by the author, was carried out on behalf of the National Council for the Child with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The workshop attracted 18 participants representing 11 different projects and organisations involved, in various ways, in promoting early childhood development.

The aim of the workshop

The main aim of the workshop was to help participants to design and carry out an evaluation of their own project without having recourse to an outside 'expert'.

The workshop aimed to 'keep it simple', to deal with evaluation in a very practical and down to earth way.

The content of the workshop

The workshop included selected aspects of evaluation theory which were intended to help participants to achieve control over the design of an evaluation, and combined these with a practical task-centred approach which allowed participants to focus on their own projects.

This report has sought faithfully to record the proceedings of the workshop in the chronological order in which they occurred except in two respects:

- section *Who is the evaluation for?* (page 10) was not dealt with in the workshop because of lack of time but it is included here for completeness;

- a few points in this report are out of chronological order because this adds to the coherence of the report.

The purpose of this report

This report records the workshop for three reasons:

- to help participants reinforce any learning gains they have made;

- in the hope that the content of the workshop may be of interest to people who were not present;

- in the hope that the format of the workshop may be of interest to people who wish to promote evaluation.

Identifying barriers to evaluation

Evaluation does not happen as often as it should

Evaluation does not take place as often as it should. Some projects do not evaluate their work at all, while others evaluate only certain aspects of their work or else they may evaluate too infrequently. Participants in the workshop were invited to give reasons why this happened.

Barriers to evaluation

The following possible barriers to evaluation were elicited during a full group discussion.

Fear

- of an evaluation leading to change and disruption;
- of raising issues which are currently dormant;
- of 'rocking the boat'; or 'waking the elephants';
- of negative findings;
- of having one's mistakes made public – of being judged and found wanting;
- in the worst case, of losing one's job.

Costs

evaluation costs money;
evaluation costs time.

Not valuing evaluation

- evaluation is not necessary because 'we know it all already';
- evaluation is not always useful because evaluation findings are not always implemented;
- the benefits of evaluation may not be easily perceived, therefore why do it.

Lack of skills and knowledge

- a lack of knowledge about what to evaluate, which can be made worse by the fact that texts which deal with evaluation theory are often complicated and this does nothing to encourage evaluation practice;
- a lack of skills needed to conduct an evaluation.

It is important to identify why evaluation does not take place as often as it should so that the reasons can be addressed.

What is evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation

The workshop noted that there was frequent confusion between monitoring and evaluation. The following simple distinction was drawn between the two:

… 'monitoring' allows us to describe what we are doing. And 'evaluation', which involved an element of 'analysis', is about learning from, and understanding, that experience.

Van der Eyken W. 1992

A simple definition

A straightforward dictionary definition of evaluation is:

To put a value on something.

This definition is important in that it implies a positive aspect to evaluation: it seeks to put a value on activities rather than to devalue them.

Towards a more useful definition

It is obviously important to go beyond this definition however.

The facilitator suggested three important questions which arose from this simple definition:

What for? *What purpose should evaluation serve?*

Whose value? *Whose value should be put on something?*

What kind of value? *There are different ways of 'measuring value' for example by counting things (quantitative methods) or by assessing the quality of things (qualitative methods).*

In discussion, participants added another two questions:

Who should evaluate?

When should evaluation take place?

Complexities of definition

In fact, it is easy to generate more and more questions but this process is ultimately self defeating because it creates unhelpful complexities. The facilitator gave the example of a training course he had attended where 62 different types

Illustration: by Pia Mobouck is taken from *Introducing Evaluation* by Willem van der Eyken (1992) of evaluation were presented. This was far too many to be useful and was guaranteed to add to any existing feelings of confusion.

A better approach was to identify a small number of important 'dimensions' to evaluation which participants could consider. These dimensions to evaluation were linked to the six questions dealt with above. The term 'dimension' is used to include both a particular type of approach to evaluation and a particular purpose which evaluation may serve.

Six important dimensions to evaluation

The following six dimensions to evaluation were considered.

What for?

Goal centred, and goal free evaluations.

The summative and formative aims of evaluation.

Whose value?

Pluralistic and single perspective evaluations.

What kind of value?

Qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Who should evaluate?

Internal or external evaluations.

When should evaluation take place?

Ongoing evaluation or one-off evaluation (usually at the end of a project).

Each of these six dimensions is dealt with separately below. In the case of internal and external evaluations and one-off or ongoing evaluations, participants had useful direct experiences to contribute and, although these were in fact dealt with towards the end of the workshop, they fit better into this section of the report.

Goal centred or goal free?

Goal centred, or 'impact' evaluations are used when the aim is to assess 'success'. Various types of 'goals' may be used in evaluations. Most frequently, a project will be concerned to discover how far it has achieved its aims. Another common goal is cost effectiveness, and funders in particular may wish to prioritise finding out how efficiently money has been spent. There are many other possible types of goal however, including finding out how the work of a project compares to an accepted measure of good practice (e.g. are we providing 'good quality' childcare?).

Goal centred evaluations are particularly useful when the aim is to improve project practice. A goal centred evaluation will therefore also usually be a 'formative' evaluation (see next page).

Goal free, or 'process' evaluations are most useful when the aim is to understand what is happening in a project. They do not aim to measure 'success' but rather to illuminate practice.

Goal free evaluations may be most useful when the process in a project is complicated and needs to be understood, or when it is innovative and may be of interest beyond the project, or when the process is clearly not working but the reasons are not known.

Although there are situations where a goal free evaluation would be appropriate, in practice most evaluations are related to some kind of goal or objective. The main purpose of drawing the distinction between goal centred and goal free evaluations is to challenge the idea that an evaluation must automatically focus on seeing how far project aims have been met. In fact there are many different kinds of goals against which success may be assessed, not all of them established by the project, and even 'goal free' evaluations are potentially valid, at least in theory.

Summative or formative evaluations?

A summative evaluation seeks to describe (summarise). This may seem somewhat futile at first but in fact a summative evaluation can be very useful to people who want to be kept in touch with what is happening in a project, and to be enabled to make their own analysis and to form their own conclusions. Audiences who may welcome a summative evaluation include projects involved in similar activities, project management, and funding agencies.

A formative evaluation aims to change project practice. It will provide some background and

description, will offer an analysis and will recommend future courses of action. Formative evaluations are of obvious benefit to everyone with an interest in improving the work of a project.

In practice, most evaluations will aim to be both summative, to describe the project, and formative, to improve project practice.

Pluralistic and single perspective evaluations

A pluralistic evaluation will aim to present more than one perspective. Among the perspectives which an evaluation may want to consider are: funders, managers, staff, parents, children, professionals and paraprofessionals, other projects, and academics. All of these groups have a stake in a project and can be called 'stakeholders'.

Unless there is a good reason specifically to focus on one perspective (for example to explore the satisfaction of parents with services provided to their children), it is important to present the views of several groups on important issues because what constitutes 'success' will vary, and may in fact be very different, depending upon who you ask.

The fact that success depends upon who you ask was illustrated in the workshop by a cartoon. This showed two cats reading a newspaper headline which said
'Woman finds dead rat in a packet of fried chicken' with one cat commenting to the other 'Some people have all the luck!'

The essential point here is that 'success' is subjective and that the value placed upon a particular event, will vary according to the perspective of the observer.

It is extremely important therefore that evaluations seek to present the perspective of more than one 'stakeholder' group.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods

Any evaluation in the field of early childhood development will be able to use some quantitative measures but it will also need to obtain reliable qualitative data. This is an important point which is dealt with more fully in the section 'Finding valid answers' (page 14).

Internal and external evaluations

An internal evaluation will usually be carried out by a member of project staff, or sometimes, by volunteers. An internal evaluation should cost less in money but more in time. It will benefit from the evaluators' existing knowledge of the project but they may find it difficult to detach themselves sufficiently to see the 'big picture'. It will be easier for a project to control an internal evaluation and to focus it on the questions the project thinks is important. An internal evaluation may not however have as much credibility as a more independent external evaluation with outside bodies such as funding agencies.

In many ways the advantages and disadvantages of an external evaluator are the exact opposite of the above. These are the points made by a project which has a great deal of experience of working with external evaluators:

External evaluators are particularly useful when there is a perceived need for 'objectivity'. Another advantage is that an external evaluator will take less time out of project work. There is however an obvious monetary cost in engaging an external evaluator. There is a particular difficulty with 'academic' evaluators in that they tend to focus on 'measurable' outcomes which may not be what the project is most concerned with. It can also be difficult to get an external evaluator to focus on the project's objectives.

One-off evaluations or ongoing evaluations

One-off evaluations are usually retrospective evaluations which are carried out towards the end of a project.

An ongoing evaluation will start at the same time, or even before a project and continue throughout the project's life. It allows for appropriate recording and monitoring systems to be put in place early in project life which ensures that information is gathered; it allows for feedback to be provided to the project at regular intervals; and the evaluation itself can change its focus in response to changes in the project.

Ongoing evaluations present many other advantages. This is the perspective of an evaluator engaged in an ongoing evaluation who participated in the workshop:

The evaluator reports directly to the funding body and the main links with the project are administrative. The evaluation is therefore fairly independent.

The evaluation has a certain amount of days available to it each year. This very useful because it allows forward planning. It is possible to work less at quiet times and to work more or less full time when necessary, for example around the time of preparing an annual report.

Because the evaluator is there all the time it is possible to be flexible, for example to be available to observe special events which are felt to be important.

An ongoing evaluation can produce regular reports. These provide formal feedback to management teams and participants which helps the project to respond quickly to development and to make changes without interrupting the development of the project. Informal feedback is also possible even between reports which also assists the project in reviewing and changing what it does.

It is clear that ongoing evaluations are in many ways preferable to one-off evaluations.

Why evaluate?

What is the evaluation intended to achieve?

Workshop participants generated some questions which suggested why they might wish to evaluate their own project:

- Is the project meeting its goals?
- Is the project cost effective?
- Is a pilot project potentially replicable?
- Are the project's goals appropriate or should they be changed?
- How does the project use its resources?
- Is the time scale for the project appropriate?
- Is the project appropriate to the special needs or characteristics of the community it works in?
- Are the right participants involved in the project?
- Does the project have a distinct role or should it join with other projects involved in similar work?

All these questions provide reasons for evaluation and give an indication of the type of benefits which may result from evaluation.

Who is the evaluation for?

It is also important to remember however, that there is a range of possible audiences for an evaluation, each of which will be interested for different reasons. Children, parents, paraprofessionals, project staff, managers, funders, other similar project, academics will want different things from an evaluation.

This means that it is important to decide who the main audiences are, and to ensure that the final evaluation report is written in a style and language which is appropriate to the audience. Different audiences will require different styles and possibly different products. For example, professionals will be familiar with reports written in technical language but parents of children may need more everyday language; project staff who are directly concerned with a project may be happy to read a long report while external professionals may prefer a shorter document; a report for internal project use can be produced on the office photocopying machine but one which aims to impress should perhaps be more professionally produced. Also of course, a report is only one possible product of an evaluation; there are circumstances where leaflets or videos for example might be appropriate.

The key point here is that, having identified the purpose of the evaluation and the main audiences, decisions have to be taken about the 'length, look and language' of the report.

Setting the aim for the evaluation

Avoiding trying to do too much

Many evaluations try to do too much, it is important to decide a specific aim for an evaluation and not to be over ambitious. One phrase which returned time and again in the workshop was:

Keep it simple.

Three questions to help focus an evaluation

In the workshop participants looked at their own project and decided what they wanted to evaluate.

Participants were asked to bear three questions in mind to help them choose a focus for their evaluation:

- What am I proud of about my project?
- What am I worried about in my project?
- What is unique about my project?

A wide range of possible aims

Responses indicate a great variety of project, of social and cultural settings and of priorities.

- Is my project promoting the real integration on an equal basis of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society?
- I want to measure if my project is really meeting its aims, in particular its main aim
- of helping children to mature and develop?
- Does our 'high tec' computer training project fit the local population; is it acceptable to them?
- An evaluation of my project should aim to measure its efficiency and productivity, the cost benefit of our work …
- Are we using our resources appropriately (resources of finance, staff, time, and services available from outside agencies?

The range of responses reinforces the fact that evaluation cannot do all things for every project.

An early stage in an evaluation process is therefore deciding what is the most important thing you want evaluation to do for you.

Focusing the evaluation

Asking the right questions

Even when the main focus has been chosen a risk remains of trying to make an evaluation do too much.

It is important to assert control over the evaluation and choose what are the most important specific questions you want answered about your work.

Evaluation begins and ends with questions. Asking the right questions is the most difficult part of the whole process.

(Van der Eyken 1992)

The workshop highlighted the importance of asking 'the right questions'.

Achieving a balance

The right questions are questions to which there are clear answers. In other words they must be specific.

They must also be general enough, however. If they are too specific, they lose their generality and therefore become less useful.

Unfortunately, no one has ever written a guide to asking the right questions for every project in every setting and for every priority which exists. This, therefore is the point where it is useful to remember the saying that 'evaluation is an art, not a science'. No one can tell you when a question is right. You have to think it out for yourself, then try out the questions by piloting them on small numbers of people.

Participants took the broad aim they had defined for their own evaluation as the starting point for defining their own questions and were asked:

What are the four most important questions you want the evaluation to answer about your project, and why do you want to ask these questions?

Two examples from the workshop follow.

Example one:

Main aim:

- An evaluation of my project should aim to check whether we are achieving our goal of developing and enriching children's abilities in early childhood.

Specific questions:

- Is the programme supporting development in the target population (children aged 0 to 6)?
- Are the materials used in the programmes appropriate to the local population?
- Are local and national staff efficient and effective?
- Are we using our budget appropriately?

Example two:

Main aim:

- An evaluation of my project should aim to evaluate how far the project has achieved its goals of improving the safety of children.

Specific questions:

- Is the programme raising awareness of safety?
- Is the programme enjoyable?
- Are the children learning at least one new thing which will improve their safety?

Having made a first attempt at asking the right questions, it is always necessary to define terms further, and to rephrase the questions. Both examples above however, illustrate the first step in generating more specific questions from a general aim.

Finding answers

Three types of research

Devising detailed research methods was beyond the scope of this short workshop, and approaches to research were in fact simplified into three basic ways of finding information:

- asking people questions; or
- watching people; or
- reading things.

Finding valid answers

It will be necessary to use qualitative as well as quantitative research methods. The workshop therefore looked specifically at the question, how do we ensure that the finding of qualitative research are valid?

This part of the workshop started with the premise that there is a widespread tendency to value quantitative above qualitative research findings, to value objectivity above subjectivity and to use terms like 'scientific' to mean the same thing as valid.

There are good reasons to dispute this view. Three reasons are:

- a lot of what we want to find out cannot be fully quantified. For example, we can count how many people attend a training course, we can use attendance figures to deduce that if people keep attending they will be generally satisfied but we cannot use these or any other figures to assess what people have learnt and whether they are putting these lessons into practice;
- the definition of success depends upon who you ask. A child may value a stimulating environment; a parent may place more emphasis on a safe environment; while a funder may consider that cost effective ness is an important criterion for success;
- discussion in the workshop added that the definition of success also depends upon who does the asking. An evaluator will bring to their work their own particular values, and perceptions based upon their own experience. This is particularly important in a culturally diverse society such as Israel.

Triangulation of sources and methods

The workshop highlighted 'Triangulation' of method and of source as a means of promoting valid findings in qualitative research. Very simply, triangulation means using more than one source (ideally at least three sources) of information, and using a variety of research methods.

When more than one source of information is used it is important to identify whose truth is being reflected in any part of the evaluation report.

If all sources are in general agreement on an issue then the evaluation can be reasonably sure of its analysis. If the sources have different views on an issue however the evaluation should express their varying perceptions before coming to a necessarily more tentative conclusion of its own.

Validation through consultation

This point was raised later in the workshop but is included here for better coherence.

An additional way of ensuring that qualitative research findings are valid is to discuss the draft evaluation report with the various groups of people who have participated in the research, so that amendments can be made before the final report is produced. This process can be called 'validation through consultation' (Marsden D & Oakley P (Eds) 1990).

It is however important to protect the independence of the evaluation at this stage as it is possible that the evaluator will have reached some conclusions which they do not wish to change but which some parties will disagree with. One way of preserving the independence of the evaluation while respecting varying views is formally to agree with participants that, in the event of disagreement the evaluator retains the right to decide upon the final content of the report but that participants also have the right to have their views recorded in an appendix to the evaluation report.

Who has the answers?

In the next part of the workshop, participants were invited to identify where the information to answer their questions could be found. They were asked to address the following questions in relation to one of the more specific questions generated in the previous part of the workshop.

In order to find the answers to each of your questions:

- Who can you ask?
- Who or what can you observe?
- What written material exists?

Between them workshop participants very quickly generated the following possible sources of information for the questions they were asking:

ASK:

parents, paraprofessionals, other professionals, project staff, project management, national management, kindergarten teachers, school teachers, trainers, visitors to the project etc.

OBSERVE:

children in project activities, parents in project activities and interacting with children, staff in meetings and conducting training and conducting activities, etc

READ:

project resumes, project reports, certificates of qualification (re training courses), reports of training courses, job descriptions, programmes of work, records of staff meetings, attendance figures of various kinds, finance records, etc.

These lists illustrate that there is a wide range of sources of information, and more sources could of course be added.

Generating indicators: what are you looking for and how do you know when you have found it ?

What is an indicator?

In this part of the workshop participants generated 'indicators' in relation to the specific question for which they had identified the likely sources of information.

There was some discussion about what was meant by 'an indicator'. One distinction is that quantitative research looks for measures, that is, findings which can be counted. Qualitative data however looks for types of behaviour, or events, or widely held opinions which **indicate** that something is taking place.

Setting indicators, like defining specific questions, is an art rather than a science, and there is no single way of arriving at appropriate indicators.

Using focus groups to establish locally important indicators

One approach which was suggested in the workshop is to hold focus groups to discuss the questions being asked by the evaluation. These focus groups, which will be composed of different types of stakeholders, will generate data (which will in itself be useful for the evaluation) which may be used to identify useful indicators.

For example, if a project is asking 'how successfully have we promoted child development', focus groups involving perhaps parents of children, and project staff could be asked what signs they have seen that children are being helped to develop. The signs they generate may then be taken as indicators of child development.

Structured questionnaires or observation frameworks may then be developed from these indicators. The structured questionnaires may be administered to a larger sample of parents, staff and perhaps other professionals who are familiar with the project, while the observation frameworks may be used to observe children taking part in project activities.

The process may be summarised as follows:

Step 1: Set up focus groups to discuss the main questions you want the evaluation to address. Each group is composed of people you have identified as having information on the question. These focus groups generate qualitative data which is useful to the evaluation. The main points generated by the focus groups can be used as a basis for more structured questionnaires and observation frameworks.

Step 2: Prepare and pilot questionnaires and observation frameworks based upon the findings of the focus groups.

Step 3: Administer the questionnaires and conduct the observations (at the same time you can be collecting all useful written information from project records).

Step 4: Analyse the findings.

A further advantage of this approach is that it recognises that definitions of 'success', in this case in child development, may well vary for example across different communities, and in different ethnic groups. The focus groups, being composed of people with a local perspective will necessarily generate locally important and culturally appropriate indicators. This constitutes an additional recommendation for this approach in a diverse country such as Israel.

Participants generated their own indicators for one of the questions they had asked about their project. One example of indicators to evaluate the success of a project which aimed to involve mothers in training their children in computer skills was:

- How clearly does the mother explain to the child what is expected?
- How clearly does the mother demonstrate to the child what is expected?
- How does the mother correct the child when he makes a mistake?
- How many times does the mother ask for help?
- How comfortable does the mother feel when she is teaching her child computer skills?
- How happy are both mother and child?
- Does the child perform the range of tasks required to operate the computer correctly?

The obvious indicator of success is listed last of all and the other questions look at additional indicators. The questions take into account the feelings of the mother and child (indicating for example how likely they are to remain involved in the longer term), as well as the ability of the mother to train her child (indicating the success of the project in training the mother).

One question 'How many times does the mother ask for help' is interesting because the same response would probably indicate success at one stage in the training process but lack of success at another. For example if the mother asks for help often, is this an indicator of success (the mother is comfortable enough to ask for help) or not (the mother has not learnt). Quite possibly asking for help frequently would be an indicator of success in the early stages of her involvement with the project but would indicate lack of success if she still had to ask for help often after being involved with the project for a long time.

The questions are also clearly suitable for different research methods. Some questions can be asked directly (The feelings of the mother), while others will require observation (how well the child performs the task, how well the mother trains the child).

These questions illustrate how it is possible to generate some good, versatile indicators very quickly, even in a workshop situation.

An alternative approach to generating indicators

Using focus groups alone is a very simple way of generating indicators but other more sophisticated approaches are also possible. One project represented at the workshop outlined its usual approach.

Step 1: begin with non structured interviews with key people, unstructured observations and reading easily available project records.

Step 2: analyse all the material you have gathered from the above and use this to generate indicators which can be used to produce structured questionnaires and structured observations.

Step 3: administer the structured questionnaires and conduct the structured observations.

Step 4: identify any gaps in the research which need to be filled with additional interviews and conduct these.

Step 5: analyse all the data.

This project noted that at the end of step one they usually found they had quite a 'rosy' picture and that the questionnaires in step three should be designed to be quite probing in order to arrive at the full, not just the rosy, picture!

This example reinforces the point that there is no single way of deciding upon indicators. There are many ways, all of which may work and it is up to each project to select or define for themselves an appropriate approach.

Ensuring that locally important indicators remain universally valid

The workshop also recognised however that there are certain fundamental factors which do not vary across communities and cultures, principally those to do with meeting basic needs. It will therefore also be important to refer to authoritative sources, not to generate indicators, but rather to ensure that locally generated indicators are within the broad framework of what is widely recognised as good practice.

Implementing an evaluation

Resources required for evaluation

The next section dealt briefly with implementing an evaluation.

The facilitator introduced some important resources required by an evaluation.

Records: Boxes, one for each main question, are the very simplest form of recordingsystem to hold information which may be useful to an evaluation! It is, of course, possible to devise more elaborate recording systems!

Time: One person (a designated evaluator) or more than one person (an evaluation working group) who has time to devote to carrying out the evaluation.

A support and management system: This is necessary to assist the evaluator/ evaluation working group to review progress with the evaluation, amend plans, provide guidance and support, and when necessary to troubleshoot. In practice this may take the form of an evaluation management or advisory group which meets regularly with the evaluator.

An action plan: An action plan must state clearly, what is going to be done, who is going to do it, and when it will be done.

An evaluation action plan

The facilitator outlined five phases of an evaluation action plan and some of the issues likely to be important in each phase.

Five phases of an evaluation action plan.

Phase 1: Preparation and planning

Important issues:

- The issues we have addressed today
- Do any new recording systems need to be put in place?
- Does anyone need any more training to carry out the evaluation?
- Are we being realistic about the time this will take (it is easy to be over optimistic)?
- Designing and piloting the research instruments.

Phase 2: Conducting the research

Important issues:

- Is the evaluation keeping to schedule?
- Are our methods working as we planned if not what do we do about it?

Phase 3: Preparing the report

Important issues:

- Who sees the draft report?

- Who has the right to amend it?

Phase 4: Printing and circulation
Important issues:

- Who receives the final report?
- Is there a need for different reports for different audiences ?

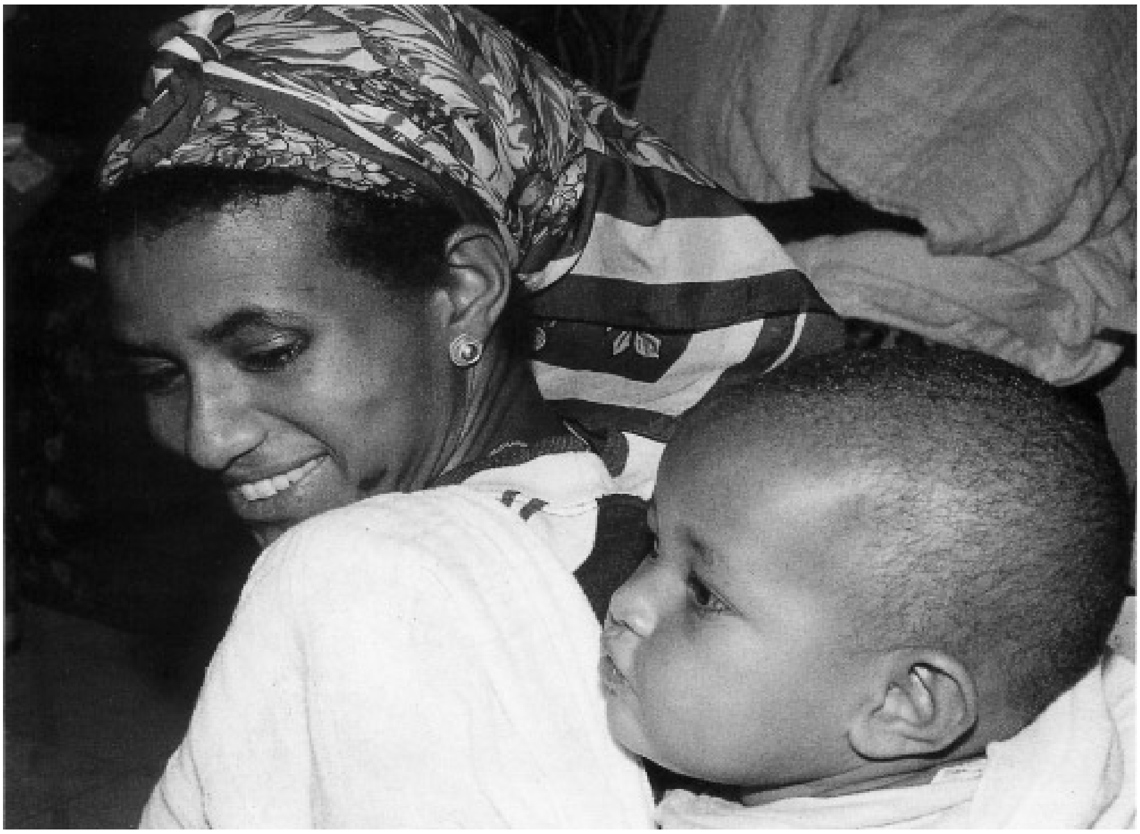
Phase 5: Evaluating the evaluation
Important issues:

- What worked well, what did not work so well, what will we do differently next time?

Workshop participants then developed the discussion concerning record keeping and finally funding for evaluation.

What kind of record keeping?

On a very basic level it is important to have somewhere for workers to put information about a particular subject, in order to make sure information is not lost and to encourage people to collect the information. One box or box file for each main question being asked by the evaluation is a very simple way of achieving this. A form which workers have to fill in and which asks the questions the evaluation wants to ask has several advantages: it focuses records on relevant material; it makes analysis much easier



because responses are standardised; and it removes the uncertainty workers often feel about what is or is not relevant information for an evaluation.

A 'timeline' offers an alternative way of structuring information. Workers are asked simply to note when 'an important' event occurs in the project. The evaluator can then interview staff about why these events were important.

Alternative forms of record keeping which were used by different participants were: photographs and videos; examples of children's work which could show how a child's skills and perception develops over time; and a book in which visitors to the project are asked to record their observations thereby capturing a range of external perspectives.

Funding for evaluation

Adequate funding is of course an essential resource for an evaluation. A crucial point made in the workshop was that the best way to ensure this finance is to build in funding for evaluation in grant applications.

By doing this a project will also demonstrate a commitment to examining and improving its own work which may impress potential funders.

Where however, it is felt that funders would not be prepared to support an evaluation some costs of evaluation (stationery, communications etc) could be legitimately included in 'core costs' in a funding application.

Concluding comments

In the meantime it is clear that the workshop brought together representatives of 11 projects, organisations or networks and allowed them to focus purely on evaluation for a full day.

Participants brought with them a great deal of energy, a wide range of experience, and strong analytical skills which enriched the workshop and helped it almost completely achieve its immediate aims of completing what was an ambitious programme. It appears too that the day was in the main characterised by enthusiasm and active participation.

Only time will tell however whether the workshop will achieve its overall aim of helping participants to design and carry out an evaluation of their own project without having recourse to an outside 'expert'.

The evaluation of the workshop itself will provide some indication of what may happen but the 'hard' indicator will be whether those who attended evaluate their work more enthusiastically, and more often in the future. It will be interesting to review the impact of the workshop a year or so from now.

References

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Bernard van Leer Foundation

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About the Foundation

The mission of the Bernard van Leer Foundation is to enhance opportunities for children 0-7 years, growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage. The objective is to develop children's innate potential to the greatest extent possible. We concentrate on children 0-7 years because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

We accomplish our mission through two interconnected strategies:

- a grant-making programme in 40 countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and
- the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation created in 1949 that is based in the Netherlands and operates internationally. The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, founded an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become in later years the Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer, currently Huhtamäki Van Leer, a limited company operating in 55 countries worldwide.

Information on the series

Working Papers in Early Childhood Development form a series of background documents drawn from field experience that presents relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The papers arise directly out of field work, evaluations and training experiences. Some of these are from the world wide programme supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. All the papers are aimed at addressing issues relating to the field of early childhood care and development.

The findings, interpretations, conclusions, and views expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Contributions

The Foundation solicits contributions to this series. They should be drawn from field experience and be a maximum of 15,000 words. Contributions can be addressed to Joanna Bouma, Department of Programme Documentation and Communication at the address given above.