

In-Habit.

1st June 2009: Evaluation

In Habitants: Jude, Emilie, Kelly, Katerina, Jason, berni, Carl, Chi

Apologies: Mandy, Ernesto

Additional people to the In Habit group: Ian Cumming, Martin Mulligan, Lachlan MacDowall, Mandy Grinblat and Sue Doyle

Jude- with the last change of federal government, there is now an increasing (and ever growing) emphasis on the need for evidence-based artwork... "You give us the evidence and we give you the money"... however evaluation can be much more than this – a creative exercise instead of purely a necessity.

Ian Cumming

Fellowship with the Australia Council community partnership board, currently 18 months into the fellowship. Creating a methodology for puppetry and community arts. His position in relation to evaluation is as an artist.

There are people who are career evaluators, such as the Australasian Evaluation Society. Evaluation intimately connected to the process of artistic creation and then sharing the created product with an audience or group of peers.

Artists have an innate expertise in evaluation – the kind of expertise that career "evaluators" have in conventional terms. Evaluators are now looking to artists for knowledge.

Evaluation as a profession needs to be informed by artists and needs to be an on going relationship. But what can artists bring to the table and what methods can be used to improve evaluation?

We need to create evaluation strategies.

The expertise of evaluation strategies needs to then run in accordance with an artists practise to help them more forward.

Ian's fellowship has become a challenge to him as an artist; being funding as an artist to come up with an evaluation structure for Australia Council's own pragmatism.

Martin Mulligan

Evaluation to open up a dialogue and find some common language.

Need to address some elements of distrust between evaluators and artists.

Artists need to take on evaluation early rather than a chore that is tacked onto the end of a project.

Many people have negative experiences with evaluation- because it is something that artists *have* to do to acquit funding. The evaluation therefore needs to look good and be positive – is not helpful to anyone.

Don't impose concepts of evidence onto ideas of practise... get over the idea of not having a common language and start working with each other.

Evaluation does not have to be a drag, but can be very good for the artists. A way to move forward

What is good practice? How can this be defined? Collectively this can be very useful for both artists and audience.

Arts can be misused and asked to put a gloss on public policy.

It is in everyone's interest to be able to speak a common language. We are all interested in good practice and committing time to good practice etc... something we all have an interest in doing.

Evidence based policy (Blair government introduction)

Evidence comes in many forms, with high levels of social research.

This field has gone far beyond what many people thought was.

Evidence needs to be empirical and objective.

Forms of quantitative evidence is actually dead (this has been known for some time) however for funding bodies of the arts they still ask for these kinds of quantitative evidence.

Qualitative ways of research:

There are many methods and we are much better off being able to draw from hundreds of different methods to evaluate. But what are the best ways of evaluation? Ian definitely argues in favour of a multi method evaluative method. Should Master three methods to gauge strengths and weaknesses of a project.

We can be introduced to a range of possible methods, however the problem is always evidence. This is the only way to create an evaluation that is indicative whether practice is good or not.

Research and evaluation of a project and the philosophy behind them are inextricably linked.

Lachlan McDowell

Lecturer in Community Cultural Development at VCA, also works at CCP and employed privately to evaluate arts projects as a contract worker. Interested in being apart of the conversation. Evaluate together as In Habit group and come up with rich conversations.

Research methods

Getting artists to think about their practices as research

Encourage students to think beyond binary systems to creative research methods of evaluation Bureaucratic methods: systems that are not mutually exclusive

Inject some politics into the conversation

Evaluation always a continual debate around knowledge and values and what is important. What is really an important thing that needs to happen?

We are often involved in a struggle around these things, which become poor experiences.

This is unfortunately the history of research and evaluation.

Eg. Knowledge systems and how they have impacted on indigenous peoples... the history of our knowledge and its impact, not a positive one.

Suggesting a whole range of prior questions before you even consider asking what evaluation is.

Group Discussion

Ways to look at our body of work over a period of time, and presenting our work to commercial entities and funding bodies.

Evaluation for an artist is an obvious thing to do, but it's hard to think about other ways to evaluate if you are used to something.

Artists get annoyed at having to evaluate particularly if it is evaluated in economic terms.

What are the issues and challenges for artists within the political system and funding bodies?

Meaningful evaluation: the language of evaluation has no connection with the art form that is being evaluated and this can be a key fault in the evaluation system.

Evaluation comes up increasingly. We always need to fill in questionnaires by email to be useful to some funding body etc., but and then we get nothing back.

Increasingly don't know whether what we are doing is the best we can do.

Constantly asking questions, but don't know if the questions are the right ones.

Jude: Increasingly work is involving more people and supporting the work of multiple artists and groups (particularly In Habit project). Jude's role is becoming one that needs to ask not only linked to her own practice but that of others. This means more questions of artists and those questions need to be meaningful, there needs to be a pertinent use of language.

Evaluation, therefore in this context has something to do with the quality and duration of the conversation after (or during) the presentation of a project.

If you are not commercial the point of evaluation is well beyond whether it's been financially successful, and the intensity of an artistic project makes evaluation sometimes a fraught process.

Need to refine the difference forms of art evaluation and documentation, to examine fully their connections.

Participant, observer and practitioner: how is evaluation communicated between these groups?

What happens when you put cultural exchange at the centre of this kind of research? Where does this take us in terms of the evaluation and how do you communicate this evaluation?

Ian- By simply being here we are in a position to evaluate... just in being here.

Documentation? Who is asking? Why were you not there?

Documentation for people who are not present at performance or presentation.

Experiencing first hand goes well beyond what we could of got from documentation.

(Ian dismissed the importance of documentation as a process of evaluation because he believes evaluation can't be done by proxy and it is so important for artists and how they approach their own practices.)

Methods of evaluation – how are we already practicing evaluation? What has kept us with our practises? Evaluation helps our practises survive. Processes of art is naturally a method of bouncing back after these questions and crisis'.

Triangulated known methods is the best approach.

Martin- most artists start with practice and then move towards a sense of evaluation.

Lets go the other way- Martin is interested in what keeps artists practising.

Research and design and the methods that can be attached to this.

Complicated spectrums of practises within the room.

Social benefits of the arts

The arts is being used to find meanings within complex societies to at least attempt to find ways of dealing with social problems.

Language and evidence: the problems of finding language to define evidence.

Ephemeral phenomena. Embodied and lived phenomena. Key principles of how to design evaluation.

Jude- "Site place and space"

Within the art circles, as much as “evidence” is bandied around the words “site place and space” are words that are also regular catch phrases.

Rather than focusing on particular art forms (ie theatre or song writing) its better to request someone build an artistic project. Rather than defining a project by its art form, investigate site space and place... to link this in with the questions of cultural exchange. Testing research, questioning research and evaluating the connections. Culmination of projects.

Looking at three levels... what does the investigation of site place and space look like and how might other artists and groups work with the model that we are creating– how can it be meaningfully put into action.

Questioning the assumptions... where is the exchange located... where is the learning exchange located... where is the long term benefit for communities happening?

Martin- Research Principles

1. Relative Objectivity. Underlying principles, based on a lot of philosophy and history. Benefits to the community, social research (regenerative community conference).

Stop taking about the need to empirical evidence

Phenomenology- understanding of lived experience in the world... how being in the world effects us (tangible experiences) where any claim for objectivity is an illusion of this.

Critical theory. How we can understand particular kinds of theories?

Postmodern thinking.

Universal principles.

Emphasis the importance of place, and our experience of place

The whole notion of empirical evidence and objectivity is replaced by a spectrum – relative objectivity through to inter-subjectivity.

No such thing as pure objectivity but we can be relatively detached.

We are all being subjective with our engagement in the world.

Moving away from pure objectivity.

Need to get deep evidence and meaningful experience.

We must have rigour.

We need to get beyond the first assumptions. Get past what has first happened.

We don't collect evidence to just discuss what we intended to do, we need to get some subjective interpretation of what is happening and what has happened without relying on what was intended.

Defendable rational

We can defend the rigour of a project and we can defend it because this is the strength of my evaluative design. Other people need to be convinced of your methodology. This is conscious design.

There are a lot of ideas and there are a lot of methods. Read the material and tailor it to your practise and project.

Design the method to be consciously adapted to your project.

From the old notions of 'objectivity' to critical distance

Take a step away from what we are thinking, away, to something else.

Interrogate those assumptions.

Meta-cognition – a day to day set of understandings. A skill that we can learn to go from **cognition to meta-cognition**. For example a deeper understanding of what 'I' do in the world.

Strategic conversation. Don't fall back on the old line 'we never have the time to really reflect on our practises' we need to go deeper to consciously articulating our own understandings of our practices.

Need to get beyond subjectivity to **inter-subjectivity**. Always a plethora of voices to be acknowledged in dialogue.

Productions of knowledge and sustained action.

Critical theory enables us to deconstruct the process of the project one we have gone through the experience. We are trying to be an agent.

Subject, desire, attention.

Literary critique.

Starting to make meaning on a practise as the central topic of a conversation. Start with a conversation around what happened, even though the moment has gone.

2. Open-mindedness.

We don't have to justify – we just want to collect impacts or the stories etc.

Advocating for the field. We can't be selective when searching for evidence. We need to have an open mind if it is going to be made meaningful. Develop a skill to simply put something aside. It is a struggle to put something aside but until all the ideas have been tested we must be open minded. We can not start off assuming what we are going to find out, there needs to be a genuine curiosity and a real desire to find out.

3. Triangulation.

Looking for a third perspective "triangulation"

During the 19th century, science went through a revolution. Began to exclude all outside other factors, exclude all other complexities when experimenting, as the desire to understand how two bodies interact... however we need to find out how three bodies interact!!! This is incredibly difficult.

We live in a three dimensional world.

Don't rely on one or two research methods but try to use another in order for us to make more sense of our practices.

Heuristic circle – way of rationalising what has been done.

Action research and participation research

Critical research group – thinking about the participants and their power roles within groups.

If the research is done whilst you are doing the project it becomes an "insider" research project, you should look outside for research. There is an assumption that participants are equal, however participants within a project like people of the general public are not equal.

Need the knowledge of an evaluator, a participant and a practitioner. Once there is three kinds of knowledge together the research becomes deeper. (Different kind of

Triangulation)

Not all outside knowledge is useful but it can be.

Multi-Method Methodology

Qualitative research is good for depth but you can't get as broad a sample.

Quantitative research such as a survey is good for the amount of high response.

Random Survey – To make a survey statistically viable you need to have a percentage response... expensive, needs to be properly designed. This is a broad survey.

Targeted survey – of people who actually go to events... hence passing out surveys and receiving them back straight away. And this is a more specific way to survey.

Random and targeting surveys are a good combination.

Profiles are a qualitative sample.

Community member profile. Where there is a number of people with smaller profiles. Vox pop. Quick interviews with people (maybe two pages of info on the one person). Has some of the qualities of sampling and surveying but it is moving into a focus on stories.

Stories and Narrative research. Rethink site and place is a good way to gather stories. How do we collect the stories? Which stories and why? Go into a community and try to understand it – how do community arts initiatives promote feelings of community. Stories that reflect the experience that you are trying to understand – the hidden stories, the neglected stories – why are particular stories chosen?

Strategic conversation semi structured interviews... qualitative and quantitative. Allow the conversation to evolve. This is much more inter-subjective and based on our knowledge of practice and our knowledge of the field.

Trying to make sense of something or the natural experience of the world of people. Principles around meaningful conversation.

Response Interviews. Need to get another perspective. These are much shorter and driven by what is coming out of the significant interviews. For instance you may do one strategic interview and then three or four response interviews around that, they work well together.

Life stories. This is a lot of work because they are little biographies of people. If this is done well there is an extremely rich amount of research, however there will be A LOT of material. Time consuming but rich data. Open approach to get information from subject.

Photo narrative where you have a topic and you want to talk to people that may not always be easy to give responses, marginalised groups within society etc. give people a camera and ask them to go and take photos on the topic that is being researched. Easier for those who may have difficulties expressing what they need to say in language. Take the photos and then discuss what is happening within the images. What prompted you to take that image? Why did you do that? They will subsequently talk about it and talk about their own decisions to take photos of certain things. Find a sample amount of people that can't be reached through the other methods.

Complimentary methods together - Decide which methods are critical for the evaluation. Strategic conversations- bring out into the open lots of experience. Photo narrative can be designed into the work and profiles (qualitative sampling) are useful for artists.

Jason- The data that comes out of the research can be a poetic form in itself. Relative, a certain type, letting the story come out on its own terms.

Martin- Artists actually make use of strategies such as photo narrative and stories much more than most academics. How do we extend our languages? By drawing on all science

and evidence. Need to have a lot of creativity, launching a book of the stories, challenging but we can see ourselves in the art. Asking ourselves what is our practice and then reflecting on it, and reflecting with other people.

Lachlan- idea of photo narrative as mapping
International method of **the most significant change**

Ask each participant in a group and then collate the answers to define a change for the group. Not focusing on the aims of the project but throws it open to be able to focus on the impact on individuals. When these questions are asked, people don't focus on the aims of the group and it becomes a way for participants to speak back to those who are controlling the projects etc.

Adaptable method and not a negative strategy. Designed to send the stories right through organizations, hierarchical, rigor and systematic method but also can be very open and useful.

Jude- concerned that the MSC model dispenses with ideas that are not part of a collective push and that they can be left behind. Does not account for the maverick and the genius because it is all about the collective power and will.

Lachlan- It is true. Majority rules in this model. Story of the outsider. Extreme stories. However we do ask why are we choosing what we are choosing. How do we design our changes? Built in democracy? Depends on how you want to design the way that ideas are processed. What are the most common ideas?

Martin- (turn something into a narrative that takes into account a plethora of different conversation and ideas) when you have a qualitative method you should not have a quantitative mindset, this is the only way of getting real information.

Sue – if we just come out with one thing, it may not capture the range of outcomes. Lots of art forms and lots of outcomes. We need to table all the stories. But it is nice to hear about what may define the 'groups' story. Picking key achievements. Participants really love the **Most significant change** methodology. Seek the interesting because it needs to ring true for the participants. If the stakeholders are conversing, extreme and interesting stories do get up but it needs to be felt and expressed by the group.

Martin- separate data from analysis. We rush to interpret and outcome all too quickly.

Carl- vocal exploration of space and the audience interpretation of that space and different sounds within that space. Observers will act as a part of space because sounds become different when they are rebounded off bodies. Breaking down and identifying culture and cross culture by breaking down music and language.

Developing the study, for Carl, as an exploration, the only way to do this is to have a feedback session.

Strategic conversation.

Most significant change.

Targeting survey (this as optional) it is up to the individual to experience what they experience...

The reasons we choose methods

"The Question"

when we are working through conversation, thinking through questions that build upon each other rather than have one huge question with a large impact and large response. This is not worth while because you don't have a diversity of responses coming out.

Rich sonic perceptual experience: questions will be apart of the experience and the questions will tailor the responses.

Questions can also kill the experience.

What is the quality of this feedback? Does this indicate that the work itself is valid? How is there evidence of a feeling – art often has an experience that is a delayed reaction.

Participant/observer: Depends what you are going to do with all the research and data that is formed throughout the project?

(Evaluation) Who is this useful for? It needs to be built into the practise to be made useful for the audience also, to become cyclical.

Suggestion: Use someone specifically with evaluation skills as an observer to project.

Berni – Common Tongue, physical tongue, cooking tongue... the metaphorical (tip of the tongue, mother tongue, tongue in cheek etc.) gathering tongues, filling a room with the tongue, poets in about 5 different languages... write a poem about the place of tongue in their mother tongue and then an ox tongue will be cooked as a part of a performance. The physicality of speaking different languages, at the end of the process will have learnt to speak the poem of a specific tongue.

Surrealistic tongue, etc. What is the place of tongue? The sharing, intimate experience, tell or write or say. Conversations. Gathering and making.

Extravagant ambiguity.

Do you want to design an evaluation to fit the project or to tailor the project to endorse evaluation?

Where is the exchange located when an observers or participants morals/values are in conflict.

Make a story about their observation: half a dozen stories that integrate the whole experience through different perspectives. Assumptions will either be validated or stood against.

Jason- failed surveying. How a piece of data seeks to record an experience that is impossible to obtained. Looking for what can't be said verbally or through normal channels, equip a community with tools that are uncodified.

Go into a space with the look that you have all the answers that you can give the people what ever they need, but if you don't give them what they need, creates a gulf, a hole that is left empty. How do we log our personal experiences within communities? How do we respond to other peoples experiences? Usually with a signalled uncodified way to communicating. But how do we log what might be done in the face of a different reality?

Invite people to let you know what the event may be useful. Poetry of failed installation and failed systems. Run the whole thing as an evaluation. Failure.

Incident reports, that haven't happened.

Pre-empting scenarios that can only happen in peoples imaginary spaces. What is the state of preparedness? Hold a whole visioning, the worst case scenario.

Creative potentials in things. Can try and close off the potentials but this can never work.

Is there something that we can learn from others? Can we learn from these perspectives?

We are trying to find the language of nothing and need to frame the project in such a way.

Futility as poetry. This is the process, this is the infrastructure, but what is it for?

To admit the failure of having a code.

Chi- will learn how to make the brick cake over a long period of time, over-laying some text over the physicality, so that the time period shifts.

Time periods. Ancient/mythic, ancient/war, tet offensive 1968, tet in contemporary society.

How well the physical act of making the cake? Whether we can successfully convey the shifts between those time periods. How well does the combination of the language and the action fit together.

Envisioning that the work is portable and in different spaces. How do we evaluate that this transportation has been successful? What Chi wants to avoid is creating the expectation within the community participant that they want to tell their story.

They don't have to contribute the story, that isn't quite the point.

Gathering responses from people to gauge how well the performance.

Peer questions or audience questions. Not clear whether the intention of it is to be a community arts project or an art project within a community – mostly a work that connects very different communities.

Dilemma – the spectrum. Either emphasis the participation strongly or emphasis the aesthetic outcome and artistic project, and one is at the expense of the other? However it doesn't have to be like this.

What is the most important thing for this project? Don't feel bad if one of the key aims is an aesthetic one, that's great. Need to ask though, what is the most important aspect of the work? Need to be clear on what you want to find out.

Interviewing peers rather than the community will be determined by your answer to this question.

Developmental questions:

What is it going to mean to do this performance, installation, community, Vietnamese, cooking show experience?

Other possibilities: Using the internet to extend the conversation over a longer period of time. Internet surveys are an option?

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