

Call in a doctor or a plumber?

**participatory empowerment evaluation
in a South London food project**

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Introduction

- Participatory evaluation of small scale community development for health project
(Project funded by local HAZ; see reports on www.healthfirst.org.uk)
- Focusing here on process of evaluation - roles and relationships of evaluator with project participants: “doctor vs plumber” / expert vs technician

Participation

- Not focusing on specific methods, eg participatory appraisal (PA), but on addressing “setting of agendas, ownership of results, power and control” (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995)
- Empowerment evaluation aiming to improve practice and foster self-determination of project participants (Fetterman et al 1996)

The project and the evaluations

- Two disadvantaged estates
- Year 1: volunteers researched residents' views on how to improve access to cheap fruit and veg
- Year 2: carried out pilot delivery schemes
- Evaluations: minimal participation Year 1, considerable Year 2

Differences in participation

Task	Year One	Year Two
Defining project objectives	Health First (HF)	General: Health First and funder Specific objectives: volunteers with HF
Deciding evaluation questions	Me (based on project objectives)	Major part of evaluation: volunteers (evaluation group)
Designing methods	I decided though presented to volunteers for approval	Evaluation group decided, I and community development worker (CDW) assisted
Data collection	Partly volunteers , mostly me	Evaluation group collected, assisted by me and CDW
Data analysis	Me	Me
Findings, report, recommendations	I produced though presented to volunteers for discussion, they suggested some changes	I presented findings, group commented, devised recommendations. I wrote up into report but they approved/changed it

Key aspects of participation

- degree of participants' ownership and control of the evaluation
- role of evaluator: expert or technician? (doctor or plumber?)

Other issues

- what constitutes 'research'?
- dealing with disagreements
- 'real world' evaluators: practical constraints on participants

Comparing participation

Aspect of evaluation	Year one “doctor”	Year 2 “plumber”
Perceived ownership	Me, Health First	Volunteers
My role	Expert external evaluator Trainer/facilitator	Technical adviser Support worker/facilitator
Control of key decisions	Me/consultation with group	Group/advice from me and comm dev worker
Group role	Source of data, consulted re design and re draft report	Decided, controlled; comm dev worker and I advised, supported, did some of work

Reflections: putting participation into practice

- commitment to sharing power
- need for mentoring/support: working across professional boundaries and developing new skills
- it takes longer!

Reflections: factors affecting participation

- Who wants the evaluation and how will it be used
- Time and resources required for participation
- Pre-existing skills and experience of participants

CONCLUSION

- Year One evaluation: consultation
Year Two evaluation: co-learning
(see Truman& Raine 2001)
- What is appropriate level of participation and what resources are required
- Relations of researcher/evaluator and participants are key