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LEGITIMISING EVALUATION FOR VOCATIONAL LEARNING: FROM BASTARD SIBLING TO EQUAL BROTHER



Questions we are looking to answer

- Is evaluation less valued than research?
- What makes evaluation different?
- Why is so little new knowledge disseminated from evaluations?
- Is there scope for more evaluation work in VET?
And what kind?
- What can evaluation researchers do to legitimise their work?



Evaluation and research: what's the difference?

- 'Research aims to produce knowledge and truth. Useful evaluation supports action' Patton 2008
- Evaluation: 'the systematic assessment of an object's merit, worth, probity, feasibility, safety, significance, and/or equity' (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield 2007).
- Research: 'the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. (ARC 2009)
- But there are of course points of connection (e.g. methods)
- And why shouldn't evaluation result in new knowledge?

Evaluation in education: misconceptions

- Evaluation=survey
- E.g. the NCVER's *Student Outcomes Survey* is the 'source for key performance measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of the system as a whole' (Misko and Priest 2009: 7)
- 'the roots of educational evaluation are in the assessment of individual student learning' which have broadened to include 'projects, instructional materials, teachers, and the school as a whole' (Nevo 2006: 445)

Evaluations undervalued?

Table 1. Review of 2010 AVETRA conference presentations (excluding panels and workshops) Source: Adapted from AVETRA website ([AVETRA 2010](#))

Type of presentation	Number of presentations
Research based presentations	52
Commentaries on systems, policy, theory and history (not based primarily on research or evaluation)	16
Presentations based on evaluations	7
Total presentations	75

Table 2. Five years of articles in the *International Journal of Training Research* (Volumes 4 to 8)

Type of article	Number of articles
Articles based on research findings	27
Commentaries on systems, policy, theory and history	15
Articles based on evaluation	3
Total articles	45

National VET Research and Evaluation (NVETRE) program


- The program, at the time of writing (NCVER 2011b):
 - Adult literacy research program (completed)
 - Building VET provider and workforce
 - Enhancing future productivity: The impact of VET on workers, employers and VET
 - Low paid workers and VET: Increasing VET participation amongst lower paid workers over the life-cycle
 - Securing their future: Older workers and the role of VET
 - Tailoring VET to the emerging labour market (completed)
 - Individual inhouse research projects (3 projects scheduled for completion 30 June 2010)
 - Individual managed research projects (27 projects in various stages of completion)




Where is evaluation?




Case studies

- Case 1: Evaluation of a healing centre: Akeyulerre
 - New knowledge: translation
 - Dissemination difficulties
 - Case 2: Evaluation of a differential response pilot
 - Knowledge generated through process
 - Applied to the Northern Territory context
 - Publishing from findings: issues
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Can evaluation be considered in the same category as research?


- Yes, but with a rider:
 - If the design, methodology and implementation of an evaluation are built on a sound set of research principles we would contend that evaluations are worthy of equal standing alongside any high quality institutional research project.
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Why is so little new knowledge disseminated from evaluations?


- The reporting and publication of evaluation findings appears to be a major point of difference between research projects and evaluations.
- Issues of Intellectual Property
- Reports not seen as valuable to ERA
- Motivation to publish for private evaluation consultants
- New knowledge from evaluations is not disseminated because it is not published.

Evaluation of vocational learning programs and systems: a field ripe for harvest

- Evaluation in VET in Australia has been a sporadic activity: carried out in some form on some occasions, not used to evaluate the 'big' issues, and rarely used as a tool in policy formation. (McDonald and Hayton 1997: 15)
- A shift in thinking required: evaluation≠survey
- Is data available for effective evaluation?
- 'Evaluation of broad policy areas will be given more attention than has previously been the case' (NCVER 2010: 3).



What can evaluation researchers do to legitimise their work?

1. Publish or perish
 2. Build evaluation capacity in research institutions
 3. Evaluators must promote methodologies
 4. Demonstrate how new knowledge translates into policy and practice
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