

The Historical Perspectives on Evaluation project

historical perspectives

A teenager, approaching the magical twenty years might be expected to ask: 'Where have I come from? Why am I different?' With over 21 years of National (and International) Evaluation Conferences behind it the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES), which is still only a teenager, is expected to ask these questions. Indeed, at the recent Auckland Conference it venerated its oldies, and bestowed on some of them the title of 'Fellow', including the role of searching for answers to these and similar questions on behalf of the AES. It was also clear from some misconceptions and incorrect mathematics that there are still a significant number of practitioners of evaluation, and AES members, who are in need of some answers.

The paper that follows is part of the quest of some of the AES Fellows and others in developing responses to those questions for the AES and interested evaluation practitioners. This quest actually started in 1991 in preparation for the 1992 International Evaluation Conference held in Melbourne, which marked the tenth anniversary of National Evaluation Conferences in Australia. But evaluation has a longer, less widely known, history in Australia and New Zealand, especially in the disciplines of health, education and training. To mark that milestone the Australasian Evaluation Society (which officially commenced in 1987) commissioned me (with the assistance of Anne Lindsay) to prepare an 'Interim History of Evaluation in Australasia and the AES'. The draft paper was presented to AES members and conference attendees for discussion over several months, but was never formally published.

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The 2003 AES Auckland International Evaluation Conference represented the 21st year of these generic evaluation conferences, and the AES Publications Committee has agreed to revisit the 'Interim History' for inclusion in the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*. At the conference I was assisted by another Fellow, Ian Trotman, in the recruitment of contributors to a New Zealand perspective. Based on the recent forays into historical and other perspectives from the New Zealand experience (see Lunt, Davidson & McKegg, 2003; Ryan, 2003) Ian, our excellent Editorial Assistant, Dr Herbert Stock, and I thought that the material was already too bulky with Australian content so it might be best to separate them for this issue of the EJA, leaving a more integrative approach for the proposed monograph and AES history.

As I alluded in the last issue of the EJA for 2002, the present issue of the EJA is also dedicated to the contribution and memory of the pioneers of evaluation in Australasia, many of whom were active in evaluation before it became fashionable or mandatory. Unfortunately, much of the early work of these pioneers is largely unknown and/or inaccessible to the current wider evaluation community. It is my hope that the AES will implement the recommendation put in the 1992 'Interim History' to establish a fitting commemoration of their efforts and contributions, in the form of an archive of evaluation related papers and memorabilia.

The three papers which follow are part of the attempt to develop a monograph reflecting those roots and it will include a review of papers to be made available in archives. Some of us 'AES oldies' propose to donate our collections of papers, and some inherited from colleagues who passed them on hoping that they would be of use to others. For example, material has come from the late Dr Elaine Martin, of Flinders University, School of Social Administration and Social Work, who was a modest leader in evaluation theory and practice in social welfare. Indeed she conducted the first workshop on evaluation that I ever organised, twenty years ago, and was one of my mentors in evaluation theory and practice. We need to debrief such leaders in the field while their papers and recollections are still available. In addition to a generic archive held centrally, there may be regional archives (e.g. in New Zealand). We also propose to develop a website for a history of the AES; a series of biographies of leading evaluation practitioners could also be part of a website. In this issue of the EJA we have provided a small selection of material drawn from these growing resources. We hope it will inspire evaluation practitioners to delve deeper into the lessons of the past, and to provide a firm foundation for continuous improvement in evaluation theory and practice in Australasia.

Acknowledgements

The 'Interim History' received many responses as part of the 1992 conference and thereafter. Although there is too much of that extra detail for this paper, we are pleased to be able to incorporate much of that material and feedback into the forthcoming monograph and the archives which are still under construction. This process must continue. Indeed, we are blessed by the encouragement and assistance of many colleagues and patient advisers, especially the following who have assisted in various ways through out the process:

Dr Anona Armstrong (ET&S, Vic.); Dr Herbert Stock (FIPPM, Flinders University), Dr Ralph Straton (Murdoch University, WA); Ian Trotman (Wellington Evaluation Group, NZ) and Jerome Winston (RMIT, Vic.). The several helpful Librarians of Flinders University, RMIT (Central and TAFE sections), University of Adelaide, University of Melbourne (Baillieu Reference Section and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry Library) and the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development (formerly in Leabrook, S.A.; now NCVET in the city of Adelaide).

Of course, I take responsibility for the content which may not represent the views of each of the contributors, the Australasian Evaluation Society or its Publications Committee.

References

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