

Meanwhile, the second author was appointed as a project manager both to implement and evaluate a program aimed at increasing consumer participation within a large teaching hospital. So, she was responsible for both program implementation *and* review within her own workplace. Considering this task retrospectively she explained how:

In all that has happened throughout the evaluation process, I have struggled with the dynamics of switching between being a project implementer and observer to an internal evaluator and the implications that this may have had on the project's outcomes. I have often wondered if I was an insider hospital employee first, then an external evaluator or an external evaluator first and then an internal administrator. This has been a source of continual dilemma, as it raised ethical and methodological considerations (Argirides 2001, p. 5).

How role dualisms have been dealt with in the literature

After having experienced such 'role dualisms' and uncertainty during the respective projects, it is surprising then to find that recent evaluation texts dealing with participant observation (PO) and case

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study in evaluation, generally fail to discuss such dilemmas. (Exceptions include works by Edwards, 2002 and Humphrey, 1995 who talk about long-term observation within one's own organisation). Indeed, the tendency is to describe the role undertaken by the evaluator during fieldwork in quite simplistic tones where the idea conveyed is that the evaluator chooses a role to play and sticks to it.

Often the role choice suggested for evaluators is based on the seminal classification presented by Gold (1958). This comprises: the complete participant where evaluators become a full member of the group being studied and the evaluation purpose is concealed (covert observation); the participant-as-observer where the evaluator and subject are aware there is a fieldwork relationship; the observer-as-participant during which involvement is kept to a minimum; and the complete observer where the investigator refrains from social contact with the group observed, such as looking through a two-way mirror. However, there is no hard-and-fast rule about which role to assume and the reality is that often the evaluator finds that, due to various circumstances, s/he is forced to move between roles or to form one.

Indeed Denzin (1989) suggests that: 'you must create a role for yourself and simultaneously establish the legitimacy of that role. So you must determine what balance you will strike between trying to fit in and trying to preserve your own identity'.

Interestingly, such matters have been discussed more by earlier sociologists and anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s than by recent writers. Topics during that period dealt with issues associated with observer and observed relationships, role choice and the dynamics of field relationships. Also, at that time, advice about how to carry out PO altered. As Behor described:

In classical anthropology observers were instructed to remain detached and objective. Yet with the emergence during the last ten years of anthropologists with recognisable connections to cultures in which they work, the lines between observer, insider and outsider are no longer so easily drawn. (Behor 1996)

As an extension of this idea, Burawoy pointed out that while undertaking PO or case study 'instead of standing above society, contemporary researchers veer toward absorption into it' (Burawoy 1991, p. 291). While this sounds commendable, it does raise problems about how to manage the fieldwork role(s) while 'living' in the evaluation setting. Consequently, during work on site, dual (or even multiple) roles may have to be assumed simultaneously and, as Ackroyd and Hughes (1981, p. 108) acknowledged, these dichotomies are often difficult to balance.

Therefore, fieldwork can be much more complicated than first expected and can lead to practical and ethical dilemmas for the evaluator. Yet, the only concerted considerations of such role dilemmas in fieldwork seem to be those written nearly 40 years ago in an article by Olesen and Whittaker (1967) and in a special issue of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (1984). Within the latter volume, both Wade (1984) and Rossman (1984), discussed how possessing an associated organisational role affects research practice. Wade, in particular, recognised how there can be role dilemmas when the observer is working in settings where they are also employed or have professional affiliation and called for more discussion of this as: 'guidance for role-taking in studies conducted where the observer is employed or has a distinct internal official role is rarely found'.

Role dualisms within the two selected evaluations

So, in order to bring some currency and to address this perceived lack, we now look at the two much more recent evaluations, outlined briefly earlier, where multiple role dualisms had to be faced by the two evaluators involved. These projects are now presented in more detail in conjunction with specific role issues that arose.

EXAMPLE 1**What makes for good practice in teaching qualitative methods? Role dilemmas during participant observation of 10 qualitative methods courses**

A great deal has been written for novices about how to use qualitative methods (QM) within research and evaluation designs but virtually nothing has been written about how to teach such methods. So, the first author decided to carry out a participant observation (PO) study of how QM are taught, by sitting amongst students in 10 different qualitative methods courses. She wanted to be treated like any other student and so accepted the same expectations from lecturers about attending lectures, participating in tutorials, taking part in all exercises and undertaking expected reading.

On ethical grounds the study was carried out overtly as a participant-as-observer study because 'entering as a known researcher ... allows you to ask questions more effectively and to get to informants better.' (Berg 1989, p. 55)

Observation took place in courses set in very different disciplines (ranging from Nursing, to Psychology, and Communications to Criminology). Other variables in a multiple variation sample included differing: size of class (15–110); length of lecturing experience (1–20 years); institution (four in Australia and two overseas); and length of course (seven weeks to a year). Under the umbrella of the PO approach, many forms of data collection were carried out including interviews, focus groups, and the study of student journals.

The multiple roles encountered

Evaluation settings and relationships were complex and involved a number of problematic 'role dualisms'. Some of these occurred because the observer was also a lecturer of QM herself and so was known by some of the lecturers already, either personally or through her writings. Meanwhile, students found it difficult to comprehend the dual or multiple roles that confronted them. The PO approach involved observation of classes and tutorials, individual interviews with lecturers and students, group interviews and looking at student QM journals kept during courses. As fieldwork progressed the following 'role dualisms' arose:

1 Peer or evaluator?

Issues had to be faced when conducting interviews with every lecturer because they were also peers and acquaintances. This is a more unusual circumstance for as Platt (1981) points out, in most research, interviewees are not likely to be encountered again and so the likelihood of future long-term consequences are minimal. This is not so when talking to peers. As Hockey (1993, p. 199) points out it leads to a blurring of the roles between the researcher and researched and so the researcher has

to decide which role to adopt: researcher, colleague or a combination.

In this particular case, a combination role was adopted but it was difficult to be both friend and confidante while trying to maintain the distance and objectivity required by the evaluation. As Platt highlights, peers are social equals, share the same background knowledge and subcultural understandings and are often members of the same professional groups and associations. This situation can be difficult to manage since there is a danger that both parties presume each other has certain kinds of prior knowledge, both sides take certain matters for granted, the informant can feel uncomfortable or threatened, and (in this instance) the evaluator could be open to professional scrutiny. As a result, ethical issues came to the fore. For instance, lecturers would reveal problems, politics and conflicts that existed in their departments or would voice personal views about colleagues. This demonstrated a certain level of trust and reciprocity whereby the evaluator provided a mechanism for sharing professional and political knowledge.

However, the evaluator had to judge what information should be used or not.

2 Student or evaluator?

This evaluator was often torn between being able to be the evaluator she needed to be and the student she had to be, in order to function in later lectures and tutorials. It was easy to remain a complete evaluator–observer while listening to questions raised by students, hearing responses from lecturers or watching activities in classrooms. On the other hand, it was often difficult not to get immersed totally as a student.

This would occur when taking part in prescribed exercises or when the lecturer was relaying totally new information (particularly that associated with an unfamiliar substantive area)

that needed to be understood in order to function properly in future classes or tutorials. In those situations, the evaluator would have to make particular efforts to remember what she was really there for and refrain from (in ethnographic terms) 'going native', thereby assuming the role of student totally. However, it did mean experiencing the courses as an insider.

Students also recognised this dualism dilemma. For instance, one student reflecting on the presence of the evaluator-cum-student remarked in a course journal: 'Her position is strange—she's neither purely a researcher, nor is she one of us—she's both. Very odd!'

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3 Student–observer or expert?

Sometimes issues arose when lecturer or student expectations about the role of teacher/expert conflicted with the student–observer role. Many students were aware that the evaluator taught courses in QM elsewhere. As a result, the observer would be sitting quietly at the back of a class in the PO role when a lecturer would suddenly ask her a question, ask for confirmation or to give a demonstration as a ‘live example of PO’. This meant that role of observer was altered to that of an expert in QM, resulting in a changed dynamic and content within the session being observed. In response, the evaluator felt duty bound to contribute, driven ethically by professionalism and the idea of reciprocity in relation to the lecturers who had kindly let her into their classrooms. A good example of this was when she was asked to show field notes to students to ‘show them what they might be like’.

Quite rightly, a student wrote in her journal:

I have been watching her and wondering. She has really submerged herself in this course, and talks after class about it all as if she was one of us with the same problems to contend with, yet I don’t know whether to view her as such or to see her as an expert, providing us with information sometimes.

4 Evaluator or mentor?

Other roles desired and expected of the evaluator by lecturers, included those of mentor. For instance, she played the role of non-threatening, therapeutic listener in relation to the stresses and frustrations often voiced about university structures and expectations.

The evaluator also became drawn into providing people with knowledge or expertise. Although she resisted as far as possible, the lecturers could be quite insistent and refusal to assist would have seemed churlish. For example, one lecturer asked the evaluator to suggest useful texts in QM and these appeared on a reading list later. In another extreme instance she was even asked to lecture on a particular topic because the lecturer felt she knew more about the topic than he did! This obviously reversed the role from being evaluator/student to lecturer and so affected the evaluation totally. However, the evaluator realised that the observer cannot expect to be the only person on the receiving end of the participant–observer process. Consequently, she discussed problems and suggested solutions for the lecturer who expressed a desire to improve professional performance. This provided some reciprocation, although data involving such extreme activity then had to be excluded from the study.

Success in coping with such role dualisms was based on reciprocal arrangements and the building of trust over periods of time.

5 Summary position

For this evaluator, the roles played were affected by pre-existing role definitions, the relationships developed with lecturers existing before the evaluation and the knowledge that she was an expert in the substantive area. Success in coping with such role dualisms was based on reciprocal arrangements and the building of trust over periods of time.

EXAMPLE 2

An evaluation of a new consumer participation model in a large metropolitan hospital: role dilemmas arising during an internal evaluation

The second project concerned an internal evaluation of a hospital and community partnerships project. The partnership project arose because it was believed that public hospitals require community input in order to improve health care service delivery to the area served.

Overall, the intention was to develop a hospital-based action research project where the focus was for consumers and hospital staff to work together towards continuous improvement of hospital services. Steps involved the development and implementation of a sustainable model, observation of the model in action and the production of a guide about how to implement the model for other acute health care settings. Along the way various elements of the project were to be evaluated.

Upon receiving funding, a project team to work in the hospital was selected from external applicants, one of whom was the second author of this article. She was appointed Project Manager and was responsible for setting up the project steering group comprising hospital staff, consumers as well as internal and external advisers. Her tasks were to create a hospital–community model, implement it and finally evaluate it.

In order to achieve all this, she had to: undertake staff and consumer consultations via focus groups and individual interviews; carry out collaborative work with

hospital management; set up a process of consumer and community health provider representation on specific hospital committees; observe these committees in action; organise and observe a community forum at the hospital; determine outcomes; and suggest improvements in relation to the model.

Playing dual or multiple roles

From the outset the Project Manager (PM) found herself caught up in dilemmas arising from dual or multiple roles. Firstly, although employed from

outside the hospital, by token of being appointed, she now became an internal employee. Then she not only had to implement the project but also had to evaluate it. Consequently, a number of dualisms arose:

1 Evaluator or hospital employee?

The role of evaluator had to be played at various stages; for example, when developing the consumer participation model, reviewing literature, or conducting a small qualitative study about staff knowledge, attitudes and perceptions regarding consumer participation. At the same time the PM also had to be mindful that she was a hospital employee and to continue carrying out tasks associated with that role. The technique of switching hats from evaluator to hospital employee was needed to achieve the appropriate performance of both roles. To enable this to happen the observer had to state openly whether she was there as an evaluator or project manager. This was crucial to allow independent investigation as well as to demonstrate that she was a hospital employee committed to following hospital procedure and structures.

2 External or internal employee?

Expanding on the above dualism, when appointed, the PM was purely an evaluator who had signed a contract for a specified period of time to conduct this particular project within the hospital. From this perspective the PM regarded herself as an external health evaluator employed by an organisation, for a set time, to conduct a specific and finite piece of work. However, having joined the hospital she began to learn about its culture day-by-day. Gradually, she felt a sense of 'belonging' and to see herself as a hospital employee with tacit knowledge. Furthermore, as hospital staff began to treat her increasingly as a colleague, she began to see herself as an internal hospital employee so that her perceptions of being an external evaluator began to fade. Nevertheless, she still questioned whether she was an insider or an outsider.

3 Expert or novice evaluator?

When the PM was appointed, the job description specified that the incumbent was required to have extensive knowledge of evaluation. The PM's colleagues certainly perceived her as an 'expert' and indeed she had the requisite skills gained through postgraduate study and prior employment. However, the PM, herself, felt that having to carry out a large-scale internal evaluation in a 'foreign' context was a new experience for her and so she felt like a novice.

4 A senior staff member or a junior one?

A confusing dual role of being simultaneously a senior and junior staff member also became evident. As the PM, she was often regarded as a senior member of staff, especially by the Project Steering Committee as well as by the staff and Director of the department where the project took place. However, other hospital staff such as the Chief Medical Officer

and the Quality Manager regarded her as a junior member of staff with not much influence to effect change, and who was bound by hospital policies, protocols and culture. This was quite perplexing and so the PM was uncertain about where she sat in the hospital hierarchy. Similarly, while interviewing or observing, the staff involved treated her in different ways—with some treating her with deference while others made it quite clear that they thought she was a junior health professional.

5 Project Manager or internal evaluator?

The dual role of being both manager and internal evaluator simultaneously proved challenging, difficult and at times confusing. There was a problem of determining where the line between project management ended and that of evaluation began. So when collecting evaluation data, staff had to be reminded constantly that the PM was now 'wearing the evaluation hat'. This proved a tricky concept for them to deal with but over time they got used to the idea.

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6 Researcher or program implementer or internal evaluator?

Difficulties arose through the processes of developing the consumer participation model, implementing it and then conducting the evaluation. While the model was being developed, the PM was often in the role of pure evaluator. When implementation was to occur the PM had to switch to being an implementer and then again to being the evaluator. This shifting of roles proved to be confusing for hospital personnel and steering committee alike, and again the PM was overcome by reminding staff what 'hat' was being worn.

7 Summary position

This evaluator was occupying a role that channelled information between consumers and hospital personnel. Participants depended on her to create a link within the hospital to mediate between the formal organisation and its consumer groups. This meant that the perception of whether she was implementer or evaluator, junior or senior had to be made transparent.

Implications concerning these multiple roles

So, the number and type of dualisms faced by the two evaluators were considerable, wide-ranging and often perplexing. The determination of roles was certainly not easy. Difficulties and ethical issues arose for both because of their background, experience and professional relationships in

combination with the perceptions and expectations of project participants. As a result, there were often conflicts between the role the evaluators needed to play as opposed to ones they were allowed, or expected, to play.

Reassurance, however, comes from other authors such as Horowitz (1986) and Ball (1990) who would not be surprised at such a state of affairs. Horowitz, for instance, takes issue with the implication that the evaluator or researcher is essentially free to choose the degree and form of participation, saying:

I will argue that fieldwork roles are not matters dictated solely, or even largely, by the stance of the fieldworker but are instead better viewed as interactional matters based on processes of continual negotiation between the (evaluator) and the (evaluated). Together, the qualities and attributes of the fieldworker interact with those of the setting and its members to shape, if not create, roles for the (evaluator). (Horowitz 1986, p. 410)

Ball concurs stating that the participant–observer is an inevitable part of the evaluation context and so has to take on varying roles. Furthermore, ‘the role taken, whatever it is, will influence the kinds of data elicited’ (Ball 1990, p. 160). Hughes (1960) adds that such fluidity and uncertainty regarding roles need to be accepted as a way of life for those undertaking participant observation or case study exercises. He emphasised that during fieldwork there will always be an unending tussle between various internal membership roles (as a participant) and those more of an outsider or stranger (observer).

As a consequence, Yin (1991) goes on to point out that the participant observer or case study worker must be prepared to be: partly an insider and partly not; partly on the boundary and partly right inside; partly accepted and partly not; partly understanding the culture and partly not. In other words the good fieldworker ‘must be able to tolerate a whole range of uncertainties and ambiguities’ associated with roles.

So, defining a role is not as easy for evaluators as some authors might imply. But on the positive side, several noted authors report that such tensions, blurring and conflicts associated with role dualisms can be crucial, eventually, for producing good research and evaluation data and insights. As Lofland pointed out:

There can be in the role of the observer an attendant feeling of confusion, loneliness and anxiety. It is out of this circumstance of being marginal—such as the simultaneous insider–outsider—that creative insight is best generated. (Lofland 1971, p. 97)

Ways to overcome the dilemmas created by dualisms

So, how can role dualisms be managed without sacrificing rigour and professional and personal integrity? And how can evaluators protect themselves from such stresses during fieldwork? From the instances presented, we found it helpful to:

- create techniques for managing dual roles
- build up trust so that participants do not view role dualisms suspiciously
- be as open as possible about roles being played
- recognise that role switching can be used as a legitimate field relationship tactic as it can lead to acquisition of certain data relevant to the study
- be guided by commonsense and professionalism when dilemmas arise
- respond to pressures arising from dualisms in a way that preserves the integrity of dual role stances
- accept that interactions between observer and participants are affected by a shared responsibility for each others’ needs and that these can surface in a variety of ways
- realise that role changing may be beneficial in allowing the reciprocity demanded by ethical qualitative evaluation. Evaluators may well have to change roles and consider ‘reciprocal arrangements’ they can offer participants for their time and cooperation. Indeed approaches for extended involvement with the observer beyond the boundary of evaluation effort may be, in fact, a demand for role reciprocity as *the participants themselves* perceive it
- revisit the data collected in order to remove any that reveal that events were altered so much by the evaluator presence that they are no longer no longer reporting on the natural, original context.

To conclude though, one must add that it is important to remain firm in the role assumed at any one time. To try to present oneself as a ‘neutral’ character may create an impression of being amateur, inane or uncommitted. So, the evaluator who carries dual or multiple responsibilities should acknowledge the existence and interdependence of these roles at particular times in the evaluation, and where possible use these appropriately for the good of those being observed.

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