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# A conceptual framework for making evaluation support meaningful, useful and valuable

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How does support differ from reporting and dissemination? How, and to what extent do existing evaluation theories attend to support? How, and for what purposes should support be provided? Does support infer that evaluators have ethical, moral, professional, contractual or other obligations to provide support? Is support an evaluation service, or should it be considered an evaluator competency or skill? Or, as with the traditional research paradigm, should evaluators merely let their reports speak for them? While the Key Evaluation Checklist (KEC) and other evaluation theories and approaches have provided a conceptual basis for evaluation support, further clarification is necessary in order to make support an integral part of evaluation practice. The evaluation support construct as posited here necessitates means that are direct and indirect, technical and general, and includes alternative scenarios for the purposes of advocating for, assisting and helping evaluands, clients, stakeholders, and audiences and users of evaluation.

> Procedures for the use of the humble checklist, while no one would deny their utility, in evaluation and elsewhere, are usually thought to fall somewhat below the entry level of what we call a methodology, let alone a theory. But many checklists used in evaluation incorporate a quite complex theory, which we are well advised to uncover. (Scriven, June 2000)

The Key Evaluation Checklist (KEC) was originally developed by Michael Scriven in the early 1970s for use by Educational Testing Services (ETS) to evaluate education products produced by federally funded research and development centers in the United States (Scriven, 9 April 2005). In 1977, the KEC was more widely disseminated via Scriven's *Evaluation Thesaurus* pamphlet, and subsequently through four book editions. Currently, Scriven's revised versions (July 2000, April 2002, October 2003, October 2004, January 2005, April 2005) of the KEC are published and distributed through the Evaluation Center's Checklist Project[2]. Although it could be argued that the KEC is one of the

comprehensive, rational and user-friendly frames for conducting evaluation, of programs in particular, many of the checkpoints could use further clarification in order to make them practical for the novice evaluator and experienced professional alike. As an example, the KEC checkpoint #14, Report and Support, with particular emphasis on the support element, is elucidated by positing an articulated theorem of evaluation support purposes and means for consideration and application by the general evaluation community. Further, this endeavor is intended to provide a preliminary conceptual framework for making evaluation support meaningful, useful and valuable, as well as strengthening the connection between evaluation theory and practice (Christie 2003).

## KEC checkpoint #14: Report and Support

Often overlooked, yet crucial to evaluation is the support provided to clients throughout the evaluation process. Evaluators provide support in various forms to their clients from the early phases of proposal development and submission, during contractual negotiations, during ongoing interactions, to the delivery of the final report and beyond. Yet, in the lexicon of evaluation-specific terminology (Scriven, October 2004), evaluation support has not yet gained its proper place, nor has its essential nature or function been given due attention in the evaluation literature. In the most recent version of the KEC, Scriven (April 2005) describes the Report and Support checkpoint (#14) as:

> [Report] Conveying the conclusions in an appropriate way. Not to be identified with handing over a semitechnical report, the paradigm for typical research studies. May require radically different presentations to different audiences; these may be oral or written, long or short, public or private, technical or nontechnical, graphical or textual, anecdotal or bare bones. [Support] Should include postreport help, e.g. handling questions; explaining the report's significance for different groups including users, staff, funders, other impactees. This may involve creation and depiction of various possible scenarios that do or do not accommodate the findings in the given context, i.e., doing some problem solving for the client. In this process, a wide range of communication skills are often useful, e.g., use and reading of body language, understanding the cultural iconography. This checkpoint should also cover getting the results (and incidental knowledge findings) into the relevant databases, if any; recommending creation of one where beneficial; and dissemination into wider publication channels if appropriate. (Scriven, April 2005)

It may be inferred that Scriven's intent for the KEC was not to provide a step-by-step procedural manual for conducting evaluation or metaevaluation, but rather 'kept very short to make them [the checkpoints] mnemonically and referentially useful' (Scriven 1991, p. 204). Davidson (2005) has expanded the Report and Support checkpoint to include:

> … who got (or will get) copies of the evaluation report and in what form … make sure that you have covered your main audiences and what they needed to know … you should note any follow-up done (or planned) by the evaluation team to ensure the findings are used. This phase, which should be written into the evaluation contract, is extremely important to help the evaluation team assess the utility of its work, reflect on what might have been done to increase use, and document any learnings … (Davidson 2005, p. 202)

Although Davidson (2005) has made a serious effort to clarify and enhance the checkpoint, she emphasizes dissemination and utilization in particular. As such, several questions remain unresolved. How does support differ from reporting and dissemination? How, and to what extent do existing evaluation theories attend to support? How, and for what purposes should support be provided? Does support infer that evaluators have ethical, moral, professional, contractual or other obligations to provide support? Is support an evaluation service, or should it be considered an evaluator competency or skill? Or, as with the traditional research paradigm, should evaluators merely let their reports speak for them?

## How have the theoretical traditions attended to evaluation support?

Many of the theoretical approaches to evaluation engage in and encourage evaluation support either explicitly or implicitly, and to greater or lesser degrees; particularly those which emphasize the relationship between evaluators and evaluation clients and stakeholders, such as use or utilization-focused, participatory, empowerment and responsive evaluation theories, to name but a few. These theoretical orientations and approaches have given considerable attention to the nature of evaluation impact, its influences, the role of the evaluator as a change agent, coach, facilitator, consultant or advocate, and evaluation use, yet explicit references as to the logic of how and why to provide evaluation support have been infrequent.

Typically, support has not been treated as being distinct from reporting and dissemination or dispersion. The former of these may include, for example, disseminating the evaluation or portions thereof in a variety of formats appropriate for a variety of audiences (Gangopadhyay 2002), while

the latter, dispersion (Scriven 1991), entails the distribution of an actual product of the evaluation, such as a report, rather than information about it.

There is little question or disagreement regarding the report element in the KEC Report and Support checkpoint. Scriven (1991) has provided a detailed account of the meaning of both the report and reporting. A report is primarily a *product* of the evaluation, while reporting is both a *product* and a *process*. Thus, reporting requires actively communicating a report or portions thereof.

> [Reporting] … communicating results to the client and audiences. It may be best done orally rather than in writing, or (more commonly) by using both modalities; across time rather than at one time; using completely different versions for different audiences or just one version. (Scriven 1991, p. 311)
>
> [Report] … one of the key areas where creativity and originality are really important, as well as knowledge about diffusion and dissemination. Reports should be designed on the basis of some serious thinking or research about audience needs as well as client needs. (Scriven 1991, p. 311)

Furthermore, evaluators have a well-developed literature for client-centered reporting, ranging from how to effectively and meaningfully present statistics (May 2004), presenting evaluation reports and findings (Morris & Fitz-Gibbon 1978), frameworks for evaluation reports themselves (Torres 2005; Miron 2004), as well as entire books on the subject (Torres, Preskill & Piontek 2004). These do little to clarify the purposes and means for supporting evaluation, other than detailing the methodology of reporting for a variety of purposes and audiences.

As previously mentioned, a number of the longstanding, and more recent, evaluation theories epitomize evaluation support to lesser or greater degrees. Patton's (1997, 2005) utilization-focused evaluation, in which the central tenants of the theory are that evaluation is designed, conducted and completed in a manner that affects how and by whom the evaluation will be utilized (Patton 1997), is directly linked to evaluation support. To foster evaluation use, the collaborative affiliation between the evaluator and the stakeholders is critical (Patton 2005). Thus, it is suggested that a significant element in the evaluator/stakeholder partnership from the utilization perspective is support for purposes of helping or assisting by means of promoting evaluation use.

Other theoretical perspectives such as empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 2000, 2005; Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman 1995; Fetterman & Wandersman 2005) and participatory evaluation (Cousins 2003, 2004; Cousins & Earl 1992; Cousins & Whitmore 1998) also epitomize aspects of supporting evaluation clients, stakeholders and users. Participatory perspectives (Cousins 2003, 2004; Cousins & Earl 1992; Cousins & Whitmore 1998) focus on and advocate evaluation buy-in, which is to say that by having program personnel and other key stakeholders involved in the evaluation, it becomes valuable to them and effects change (King 2005). Moreover, the various participatory approaches give emphasis directly to evaluation support, by stating that one of the roles of the professional evaluators is 'for technical assistance as needed' (King 2005, p. 291). Fetterman's (2000, 2005) empowerment evaluation differ slightly from participatory perspectives, though still rooted in similar traditions, in that the primary purpose is to 'help people help themselves and improve their programs' (Fetterman 2005, p. 125); thus promoting and encouraging evaluation support through assisting and empowering others in evaluating themselves. While responsive evaluation (Greene & Abma 2001; Stake 1980, 1995, 2003; Stake & Abma 2005), on the other hand, advocates support less directly than either empowerment or participatory types of evaluation, yet embodies elements of it. Analogous to the participatory and empowerment approaches, responsive evaluation is organized around stakeholder needs and concerns (Stake & Abma 2005), often by allowing stakeholders to specify what questions are to be investigated; which could be considered an ancillary form of evaluation support.

## The fundamental purposes and means of providing evaluation support

Prior to specifying the fundamental, essential purposes and means of providing evaluation support it is necessary to explicitly articulate what support implies. Two readily available definitions (Merriam-Webster 2005) aid in characterizing support as it relates to evaluation and in particular, the KEC. They are: (1) to uphold the interest or cause of—*advocate*—and (2) to uphold and defend as valid or right—*assist* or *help*.

Taking into account the previously discussed theoretical perspectives, and given Scriven's (1991, April 2005), Davidson's (2004) and Merriam-Webster's (2005) renderings, the evaluation support construct calls for means which are *direct* and *indirect*, *technical* and *general*, and includes *alternative scenarios* (Scriven, April 2005) for the purposes of *advocating* for, *assisting*, and *helping* evaluands, clients, stakeholders, and audiences and users of evaluation. This designation applies equally well and is suited to evaluation purposes that are either formative, summative or ascriptive (Scriven 2004, October 2004).

## Types of support

The types of support posited herein (general and technical, direct and indirect, alternative scenarios) are neither sequential, mutually exclusive, nor intended as an exhaustive list of the potential types of support that evaluators can or should provide. Rather, these types of support are intended to clarify those as outlined by Scriven in the KEC (1991, April 2005) and serve as a basic framework for consideration and critique by the evaluation community. It should be mentioned that in the evaluation process Scriven (January 2005) and others (Donaldson 2001; Donaldson, Gooler & Scrive 2002; Schinker 2005) have suggested that 'a wide range of communication skills are often useful, such as use and reading of body language and understanding the cultural iconography' (Scriven, April 2005) are useful for reducing the extreme anxiety experienced by some evaluation clients, and that this likely holds true when providing support as well.

### General support

General support consists primarily of the types described by Scriven (1991, April 2005) and is best suited to the common ongoing activities and procedures intended to help or assist evaluation clients, stakeholders, users and other audiences before, during and after the evaluation process. Thus, general support lends itself to such things as continued communications with clients and stakeholders (Stevahn et al. 2005) and attending to questions and queries about the conducted evaluation. Furthermore, general support includes those things that evaluators traditionally provide; formal or informal presentations of evaluation findings using a variety of modalities, delivering reports, and so forth. Unlike the traditional research paradigm (Scriven, April 2005), delivering a report (general support) does not in and of itself represent support. Therefore, it is essential that the other types of support (technical, direct and indirect, alternative scenarios) are also considered to advocate for, help, and assist evaluation clients, stakeholders, users, and other right-to-know audiences.

### Technical support

Technical support may be thought of as being evaluation-specific. That is, technical types of support are not concerned with the conducted evaluation itself, but rather evaluation in general. The intent of technical support is to help or assist evaluation clients, stakeholders, users and other audiences in understanding evaluation purposes, procedures and logic. Support of this type allows evaluators to explain evaluation-specific principles, procedures or terminology to potential and actual clients, users and other audiences of evaluation; 'the unique logic and methodology that is truly evaluation-specific' (Davidson 2005, p. xi). This may include, for example, explaining or justifying the reasoning or rationale of a selected theoretical or methodological approach, sophisticated statistical analyses or syntheses (e.g. ranking, grading, scoring or sum), or accounts of how and why particular values were considered relevant and others were not.

### Direct and indirect support

Direct and indirect types of support may be either or both general and technical. Direct support in this sense is support provided expressly to the evaluation client, stakeholders or other right-to-know audiences that may be general, technical or both to help and assist these groups in understanding and using evaluation. Indirect support on the other hand serves a secondary function, although purposeful, and includes such things as getting results and knowledge findings into the relevant databases (Scriven, April 2005), documenting lessons learned by the evaluator or evaluation team (Davidson 2005), meta-evaluation of the conducted evaluation, publications or other forms of knowledge generation resulting from the evaluation, or making findings available to other right-to-know audiences. Thus, direct support can be thought of as a fundamental or essential type of support that has a direct impact on the evaluation clients, stakeholders or users; whereas indirect support can be a supplementary or auxiliary type of support that may or may not have an impact on these groups.

### Alternative scenarios

The final type of support, which Scriven (October 2004) recently added to the Report and Support checkpoint in the KEC, is alternative scenarios. Alternative scenarios are problem-solving activities or solutions provided by the evaluator in response to the evaluation findings in the given context and can engage the general, technical and direct elements as well. Alternative scenarios can be more complex than general and technical or direct and indirect types. An example of where this type of support may be implemented is illustrated by the 1983 Dekalb study (Stock et al. 1983) of driver education. The study essentially found that under three conditions: (1) no training at all (control), (2) a 20-hour curriculum (PDL), and (3) the Safe Performance Curriculum (SPC)—consisting of 70-hours of classroom training, simulation, and driving range and on-the-road training, that driver training was ineffective in reducing collisions and fatalities over a six-month period. More important, a 20-year follow-up (Northport Associates 2005) found that the control had statistically fewer occurrences of collisions and fatalities than either the PDL or SPC groups.

Scriven (19 November 2004) suggests that other solutions (i.e. alternative scenarios) should be presented to the client in such cases. Although alternative scenarios are a form of post-report support, they distinctly differ from technical or general and direct and indirect types of support in

that they provide differential, potential solutions to problems that emerge as a result of the evaluation. The alternative scenario form of support is derived from the context-dependent findings of the evaluation and provides: (1) an opportunity to avoid undesirable outcomes, (2) provide comparatively high costs-benefits ratios, and (3) general quality improvements. In the aforementioned case (Scriven, 19 November 2004), a feasible alternative scenario may be simply a matter of implementing appropriate, readily available technology, for example introducing highly sophisticated and realistic computer simulators (similar to those used by the United States Air Force) that are intended to reproduce the driving experience. Alternative scenario types of support can emerge from competitors (KEC checkpoint #9), may possibly result in explanations and recommendations (KEC checkpoint #12), and may be thought of as offering or expressing an option that the client may consider in alleviating or improving the problem being addressed, in this case improving driver training and reducing driving-related fatalities.

## Additional considerations

Evaluator-provided support denotes substantially more than delivering a report and leaving clients and other stakeholder groups to make of it what they will (Scriven, April 2005). This by no means is intended to imply that all dimensions (i.e. types) of support are essential, required or necessary in all contexts. There will certainly be instances where comprehensive support is necessary, but more often than not, it may be suitable to incorporate only one or two of the support types into evaluation activities. Clients that are familiar with evaluation may not need technical support, for example, but may require both general support and well thought out, credible alternative scenarios. Yet, even though the client may not be in need of intensive supportive services it is the evaluator's responsibility to convey the importance of the evaluation results, which would encompass both general and direct types of support.

Support is time consumptive, costly and requires substantial additional resources on the part of the evaluator. Are evaluators then ethically, morally, professionally or otherwise obligated to provide support? As a discipline that operates on a set of moral principles and values (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation 1994; Shadish, Newman, Schreirer & Wye 1995), evaluators are duty-bound to provide these services. Evaluations often have, or potentially have, significant social, political or other ramifications. Likely, or proven, beneficial programs, services or policies that are inappropriately interpreted may be unduly and unjustly terminated. Through the provision of ongoing and in-depth follow-up and post-report support in one or more forms, the likelihood of misrepresentation or misuse (Stevens 1994) is decreased. Decisions are ultimately made by those charged to do so, but providing support beyond reporting facilitates enhanced decision making, whether formative or summative (e.g. change the program's design or allocate funds to another program).

A simple solution to the extra costs associated with providing ongoing, pre- and post-support is to incorporate supportive services directly into evaluation budgets (Davidson 2005; Horn 2001). This may include best estimates or provisions for supportive costs into evaluation plans, contracts, bids, proposals or during the negotiation process (Stake 1976); including adequate explanations and justifications. Explaining and justifying additional costs to potential clients is no easy matter, the evaluator must convince the client that these additional services are essential to explaining, clarifying and implementing the evaluation findings. Although these suggested solutions may not be universally applicable or feasible (e.g. budgets or time frames that are severely restrictive), other solutions are available. For example, evaluators may provide supportive services pro-bono, which may serve to reinforce evaluation credibility (Caron 1990; Winberg 1987), use (Cousins 2003; Caracelli & Preskill 2001; Henry & Mark 2003; Mark & Henry 2004), meaning (Gangopadhyay 2002), and value (Richardson 1992). The remaining question then is whether or not support is merely a service, or should it be considered an evaluator competency or skill?

In the efforts to establish the possible 'common ground' (Stevahn et al. 2005) of core competencies (King et al. 2001; Stevahn, et al. 2005) and essential skills (Canadian Evaluation Society 2005) for the evaluation profession, allusions have been made to various types of evaluation support. A number of Stevahn, King, Ghere and Minnema's (2005) domains, categories and items loosely express the various types of evaluation support outlined herein: such as IVB2, 1.3 (conveys personal evaluation approaches and skills to potential clients) which implies general, technical and direct types of support; IVE6, 1.6 (contributes to the knowledge base of evaluation), a type of indirect support; IIC1, 4.2 (negotiates with clients before the evaluation begins) which is a general and direct type of support; IIC2, 4.4 (communicates with clients throughout the evaluation process) which addresses general, technical and direct types of support.

In a similar vein, the Canadian Evaluation Society's (2005) *Essential Skills Series* also addresses evaluation support via the 'Understanding Evaluation' skills (e.g. reducing resistance to evaluation, involving staff and clients in the evaluation process, increasing evaluation utilization), 'Building an Evaluation Framework' skills (e.g. evaluation methods for 'getting close

to the client'), 'Improving Program Performance' skills (e.g. assessing client satisfaction), and 'Evaluating for Results' skills (e.g. communicating evaluation findings); which convey general and technical and direct and indirect types of support. As such, it may be worthwhile for aspects and types of support to be considered more overtly, or specifically integrated into the developing competency and skill frameworks for evaluators, rather than viewing support as an evaluation service. Investigators of evaluator competencies and skills are urged to consider an agenda for further research and inquiry into this domain to determine whether or not support is a worthwhile competency or skill, whether or not it adds value to the existing competencies and skills, and whether or not it should be considered distinct from those competencies and skills already conceived.

In some respects the perceived quality and value of evaluation by its clients and other relevant stakeholders and right-to-know audiences is related to its recipients' perceptions of not only the processes and products of evaluation, but also on its ability to meet their needs as consumers of evaluation. Thus, it is suspected that the quality and value of evaluation as a discipline, process and product are inherently linked to the depth and breadth of services provided, including among others, support.

## Note

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2 Additional information about the Checklist Project, which is part of the Materials Development, Training and Supportive Services (MTS) project funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), can be found at <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/mts>.

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# Reviews of two methods texts

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As we do not have a specific article for the methods section of the journal this time, we have decided to consider two methods texts, one reprinted in 2005 and the other published this year. One will attract those of you undertaking large-scale quantitative evaluations or case studies while the other is for novice qualitative evaluators interested in the health field. What these books have in common, however, is that both authors are Australian. David de Vaus is currently a Professor of Social Science at La Trobe University while Emily Hansen is a Research Fellow in the Discipline of General Practice at the University of Tasmania. Consequently, most of the examples within both books have arisen from Antipodean studies.

## 1 RESEARCH DESIGN IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

**David de Vaus**

Sage, London, 2001, reprinted 2005, ISBN 0-761-95347-7, paperback, US$46.95, 296 pages

The major problem with this book is its title. The words '*Research Design in Social Research*' suggest that all kinds of designs would appear within its covers. However, the truth is that 12 of the 15 chapters deal with quantitative designs. The remainder presents case study as a potential qualitative or mixed method approach but the author does not consider the special design needs of other common (often qualitative) methodologies such as action research, phenomenology, ethnography or grounded theory—all of which require particular design considerations.

Similarly, the author covers various statistical analysis approaches but does not mention the various approaches possible for qualitative analysis (ranging from discourse analysis to using various computer-assisted qualitative data software packages). Other omissions are that there is nothing on mixed-methods designs (which are commonly used); how reporting is integral to planning evaluations; or how resources (staffing, time and financial) must be considered in relation to design.

Consequently, the title is somewhat of a misnomer. This is a shame as there are many excellent features, particularly if you are to carry out large-scale quantitative evaluations. The first part of the text talks about general matters such as the context of design, tools needed, causation and logic. David then goes on to cover experimental, longitudinal and cross-sectional designs in detail. For each there is a description, as well as examples. In addition, ethical implications and limitations for each design are considered at some length.

Meanwhile, the writing style is always clear and accessible. This has always been one of David's strengths so that the presentation is logical and thus the argument flows well. In fact David has an easy, personal style that is easy to follow.

In addition, the author has achieved an appropriate balance between theory and practical relevance throughout the text. This is one of the book's positive aspects whereby the presentation of each abstract concept and idea is followed by real examples. Indeed, it is evident that David has drawn on his extensive prior experience as a senior researcher at the Australian Institute of Family Studies to provide these. Consequently, the examples are of general interest, whatever the discipline of the reader.

Examples are also portrayed through the use of graphs and tables. These are clear and relate strongly to the text. As a result, the author often 'talks' us through them so that we understand clearly what he is trying to convey.

Related to the text and graphics, the layout is well spaced and fairly appealing to the reader. Splitting the book into different parts is also helpful. The only thing that might assist with the text design is to introduce some colour into the graphics (although this might be uneconomic for the publisher).

Overall, the book is quite advanced and so would be useful to post-graduate students and to the many professional evaluators undertaking large-scale or survey-based evaluations. It should also be in academic and other libraries. It just needs a different title or to concentrate more on qualitative designs!

## 2 SUCCESSFUL QUALITATIVE HEALTH RESEARCH: A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION

**Emily C Hansen**

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2006, ISBN 1-74114-678-X, paperback, AU$39-95, 210 pages

This book is aimed particularly at novice qualitative researchers working or interested in the health domain. So, it joins a number of similar works concerned with qualitative health research that have appeared during the past few years (including those by overseas authors Crabtree and Miller (1999), Gantley (1999), Green and Thorogood (2004), Morse and Field (1995) and Pope and Mays (1999), as well as those by Australian authors such as Grbich (1999) and Rice and Ezzy (1999).

The main aim of the text is said to be to provide 'user friendly practical and theoretical advice' for those needing to design a qualitative health project, collect data, analyse it and report appropriately. These aims are certainly met because there are sections on each aforementioned aspect, the writing is clear and there are many helpful tips for those entering qualitative research for the first time.

More specifically, the volume begins with a chapter that sets the scene by talking about: the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods; mixed methods; and the link between qualitative research and academic theory. Other chapters deal with planning a piece of research, qualitative research design, participant observation, interviewing, focus groups, analysis and writing.

As the above list indicates, though, there are some gaps in the content. For instance, there are few details about document analysis and none at all about the use of the visual medium as data. However, on the positive side there are excellent, quite detailed sections on ethics (where there are quite detailed considerations of informed consent, right to privacy, protection from harm, covert fieldwork and vulnerable participants) and rigour and these sections are worth looking at, even if the reader is more experienced in qualitative work. Not surprisingly then, the book professes to: 'sit in the middle ground between basic QM books and the more abstract style of writing and discussion found in books for more advanced audiences' (p xi).

Particularly positive aspects of the presentation include that:

- more attention is paid to various types of data analysis and to matters associated with writing than in many other qualitative research texts
- there is a mixture of historical material as well as reportage of more recent studies
- summaries are provided at the end of each chapter
- a useful and comprehensive glossary is provided before the index.

But perhaps one of the best and most innovative features is that five chapters end with detailed examples of how the chapter content has been applied. These have been written by experienced and well-respected Australian and New Zealand health researchers who work in public health, nursing, health program evaluation and the sociology of health. These real applications bring the preceding theoretical and practical ideas to life for the reader.

Nevertheless, there are a few weaknesses. One is that the presentation is restricted to prose only so that there are no figures, tables or any other devices to break up the text. Therefore, flicking through the book may be off-putting to a novice.

Another concern is that, although extra reading is suggested at the end of each chapter, much of it is rather dated. For instance, the most recent of the five texts suggested for participant observation/ fieldwork was written in 1996 and yet there have been excellent, more recent volumes such as those by DeLaine (2000) and Dewalt and Dewalt (2002). The same is true for readings for focus groups (all listed appeared in the 1990s), while there have been several well-written tomes since 2000, for example Bloor (2000), Fern (2001) and Krueger (2000) (all possible as Hansen has listed books as late as 2005 in the final references).

Overall, though, this is a readable, thorough and useful book that novices should acquire. Note that I do not say ‘novices carrying out health research and evaluation’, as this book would be of interest to *all* disciplines because the examples are understandable and applicable to the lay researcher/evaluator as well as to those within the health sector.

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