

SCRIPTING THE LEARNING PROCESS:
EVALUATIVE INQUIRY IN FIVE ACTS

by

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Abstract

I have discovered that evaluation like my first passion, drama, challenges participants on a cognitive and personal level. In both evaluation and theatre, stories are told for the purpose of stimulating interest, reflection, and insights into the complexity of human behaviour. In the world of program evaluation judgements about program merit, worth, or significance are generated through an evaluator's interactions with theory, stakeholders and colleagues. Program insights are thus tied to the quality and complexity of these interactions.

This thesis tells the story of my transition from drama teacher-to-graduate student-to-evaluator-researcher. It begins with my motivations for this transition; includes my learning about internal, participatory and collaborative evaluation. Finally, this thesis speculates on how inquiry and experiences, such as the ones documented here, might inform the learning of other novice evaluators. It accomplishes this latter goal by making explicit the complexities of a participatory and collaborative evaluation process and the considerations and deliberations that I faced in attempting to enact this approach.

This thesis reflects the fact that I have always used stories as a way to understand and make meaning, Presented in the structure of a play, this narrative purposefully examines the values, challenges, and possibilities for learning that arose in my collaboration with other evaluation colleagues. Over the five acts I reveal my growing understanding of evaluation theory and practice and how this was shaping my understanding of who I was becoming. The final Act explores the notion that professional learning and identity is not a fixed or exclusive concept.

This thesis suggests that learning from experience is valuable in contributing to the growth of novices. In learning to do evaluation it is not enough to focus on models of practice or theoretical principles. Becoming an evaluator also requires attention to personal and interpersonal orientations and the monitoring of an evolving personal stance. In presenting this thesis I argue that the elements of my story have transferable qualities and that these elements can trigger conversation and insights beneficial to other novices or those charged with the induction of novices. The intended consequence is a richer understanding of evaluation as a human enterprise.

DEDICATION

*embracing the past-
celebrating the present-
nourishing the future-
where movement and change are a part of life
I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family
for their enduring love which taught me to enjoy
melodious conversation and laughter*

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I will always remember the support of my graduate student colleagues. Although this thesis was independent, my learning was made richer by the intersection of ideas with so many others. I am also indebted to Vasilios and Mike who showed patience and kindness to read it "one more time" and by doing so, helped to guide me through the editing and technical hurdles.

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CHAPTER ONE

Prologue

a. Prologue: Spoken by one or two characters before the chorus appears. The prologue usually gives the mythological background necessary for understanding the events of the play.

This thesis uses a theatrical structure to weave provocative quotations and a scholarly perspective with narrative writing in a conversational and informal voice, to portray my journey as a novice evaluator. The researcher is unavoidably and intentionally present throughout this text. A chorus appears figuratively in the form of *Considering the path*; these frequent insertions invite readers to broaden their own understanding by borrowing and interweaving artful ideas from others. Evocative quotations are a way of invoking a broader boundary in which to understand and define myself and this work. Eisner (1998) suggests that for feeling to be conveyed, the “language of the arts must be used, because it is through the form a symbol displays that feeling is given virtual life” (p. 4). The language of this narrative is meant to be both evocative and reminiscent; both the tone and substance of this thesis have been influenced by my desire to create a text that will enable you to imagine yourself a character in parts of this evaluative story.

This learning process is shaped to resemble the structure of a Five-Act play. You will not find separate sections of literature and methodology as these have been woven throughout the Acts to buttress the information presented. Each of the Five-Acts signifies a movement not just to another thought, but another stage in thinking about evaluative ideas. Each Act begins afresh, swaying between past memories and present use, reaching backwards while flowing onwards. The theatrical construction appropriated for this narrative journey is based on ideas borrowed from conventions of academia, literature,

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and theatre; taken together they form an image of a novice's journey in an evaluative process.

The Acts that follow represent growing understanding from my observations and participation in an evaluation project. In addition, dialogue with colleagues who are also graduate students and work on this topic with mentors provided influential wisdom during this work. Ultimately, this thesis documents my interest in internal evaluations involving participatory, collaborative, and developmental methods of understanding as portrayed through narrative reporting.

Backdrop: Setting the Context

a. Backdrop: Provides clues to the setting. The backdrop hangs at the back of the stage.

This backdrop prepares readers for the context of the evaluation that is described throughout this these. The purpose of the evaluation project was to examine the new Classroom Assessment module that is now a required part of the pre-service education program at Queen's University's. Although not required by any external source, the evaluation was initiated by the instructors to assist with the development of the course for the following year. Both of the module instructors anticipated that the course would take three years of implementation and evaluation to learn about the most appropriate content, as well as the most appropriate way to deliver the content. Our evaluation would focus on finding out what people involved with the module wanted to know, collecting and examining ideas from teacher candidates who completed the module, and identifying improvement routes for the course content and delivery for the following year. Patton (1997) explains that people who have a vested interest in the program and its evaluation are stakeholders while those who will make decisions based on evaluation findings, such

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as the module instructors, are typically referred to as evaluation users. In this case, the stakeholders were also users of the evaluation.

The Assessment and Evaluation research lab was the setting for our evaluation meetings. The instructors invited five graduate students who had an interest in evaluation to participate in evaluating the module. We sat facing each other at that first meeting, each person responding to the questions: Who are we? What roles do we envisage for ourselves? Why are we on the evaluation team? Initially, Dr. Shulha planned to act as a member of the evaluation team and faculty mentor to the students within the team. Essentially, she would wear two hats, that of the course co-ordinator and the evaluation co-ordinator. Within this division her role would be to “maintain a conscious balance between internal evaluation and outer world, of the Faculty of Education. [Secondly] to use the primary findings of the 2006 evaluation as a basis to help apply for funding to conduct an evaluation in 2007/2008” (Meeting minutes Dec. 11, 2006).

Evaluations are not static processes; things changed before our next meeting at the start of January 2007. One of the doctoral students who was on the evaluation team had withdrawn from the group because of time constraints, but more importantly Dr. Shulha had decided to withdraw from position as coordinator and create a role for one of the graduate students in this area. This would allow her to focus on her role as a stakeholder and evaluation user instead of project co-ordinator. I was a bit nervous when she removed herself from the direct operations of the evaluation leaving four graduate students who felt novice in the area of conducting evaluations, in charge of the evaluation.

The term “novice” is not an absolute category; it is instead a relative place on a learning continuum. Benner (1984) recognized this continuum and established five labels along the continuum to represent the growth of competency. Her stages are novice,

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advanced beginner, competent, proficient and finally, expert. Novice, as a concept is discussed more thoroughly later in this thesis. Although I was nervous, at the same time, my experiences as a teacher had shown me that some of the best learning happens when students negotiate and collaborate amongst themselves rather than defer to available expertise when problem solving.

Introducing the Cast: Our Evaluation Team

The evaluation team consisted of four graduate students, one of whom was the coordinator of the project. Our coordinator was in the second year of her doctoral studies, had taken two theoretical evaluation courses while working full time for an evaluation group, and had participated in at least five different evaluation contexts. These experiences provided her with a solid framework for thinking about evaluations and interweaving theoretical ideas with practice. In addition to being steeped in professional experience her personal experiences as a woman, wife, mother, nurse practitioner, traveller, immigrant and graduate student enriched her practice in dealing with others. Although she called herself a novice, as coordinator of this evaluation project, she brought both the theoretical and practical foundations that more closely linked her to either the “competent” or “proficient” category of Benner’s novice to expert continuum (1984). Our coordinator helped to shape the questions which enabled the collection and analysis of data. These skills helped to advance the evaluation (Benner, 1984). Her practical experience guided us in defining evaluative terms, ways of working and questioning our assumptions (Benner, 1984). At our initial meeting she indicated her interest “in evaluation because of the bridge between theory and practice. [She would guide the] linking of our questions to our methods, and take an overall approach of the framework or design of the evaluation” (Meeting minutes, December 11, 2006). Her

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approach as coordinator met the spirit of collaboration; she was willing to explore ways of working and ideas while listening to the suggestions of others and offering her own. As coordinator, it was her responsibility to juggle the institutional, social, intellectual and personal dynamics present in this internal evaluation context.

Our cast also consisted of two other graduate students who were both in their first year of doctoral work. Each had travelled a different and unique route to their chair in the research lab. Each brought unique strengths that would help them contribute to the collaborative nature of our evaluation. One was a fellow graduate of both the Bachelor of Education and Master's of Education program at Queen's. He was returning to Canada after a year of research, which concluded in a project evaluation. As a Master's student, he had worked for four months as a member of an evaluation team. Although evaluations are contextually specific learning environments, his previous evaluation experiences and research background gave him a transferable overview of the process and expectations of an evaluation. Moreover, his connection to this evaluation project was further established because recommendations from his Master's thesis provided many of the foundational concepts for the Classroom Assessment course module that we were now evaluating. This connection had "stimulated his interest in seeing the way his conclusions lived in the course" (Meeting minutes, December 11, 2006). As a graduate student and research-evaluator, he brought "experience with evaluations and an interest in alternative evaluation formats" (Meeting minutes, December 11, 2006). Although he identified himself as a novice evaluator, he was closer to Benner's (1984) level of "advanced beginner."

The remaining evaluation group member brought extensive experience gained working in two academic environments. During this time, she honed her craft as an

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instructional designer while working in an evaluation centre building her skill base in research, analysis and the formation of strong, logical arguments. Like our other first year doctoral student, this woman was more of an advanced beginner, rather than novice (Benner, 1984). During the evaluation she consistently explained ideas and helped shape questions. Having worked as a Teaching Assistant for the Classroom and Assessment module during its first year of implementation strengthened her substantive understanding of the program. The group used her expertise at times to shape the evaluation. Even with the cast of characters now firmly in place and the evaluation team formed, there was still a long way to travel and a lot to learn before opening night.

I was the person with the least practical experience in the area of evaluations; I was interested to learn about the process of evaluation from participation in an evaluation project. My goal was to understand what people could learn from participation in an evaluation project and how evaluations can be learning experiences. Documenting our work together formed part of my second year as a full time student working on my Master's of Education. My interest in the area of Evaluation grew during a course taken in the first year of my Master's. This course gave me a theoretical beginning towards understanding the complexities of evaluation and an opportunity to, in a limited way, practice the craft of evaluation. My initial foray into the field left me wanting to learn more about the field of evaluation and ways that evaluations could work. More than any other member of the evaluation team, I was a full novice. Research for this thesis allowed me to participate on the team while documenting my experiences. Others will have different evaluation experiences but some transferable ideas may be found in this these. Overall, this thesis documents my growth of understanding from participation on a collaborative evaluation team.

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Framework of People Involved

The table that follows is a visual organizer of the people who were involved in the evaluation project and this thesis. More information about involvement of these people and roles is explored throughout the thesis.

Mapping out People and Roles within this Evaluation Project

The Project: An Evaluation of the Assessment and Evaluation Module (Course Code: 150/155) for Bachelor of Education Students at the Faculty of Education	
Role/Group	People
<i>Course Instructors</i>	Dr. L. Shulha Dr. D. Klinger
<i>Evaluation Stakeholders</i>	The course administrator Dr. L. Shulha Dr. D. Klinger Teaching Assistants (4 Graduate Students, two of whom were on the evaluation team) Bachelor of Education Students
<i>Evaluation Users</i>	Dr. L. Shulha Dr. D. Klinger
<i>Evaluation Team</i>	Graduate student co-ordinator: 2 nd year Doctoral student 1 st year Doctoral student 1 st year Doctoral student

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	2 nd year Master's student
<i>Supervisors of this thesis</i>	Dr. L. Shulha Dr. D. Klinger

Act One: Exposition

Considering the path.

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities. Shunryu Suzuki

The art of creation lies in the gift of perceiving the particular and generalizing it, thus creating the particular again. It is therefore a powerful transforming force and a generator of creative solutions in relation to a given problem.

It is the currency of human exchanges, which enables the sharing of states of the soul and conscience, and the discovery of new fields of experience. Yehudi Menuhin

A Place to Call “The Beginning”

Suzuki and Menuhin help us to consider the path that unites scholarship with art. Both require a unique way of looking at something in their ability to convey ideas in a dynamic way that enables discovery. When scholarship and art work together there are many possibilities, many ways of seeing, understanding and sharing. Koestler (1964) and Dissanayake (1992) propose that aesthetics, which encompasses the creation of stories, are an essential aspect of life. This thesis examines the inquiry of a novice evaluator by engaging throughout an evaluative process. Van Maanen (1988) tells us that “by producing a cultural representation one earns the right to confess and tell how that representation came into being” (p. 140). The process of devising, researching and writing this thesis is itself a representation of how individuals move along the evaluation continuum, progressing from novice towards expert. The purpose of this narrative is to learn from the experiences of an internal, participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluation; and to contribute to the growth of novices and those who work in similar settings, in the area of evaluation.

This thesis marks the embarkation of a new, improvised invention of me, the author. Improvised, because it is something unexpected, but not without introspection. It

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is an invention, because we are continually creating and recreating images of ourselves. We do not leave our old selves behind; instead, we add new dimensions to our sense of self. In my attempt to understand the professional transition from teacher-to- graduate student-to-evaluator/researcher, I have entered into an evaluative research context.

It seemed improbable to me that I could begin to write my Master's thesis without first understanding for myself, and sharing with the reader, the role my past experiences play in shaping my current ideas about teaching and learning. As Richardson (2000) suggests research and writing is a journey into both my self and the subject; the goal of this thesis reflects that both professional and personal learning have transferable qualities that can assist future novice evaluators as they enter the field of evaluation.

Initially, I struggled to find the right words and structure to explore my past and present but ultimately realized that there is no definitive course. Ultimately, I chose to follow Goldberg's (1990) advice to find a structure that honoured my worldview. I liken this to Bruner's (1996) idea that narratives allow us to construct a version of ourselves, and that, like ways of knowing and educational research itself, there are many ways to uncover these versions of ourselves. In recognizing this I understand that the exact beginning of my research is a bit ambiguous. After spending time revisiting old journals kept throughout my lifetime as a student and teacher, I knew that the foundations for collaborative work were laid much earlier, in my earliest childhood experiences.

This narrative reveals pieces of my growth from child to adult that are interconnected to the story of our evaluation. The tone shifts deliberately from past to present, invoking understanding by merging ideas to suggest a way for novice evaluators in the future. The theatrical structure provides an inviting frame in which to disentangle the complexities of a novice's impressions, ideas and experiences in evaluation and

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research. Acts One and Two presents a more traditional, linear story designed to “set the stage” for the unfolding drama of the evaluation project described in Act Three. The story is further captured in Act Four when the merging of theatre and analysis depicts my voice, that is, the voice of the evaluative-research participants in a playlet. Although the story of my growth as an evaluator and researcher is just beginning, Act Five draws this part of the story to a close by allowing literature, theory, analysis, the evaluation participants and this author to stand on stage together one final time.

Considering the path.

Storytelling is the oldest form of education. Cultures around the world have always told tales as a way of passing down their beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations. Stories capture imagination, engaging emotions and opening the minds of listeners. Consequently, any point that is made in a story or any teaching that is done afterward is likely to be much more effective. Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss

The only way to compose myself and collect my thoughts is to set down at my table, place my diary before me, and take my pen into my hand. John Adams

Seeing my Past through Stories

As evidenced in the quotations above, stories are a powerful way of connecting people and understanding oneself. Stories provide an opportunity to re-imagine and share our experiences. The difference between stories and narratives is in the interpretation; stories provide only a sequence of events, while narratives combine a sequence of events with analysis (Van Maanen, 1988). This text provides a sequence of events related to our evaluation project with analysis that may help shape ideas related to the future work of novice evaluators and those who work with them. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe stories as a way of understanding our practice, or a way of seeing. Both oral and written stories are a way of forging understanding and have always have been central to my professional and personal life.

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It is possible to believe that all people participate in the craft of story telling. For example, a person might ask, “How was your day?” That person is essentially asking for the story of your day. Similarly, evaluations all involve elements of storytelling. In creating a program description one is telling a story of the program. When talking with program participants one is hearing the stories of a program. Eisner (1997) suggests that stories instruct, reveal, and inform; that there are many ways to convey a message. From my novice perspective, the story of this evaluation interweaves some of my past experiences and beliefs, merging past and present as a way of establishing transferable ideas. Before we can look into future work with novices, it is useful to look into the past and understand what motivated me to engage in collaborative, participatory evaluations and depict these understandings in narrative form.

Experiences Link Past, Present and Future

As an adolescent growing up in a small rural community in south western Ontario, my family and I worked together at our village’s only local restaurant and gas station. My father did not wear a suit to work; instead, he wore calloused hands which bore the evidence of diverse labours as a small town owner of a restaurant and gas station who worked alongside his employees. I didn’t realise at the time that his example was building in me a firm belief that when people work together toward a common goal, new possibilities unfold and great things can happen. This idea has guided my practices in the arts, as an educator, traveller and now, as the basis for my graduate studies. It is further manifested in this thesis, because my work as a novice evaluator encompasses a project that is internally based, and consciously participatory and collaborative in nature.

I remember stories constructed and presented to me as a child, stories that bespoke of family traditions, far away customs and complex relationships I was only beginning to

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grasp at that time. There were a few favourites, because of the content of the stories themselves, as well as the feelings created in me through the repeated telling of these stories. From my earliest experiences as a listener and reader, I desired to become a good storyteller: I admired the way my mother's inflection animated a memory, the way her gestures or tone added dimension to an image. I have learned to admire how words can slide seamlessly together, transporting me into lives both similar and foreign to my own. Stories can anchor us, carry us along and shift our perceptions; they are not subjective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I see narrative as a performance art, as well as a fixed medium; both forms require skill. The telling of stories is often a performance art in the way the story is told, the way an idea is captured, heightened, suspended and shared through tone, gesture and expectant pauses. Stories are also a fixed medium, entrenched in our memories, recorded in journals or in computers. The skill is to know yourself, your story and your audience and choosing the moments to craft, share and listen. This story is intended to carry forward artful elements of storytelling, while placing it in the academic environment; craftily inviting the audience to make pieces of this story their own.

The Role of My Journal in Narrative and Evaluative Inquiry

Through conscious and unconscious practices involving my journal, this evaluation story has morphed into a narrative. Richardson (2000) states that "narratives exist in the everyday ... [t]hey reflect the universal human experience of time ... narrative is the best way to understand human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives" (p. 65). This narrative evolved through a compilation of moments captured in discussions, notes and activities with my supervisor, other faculty, friends, family as well as myself; many of these moments are recorded in the pages of my journal.

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My evaluation journal was started at the beginning of this project and like the journals of my past, became a place of narratives recorded throughout the days and months of this evaluation. Experiences were documented by blending poetry, images, sketches, artefacts, photographs and conversational moments to illuminate ideas and reflections. Similarly, the journals that I have kept throughout my life ultimately helped prepare me for narrative data collection, analysis and reporting.

My first journal was a lined and bound hardcover with pages of pale pink, pastel purple and mint green, etched with a gold letter “M” on the front. An excerpt from one of my earliest journal entries illustrates the reciprocity of stories:

Today Mr. Aziz taught us how to paint, I think I already knew how but I didn't tell him that. Mom laughed when I told her. We used new paints that smelled like the hot tar that seeps in every time someone opens the store door. She told me about when I painted Easter eggs at Nursery School the hard boiled ones from class and later I surprised her by painting the fresh ones from the fridge. (Excerpt from my journal, 1985)

When I shared my school-day experiences with my mother, she responded with a story of her own, creating dialogue which reverberates with talking and listening in the decades that have followed. Even snippets of dialogue representing the smallest moments connected present with past, and carried the richness of the experience onto pages of my journal that would travel into the future. The journal is smaller than I remember and what strikes me when I hold its aging spine in my hands today is the small lock and set of keys that bound its pages. It seemed that there was a message then that writing is secret, writing is private; this thesis makes my private writing public.

The practices of qualitative research illustrate that writing no longer needs to be secret or private; that writing and research can be interwoven, and in doing so create a strong foundational perspective for understanding. Scribbled inside many of my journals

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is the quotation, “how can I know what I feel until I see what I think.” At the time it was attributed to E.M. Forster (1927), but further research calls into question the true origin of this quotation. Regardless of who initiated this idea, it is a concept I have held close throughout my development from adolescent to adult as a way to legitimize my desire to record and imagine in words. Travelling and working overseas for six years, and being a full time student for the past two years has heightened my appreciation of recording stories as a way of sharing and understanding. Stories read, shared, recorded, told and retold provide the opportunity to learn about myself, to better understand the lives of others and the spaces we inhabit. Writing has helped me through my struggle to define myself as a student, researcher, woman, daughter, sister and friend. An excerpt from a recent journal entry captures the essence of an experience:

You give me this button to hold, to evoke a memory ... it stares up at me gleaming ... My sister and I had to be very attentive when we played in my Grandmother’s antique jewellery box. The adults would be clustered on aging floral love seats in the next room, happy to have us quietly amused for a while but unaware of our activities. Our senses were heightened by their laughter and the illicitness of our investigatory play: earrings held up, necklaces layered on faded cotton t-shirts and braided on the heavy satin bed quilt. We believed the jewelled box transported us to a magical land, the shapes, stones and sparkles in that antique jewel box crowned us princesses and queens of another land. (Excerpt from my journal, July 2006)

Like the buttons and jewellery box, the words and phrases that get captured and created within qualitative research can transport us to magical places. Qualitative inquiry is an approach, yet it is also a way of seeing that encourages a diverse collection of investigative strategies, allowing for an in-depth examination of individual experiences and how people make meaning from their experiences (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research Richardson (2000) explains that the researcher is the instrument; the data, analysis and findings are all filtered through their biases and subjectivity.

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This thesis, completed in a qualitative style has allowed me to create and experiment with a wide range of qualitative tools and report my findings using words as my principal medium. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) propose that qualitative designs are systematic ways of exploring and gathering data, using a variety of methods, and representing understandings gained in the form of words. Another journal entry explores the impact words have on me:

Narrative is a conscious choice. I might like to say that emerged later in response to the situation but really, it happened when I wrote my first case study ... understanding people through their stories, presenting research as a story makes sense to me. I have an appreciation for the way stories can engage people, the way stories are told, the way stories can cross boundaries and invite you inside an experience ... Stories allow me to speak, to be present and this is important to me, I can not cloak my words in distant academic language, it is an ill-fitting costume. (Excerpt from my journal, November 2006)

Journal writing is a reflective practice in my life; I was initially unsure how this would translate into data connected to our evaluation. Richardson (2000) and Wolcott (2001) both suggest ways of developing ideas through writing: strategies of asking myself questions, making mind maps, note taking, drawing figures or tables to conceptualize something, considering the role of artefacts in the learning process. All of these pieces led to an extensive journal of my personal learning during this evaluative process.

As you have begun to see throughout this section, my journal holds narratives, ideas and stories from my perspective of the evaluation team's events and reflections about the process of this evaluation experience. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) identify that journal and log strategies can help monitor and document a researcher's perspective. My journal forms part of the narrative and analysis, in that the journal contains elements of this story that were later reviewed to highlight the importance of the activities, critical events and interplay within the evaluation team. As such, my journal

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informs a reflective process, providing helpful insight as to how narratives explore novice perspectives in evaluation work. My research requires verisimilitude based on my experiences as a learner in formal and informal contexts, an inquirer of cultures and of the self. Qualitative research did not just “make sense”; it was the most truthful way for me to proceed. This narrative, like writing of all styles, takes risks both by making my developing ideas vulnerable to the reader’s opinion, while also attempting to look for relationships in formative experiences, reflective experiences, and established practices for evaluative-educational research. It is important that readers consider the merits of qualitative and narrative inquiry to judge if my story makes a scholarly contribution to the development of novice evaluators.

The Role of Narrative in a Scholarly Context

The role of my journal and the narrative approach to this thesis make evident my belief in the value of connecting ideas through writing. Words have always interested me; they were my friends long before I understood their Latin or Greek origins. As Nash (2004) points out, *schola* or *skhole* in its root form represents exploring or playing with ideas through the development of intellectual arguments, writing or teaching. My initial “narrative strategies” may not have been so scholarly, but they are preserved in journals with pictures, stories that are re-interpretations of my growing consciousness of the world around me. These journals chronicle my triumphs and tragedies, both real and imagined and offer a way of connecting the present with both the past and the future. Nash (2004) identifies that narratives offer us ways to explore who we are trying to become. For me, narrative has always had multiple purposes. It was a place where I could create or recreate, explore, reflect, imagine, dream, sort, organize or see myself and others clearer.

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My recent narratives are mostly bound in solid black books that reveal the ongoing improvisations and sometimes, conscious transformations of my life. Narrative is a way “each one us reorganizes, reassesses, realigns our life experience so that it is continually integrated into our present, personal schema” (Brody, Witherell, Donald, & Lundblad, 1991, p. 263). This thesis offers me the chance to reflect on my experiences with an internal, participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluation to discover and express my voice while contributing to my personal growth as well as that of other novices in the area of evaluation.

Narratives are powerful ways of analyzing and communicating new understanding while offering future, novice evaluators a story that they can draw from as they create their own. Nash (2004) tells us that stories contain glimpses of many intellectual and experiential truths. Stories can form an important tool in understanding and developing as a novice evaluator. Benner (1984) suggests that dialogue is an important aspect in the development of novices because it helps in the refinement process. My previous academic background, studying literature and theatre, illustrates my belief in the fundamental power and necessity of dialogue and narrative. Reading narratives of women as they publicly understand themselves within their environment was accessible to me through literature. The writings of Moodie (1852), Dillard (1974), Goldberg (1986; 1990; 2000) and Huston (2000) depict some of the women whose stories have guided my interest to learn about myself, others and the process of a novice in an evaluative setting through reflection and writing. These narrative works feel like a dialogue, an exchange of ideas between friends and strike a tone similar to the one I hope to achieve throughout this thesis.

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Courses studied and later taught in literature and theatre belie my enthusiasm for the concept of the “story” as a way of understanding, making sense of, exploring and engaging in the world around us. Bruner (1996) believes that “we organize our experience and our knowledge in terms of the narrative form” (p. 121). After my undergraduate degree I was fortunate to become a member of the Queen’s University Artist in the Community, Bachelor of Education program. As a teacher I embarked on another way of understanding myself and others; I have discovered that I make sense of teaching and learning through collaborative and creative understanding. Working in the company of teachers and students from all over the world has provided me with greater knowledge, as well as the impetus to continually reinvent my personal and professional self. Graduate school has added yet another dimension in this regard, and I continually reflect on how much I have changed, and how much I have learned:

I feel excited about writing this narrative, but I also feel like it is big challenge ... I wonder if I have anything interesting to say, things that will be new to others, that will make them think or respond. I guess that is a fear of mine, I don’t know what direction this thesis is going to take the further I go into the process, the more it reminds me of teaching. I would spend hours meticulously laying out lesson plans and then get to class and allow the lesson to take on a much more organic structure. The material rarely got covered in the order that I intended for it to be completed! I think this is the inherent messiness in learning and creating, and is something I have found in my teaching and sought in my graduate work. (Excerpt from my journal, December 2006)

This narrative has evolved along with the areas of data collection first conceived during the proposal phase of the thesis. As Eisner (1998) identifies, this process does not depict “sloppy planning or wishful thinking ... its function is to highlight the complexity of such work and its dependency on the sensibilities and good judgement of the qualitative researcher” (p. 170). Critics and audiences need to consider that in both the areas of qualitative research and evaluations judgement, is a subjective concept that is imperative.

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The Art of Combining Narrative and Research

If the notion of research were a production of its own, this thesis would illustrate that the definition of what constitutes research is broadening along with the recognition of myriad ways we can express our understanding. The blurring of boundaries in research methodology or in the presentation of research depicts the artfulness of this process. Through this process of seeking to understand, conferring ideas and developing pathways we come to know our selves, others, our questions and our ideas better.

Nash (2004) identifies that “narratives are instruments that help us know about ourselves and others, and to solve problems; they are also told for us to tell others about our experiences” (p. 62). Artful research combines scholarly ideas with aesthetic voice by the use of sensory images to evoke a response in readers. This thesis borrows from both the literary and theatrical to blend these genres in the creation of an academic text. Pagano (1991) suggests that educational stories represent the kind of world we want to live in; our stories “help us to find our place in the world ... through knowledge and through our stories about knowledge, we bring a sense of our own identity into focus” (pp. 197, 199). Evaluative inquiry presented using narrative strategies is a way of using story form to help share the experiences of a novice and to probe my understanding and that for others.

Like most students, as I prepared to research and write this thesis, I read from a wide range of sources. The debate about science versus arts-based or arts-informed methods of inquiry initially surprised me, as it had not yet occurred to me to question the legitimacy or rigour of alternative ways of collecting, analysing and presenting data. Barone and Eisner (Barone, 1995, 2001; Eisner, 1988, 1991, 1997; Eisner & Barone, 1997) both explore the forms and functions of research to advocate for arts-based

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research as a legitimate way of stimulating thought, reflection and discussion. People sometimes question the rigour of narrative in academia; Davis (2002) reveals:

Of that, I'm glad. Rigor -- stiffness, stillness -- is precisely what I don't want. The work needs to move, to breathe, to be aware of its complicity in the phenomenon that it seeks to understand, to be attentive to its own embeddedness (p. 1).

Narrative is a powerful strategy that can be used in academic environments to examine the richness of a moment within the continuum of understanding, to explore how we think, believe and make meaning from our experiences.

The link between narrative and art is complex; Mello (2006) recognizes that knowledge can be constructed through stories and experiences but that “many works using arts do not necessarily evolve from narrative inquiry, and there are narrative inquiries being developed without using arts” (p. 205). Using a theatrical form, which presents this narrative by including stories as a way of understanding and dialogue as a form of data incorporates an artistic viewpoint. Narrative itself is not a particularly radical idea, but when linked to evaluative inquiry and the study of novice growth in this field, it is innovative. With any innovation there is a certain “muddying of the waters” and inherent ambiguity. Therefore, it is important to state that my view of art is broad, and builds on both a theoretical and an experiential understanding. Mello (2006) encapsulated this idea when she opined, “I see art not only as a product, a mode of representation, or even a superior skill but also as a way of living, a way of looking at the world and the life and education in it” (p. 206). If art is “in the eye of the beholder” I believe this thesis can be considered art because of its theatrical frame, literary evocations and storied form.

Exploring the Role of a Novice Evaluator through Narrative

In this thesis, qualitative strategies are used to portray the story of a novice evaluator as she acquires experience. Even as I write this narrative to depict the process,

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my ideas are changing and shifting. They are preserved here with polite understanding that this narrative represents only a moment in time. Narrative is the best method for exploring the evolution of this novice evaluator because it is “humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings” (Richardson, 1997, p. 65). According to Benner (1984) novices typically have an understanding that is unclear and unfolding. This developing knowledge is well suited to the narrative form because, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, the “epistemology of ambiguity that seeks out and celebrates meanings that are partial, tentative, incomplete sometimes even contradiction and originating from multiple vantage points” (p. 153). I am confident that future thinking, experiences and reflections will further evolve my research and evaluation ideas. Richardson’s (2000) and Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) ideas of writing as research and the use of narrative inquiry to enhance meaning or understanding about the nature of the process resonate in this case as a novice’s experiences in the evaluative process are explored. Storytelling reflects our social world by its content and processes; the interactions that occur in the name of evaluation are social constructions and therefore seem like a natural place for storytelling.

Some of the theory that guided this research was found in work by Costantino and Greene (2003) who identified that, because storytelling can incorporate multiple perspectives and provide windows of insight, a narrative frame can make contributions to the field of evaluation. The increase of narrative as a tool in social inquiry has expanded the link between narrative and evaluations (Costantino & Greene, 2003). Although the narrative aspect was an unanticipated component of their evaluation, these authors argued that narrative can “contribute in many valuable ways to the social practice of evaluation” (Constantino & Greene, 2003, p. 48). Their work is important because it denoted part of

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the ongoing shift of acceptance; not only in what constitutes evaluations, but in the ways we represent them. Another pair of authors who have worked in the area of narrative evaluation is Dart and Davis (2003). They share their work in developing a “most significant change” which is a dialogical storied data collection tool, to encourage the practice of creatively combining techniques in evaluations, including the use of storytelling. They identify that storytelling defines relationships, sequences events, and explores cause and effect while linking various pieces into a complex whole (Dart & Davis, 2003). The concept of helping people shape experiences and perspective into “a whole” plays an important role in the development of stories and the progression of novices to experts.

Recognizing my lack of experience and desire to gain understanding of the evaluation process was an important part of transitioning on the novice continuum. Benner (1984) indicates that the transition from novice to expert is made as novices begin to see fragmented information as a contextualized whole. This evaluation narrative transforms experiences that might go unnoticed in the context of a situation, and shapes them in the form of analytical storied elements to create a broad stage upon which to depict and share understandings. During the evaluation process I was attentive to how we negotiated tasks, and shaped our understanding from past experiences and theory. In Acts Four and Five, I reflect on how these things contributed to my own learning, and the learning of our group. This attentiveness allows me to draw together elements of qualitative research with the evaluation process and in particular, our collaborative way of working, to make meaning from experiences. Overall, these experiences created meaning that can be applied professionally and personally on multiple levels and in multiple ways.

Considering the path.

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Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. Helen Keller

Collaborative Experiences Shape Understanding

During the first year of my Master's course I enrolled in a course called Program Evaluation. Even today I am struck by the unassuming and unremarkable title that has captured my ideas and added new dimensions to my professional life and the continual expansion of my personal life. This course was unlike any other I had taken, it blended theoretical and practical elements in specified settings that engaged us in working on our own and with others. Flinders and Mills (1993) explored the idea of social scientists that are driven not by theory but "educational program evaluators whose work is framed around the interest and concerns of selected members of the setting being evaluated" (p. 24). Theory is a critical issue in evaluation; its relatively recent transitions can be described as an "this evolutionary proliferation of alternative evaluation models" (p.24). Theory in evaluation is expanding on an ongoing basis as evaluators continue their work with people and revise and redefine how they conceptualize that work in specific settings. As explored in the context of the course and to a less broad extent in Act Two of this thesis, there are multiple evaluative theories.

An introduction to the multiple theories of evaluation allowed me to realize that I had been presented with an opportunity to create a different paradigm within the context of teaching and learning, a chance to initiate and participate in spaces where teachers could work together to examine and grow as a result of evaluative practices. I had a chance to engage in inquiry that would take me back into the classroom where I felt so comfortable, and help teachers envisage the creative spaces possible. Despite my enthusiasm, I soon realized that one course in program evaluation and evaluation work on

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an alternative school-based course did not qualify me to work with teachers in an evaluation capacity. There were multiple dilemmas; who would generate the questions, how would I negotiate the participation of stakeholders or participants and how would I gain access to people who were genuinely interested in looking at evaluation? In light of my participation in the evaluation project represented in this thesis, I now know that evaluative inquiry, at least the kind that can help to engage people and possibly shift the way people see themselves or the organization they work within while broadening their ideas about evaluation is best driven from within an individual or an organization. The fact that I did not know how to unravel my initial dilemmas reveals my limited experience. I realized that I did have an opportunity to develop my evaluation skills in the context of an internal, participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluation. This would provide me with the ability to work in collaboration with others to develop a greater understanding of the roles, skills and responsibilities of an evaluator, while in a environment made safe by the dialogical nature and constant presence of an established, nurturing faculty mentor.

My past experiences teaching and learning have taught me that there are many benefits to collaboration: people to share ideas with and people who will offer support and encouragement. Both of these elements help foster momentum. I have found that collaborative spaces encourage the development of creative work and that these spaces help move people beyond the known. Hafernik, Messerschmitt and Vandrick (1997) suggest that collaboration increases motivation by drawing people into a broadening circle. As rewarding as it can be, collaboration is not without its challenges; it demands organization, commitment of time and development of interpersonal skills. As this thesis

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reveals, collaboration is not a fixed concept; participants have to negotiate what it means to them as individuals as well as within the group context.

During this research, I have discovered the value of acknowledging what I do not know, and trusting what I do know. More experience will give me greater personal credibility as I endeavour to grow and establish myself as an evaluator-researcher. During my personal and professional experiences, I have felt the richness of exploring places unknown in both a literal and figurative sense and recognize that these opportunities are made all the more memorable when shared with others.

Learning through a Collaborative Evaluation

There is not a definitive way for understanding how to engage in collaborative work. Think about the practice of visual art; there are many mediums and forms you can experiment with on their own or by combining to find a mode of expression that best suits that artist or the piece. There was fluidity in the way that we worked together; we allowed the specific goal of that day, or that aspect of the project to guide our way of working. Having varied practices for engaging in collaborative work allowed us to experiment with ways that worked for this group, on this project. It also helped familiarize the evaluators involved with ideas for how they like to work and learn in collaborative experiences.

Some of our collaborative evaluation activities included: organizing the evaluation questions by interviewing our clients and stakeholders, imagining and constructing ways that we could identify and answer their questions, conducting focus groups, creating a survey and analysing data from all of these endeavours. In order to better understand these activities, Act Three focuses on the specifics of our evaluation process where I document and reflect upon them in my journal, and communicated with other members of the evaluation team. This work was done individually and collectively, during evaluation

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work as well as outside of our evaluation team meetings. Taken together, these multiple data collection strategies help to illustrate the significance of novice evaluators being involved in a collaborative process.

The narrative of my journey captures changes in understandings and dispositions, as I work collaboratively with others interested in evaluative strategies, and allow a conscious creativity to influence the way I make sense of evaluation theories, practices, and reporting strategies. My experiences in researching this thesis, as an observer-participant on the evaluation team, show that when collaboration does happen, energy among people who are passionate about learning through evaluation and sharing their knowledge with others is palpable. Thinking about what has motivated me towards this area of evaluative inquiry has allowed me to reflect on the past and recollect times that distinguish themselves in my mind for having generated the greatest periods of reflection, creativity and learning; these were the times I worked with others to make meaning.

Considering the path.

My task...is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you see. That – and no more – and it is everything. Joseph Conrad

A Refrain: Evaluation and Narrative

Like Conrad, my task in writing this narrative is to clarify the events of our evaluation, to make our process and my learning transparent. As Costantino and Greene (2003) indicated, there are multiple audiences who may have an interest in the work, and it is the duty of the evaluator, or in this case the evaluator-researcher, to find a way to serve those interests. By selecting a qualitative framework with narrative strategies, I have chosen to create a document which makes sense both from the viewpoint of a novice evaluator as well as an artistically oriented frame of mind. It is important to note that it is

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the process of the evaluation, rather than evaluation itself that is the focus of this narrative, and which has provided me with the greatest scope of methodological choices, including opportunities for data collection and analysis.

Every artist needs an image, inspiration or material for crafting an idea. In this case, material in the form of data was collected in five main ways: (1) the bound pages of my journals, (2) notes, minutes and photographs from multiple meetings, (3) correspondence, including e-mails and comments made in conversation or on documents, (4) the experiences of the collaborative process of collecting data for the evaluation that led to interviews, focus groups and a survey, and (5) individual, post-evaluation interviews with each member of our evaluation team and our faculty mentor. Although the data collected for the evaluation are not part of my actual data, the process of deciding, devising and creating these systems and tools shaped my understanding of evaluation and the collaborative process and evoked opportunities for growth within our team and me. Evaluation minutes, notes and photographs were also compiled in my journal and evaluation binder. I recorded my observations at evaluation meetings, questions about planning, strategies and goals. These multiple data collection strategies provided rich material for shaping the Acts of this thesis.

Cueing Upcoming Acts

In Act One, The Exposition, I have outlined the rationale for marrying qualitative, narrative analyses with inquiry that focuses on the growth of a novice evaluator in this context. The introduction of broad concepts involved in this research, serves as an invitation to travel this path of academic inquiry. Subsequent Acts reveal more about the theoretical constructs and practical elements used to draw ideas together for future novices, and those who work with them.

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Act Two explores my feelings after returning to Queen's to begin my Master's, when I was initially unsure about the path I would follow. Remaining curious to the various paths open to me encouraged me to take risks, to try new things and to engage in work with others that was not always my primary interest. Some of these ideas are connected to novice and collaborative theory, and are also reflected in the theoretical underpinnings expanded upon in Act Two.

As revealed in Act Three, the culmination of minutes from our evaluation meetings illustrates the development of the evaluation itself. This was done in an effort to further explore how these relationships and ideas grew within the context of events, and how all factors worked together to create an evaluative learning opportunity that helped develop a novice evaluator. These multiple data collection strategies allowed me to keep track of our decisions and discussions. Together, these ideas allowed me to more accurately reflect on our choices, what I learned, the direction we were going, and the clarification I needed. Meeting minutes were analyzed using Atlas-ti, and the initial analysis recordings of the meeting reviewed. Presented as a collection of short scenes, Act Three depicts our evaluation process.

In a typical Five-Act play structure, Act Four generally reveals the falling action. In this work, Act Four includes sections of dialogue from interviews with evaluation team members at the completion of our evaluation project; the words have been framed by analysis that reflects the main evaluative ideas explored throughout this thesis. The dialogue has been constructed as three playlets that tie together an understanding of evaluation from a novice perspective as well as from the experiences of members of our evaluation team.

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Readers return to a more traditional narrative form in Act Five. This Act encapsulates my learning in the singular voice, by explicitly drawing together conclusive ideas. My learning has been summarized so that future novices, and those that work with or teach them, might use strategies to further their own development. This summation reflects my novice perspective at the end of the evaluation project, with the recognition that the end of this project is early within the continuum of my evaluator-researcher experience.

Eisner (1997) identifies that pictures have a role in data representation because they can depict what places and people look like. The photographs from our meetings, although not included here, were used to help initiate discussions and evoke memories, to help document the process as writing prompts in my journal, as well as to initiate reflection during the post evaluation interviews. Like the multiple strategies used to hold an audience's attention during a performance, these varied strategies provided a way for me to explore, attain and sustain interest in a novice's journey into the field of evaluation. Examples are included in this thesis to illuminate the process.

CHAPTER TWO

Act Two: Rising Action

Considering the path.

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

Sir Winston Churchill

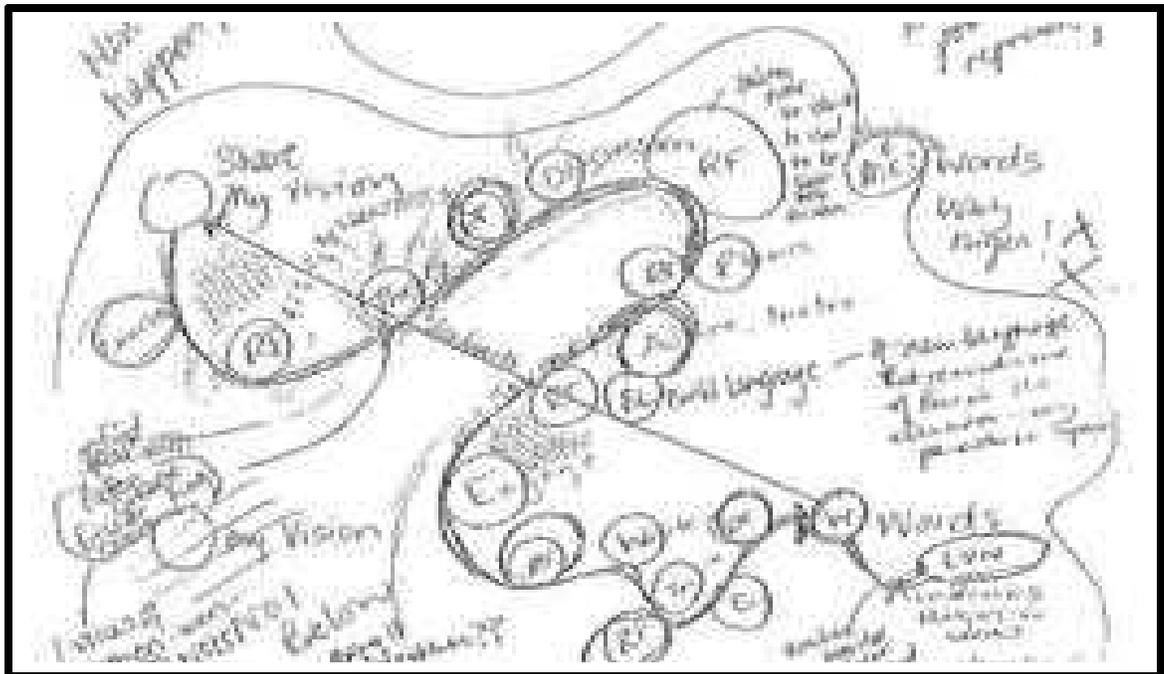


Image 1. An image from my journal illustrating the envisaged path for this thesis.

Paths of Learning

I find solace when I read Churchill's words, when a journey seems long and the path unclear, unending and possibly, unforgiving. The image above illustrates the path described in this section, the rising action, with resources, obstacles and goals identified or discovered as the process of this thesis unfolded. My experiences travelling and living abroad taught me that with patience you can always find a path, and that the path is

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seldom a straight line. The winding path representing the journey of this thesis is like the process of living; it has much to offer in our willingness to contemplate, to stretch ourselves and to persevere. The path above portrays theory, practice, collective work and individual reflection, demonstrating how my involvement helped develop an understanding of the possible routes for a novice evaluator. From my experiences, Eisner's (1988) evocation that scholarship ends with words but begins with a vision is accurate.

To tell the story of this evaluation process is also to tell the story of my evolving professional identity. For it is not a fixed concept, and has shifted numerous times. I can recall my first hours working at the family business picking up garbage from our acre lot as vividly as I can remember the nervous energy I felt looking at the empty drama space on my first day as a teacher. Each of these roles, as well as those adopted in between and since, has ultimately helped to shape my identity. We shape our identities in response to the environment; working in many different professional capacities has helped me develop a broad range of skills that further life experiences will teach me to apply. Each time I transform myself, I gain something new and leave something else behind.

Graduate school dramatically changed my environment in several ways; these changes have been a catalyst for thinking about past experiences, present ideas and future plans with a more critical eye. By entering graduate studies I have literally "come home" in the sense that I have returned to Canada and the place of my former studies. Figuratively, I have come home in that living in a more geographically familiar area has encouraged me to spend more time focusing inwards. Involvements in teaching and research assistantships have exposed me to working with people from differing specialities. Doing so has challenged and broadened my paradigms of education. These

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opportunities to work with others have also deepened my understanding of the graduate environment by giving me a glimpse into the policy, politics and structures that operate explicitly and implicitly. My work with other graduate students and professors, especially my supervisor, has led to new and diverse opportunities, one of which was this thesis. Overall, my graduate studies have evoked another transformation of my personal and professional self. Instead of being a classroom teacher and leader within a school community, I am a student. As such my primary role is defined as a learner; a responsibility I undertook in this thesis both independently and with others. In my “teacher role.” I often felt isolated. Although I enjoyed working with colleagues on collaborative projects, the demands of the timetabled curriculum and our extracurricular commitments often prohibited it. This contrasts dramatically with my graduate experiences where collaborative projects have been a central element of my learning.

The Intention and Rationale of this Research

This research(er) engages theory and practice as a way to connect learning, not only about the process of evaluation but about the events that trigger discovery. Benner (1984) identifies that novices can extend practical and theoretical knowledge through experience. The intention of this thesis is multidimensional; it includes wanting to learn, through participation, about the process of an internal, participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluation and how this process leads to personal and professional growth. Further, it is anticipated that this narrative has the potential to influence future novice evaluators and those who work with them. The evaluation project of the Classroom Assessment module featured in this thesis provided me with a chance to work closely with other novices and document, explore and reflect on my experiences in an evaluation process. By observing and contributing to the ways an internal evaluation team

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conceptualized their work and made decisions, I gained insight into our efforts to make the evaluation collaborative and developmental. These experiences provided me with an opportunity to participate in the process of designing, collecting and analyzing data for an evaluation and in doing so, to develop and reflect on my evaluator/researcher skills. Like the process of the evaluation, this path of developing an evaluator-research identity is winding. This thesis identifies and examines explicit and tacit notions of the evaluation processes that contribute to my novice evaluator growth and is translated into a narrative to further the evaluation community's understandings of how to nurture the growth of novice researchers in the area of evaluation.

There are two main reasons why this thesis is important: First, there is a need for empirical data on the consequences of participation in participatory and collaborative contexts for the evaluator herself. Cousins and Earl (1992) have indicated that further research about the "unintended effects" of participatory evaluations is needed (p. 408). While they were primarily referring to the effects of this type of evaluative inquiry on those who request the evaluation, this research is looking at the effect of evaluations on those involved, specifically, a novice researcher.

A second reason is that this thesis depicts evaluator growth and understanding in a uniquely personal way that may be relevant for other novices and those who work with novices. Narrative incorporates threads that are both broad and specific, that involve both personal and professional learning within individual and collective practices. As Polkinghorne (1988) states, "narrative meaning is created by noting that something is part of the whole and that something is a cause of something else" (p. 6). Both evaluations and narratives are contextually specific; both have the capacity to help expand personal and professional consciousness. Although no one can accurately predict the future, this thesis

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shares one novice's perspective in hopes that within the conceptual underpinnings there will be transferable ideas for others.

Considering the path.

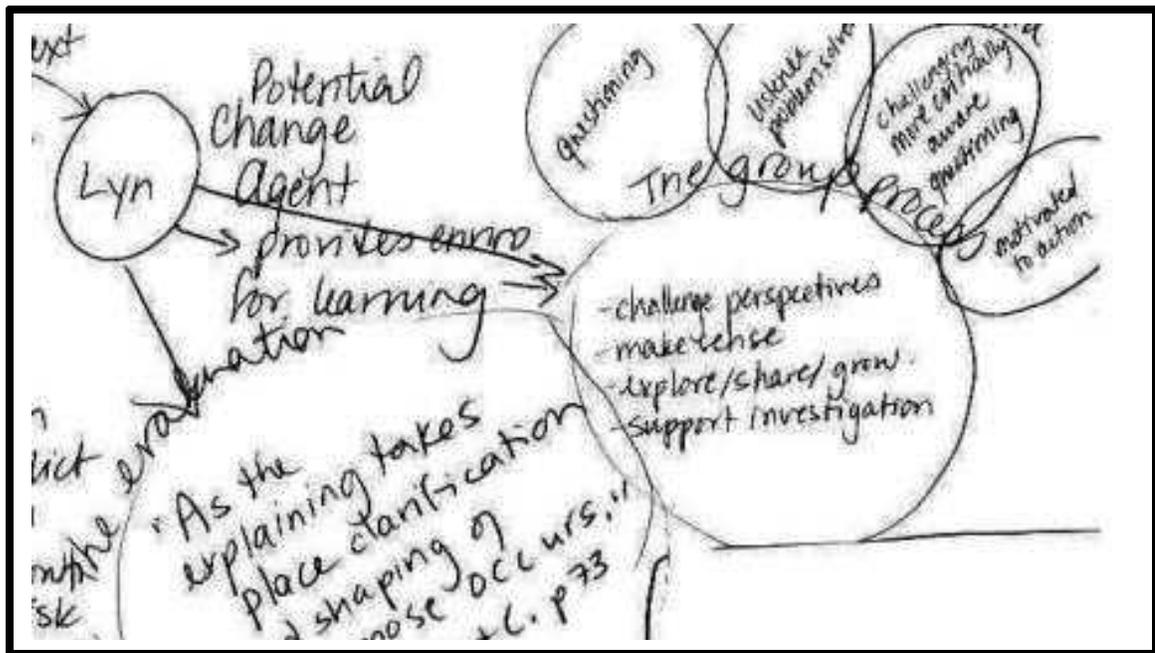


Image 2. Circles adjoining circles illustrate the connectedness in the evaluation.

Dynamic People and the Practice of Evaluation

The circles in the image above represent some of the individuals involved with this evaluation process. My supervisor, Lyn, is clearly visible in the upper left corner, but the smallest circles represent the four members of our evaluation team, and the larger two circles ways of conceptualizing the work of the team, within the Faculty of Education. The cast is broader than these circles represent, as ideas were generated from multiple sources during the context of this evaluation. However, the main players in our evaluation cast were a team of four collaborative evaluator-researchers, depicted by the small circles on the right. Evaluation is a dynamic field; as it has grown and changed so has the cache of skills evaluators now use in theoretical and practical contexts. After this evaluation project was conceived and my research began, questions started forming; how could I most effectively understand the growth that has taken place in the field of evaluation? I wondered about the growth of other novices (Benner, 1984), the move towards more

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participatory models (O'Sullivan 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005) and the relationship of practitioners with theory or teaching and learning (Alkin, 2004). Any one of these could easily be a central topic for study, but primarily I wanted to understand the role of an evaluator from a novice perspective, so that I could think more deeply about how novices enter the field of evaluation.

As a student in an evaluation course I looked for stories: how did the theorists I was reading become evaluators, what were their paths? I digested articles and books, carefully selecting ones from a variety of perspectives and soon found that I was wandering on an unfamiliar path, lost in terminology as distinctive as a foreign language, trying to connect ideas with words and images that I recorded in my journal. Benner (1984) explains that as people move through the novice to expert continuum they gain “a feeling of mastery and an ability to cope and manage the many contingencies” (p. 24). Theory alone can not facilitate this shift from theory to practice. In the pages of articles and books that I used in the course of this research I hoped to find where the authors have lived, studied and taught. Articles by King (2003), Preskill (2000), Greene (1980; 2000) and Preskill and Torres (2000) sent me tracing their academic journeys hoping to find “a beginning.” As a graduate student I understand that the professors who are our teachers, researchers and evaluators have travelled individual and unique paths to where they are. By understanding some aspects of their journeys I thought I might be able to create an image of a pathway I might travel. My way of understanding, and the attempt of this thesis, is to honour Carr's (1966) invitation to make meaning from the smallest pieces, to draw upon the collective and to look for patterns. Ultimately, I wanted to understand if there was a place for me, as a novice, to grow into the field as an evaluator-researcher.

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The Difference Dialogue Makes

Ideas bounced off the sun streaked windshield as faculty and student members of the Assessment and Evaluation Group drove home from the 2006 Edward F. Kelly Evaluation Conference hosted by The State University of New York, Albany. Some presentations were good, some presenters struggled to share their ideas aloud; yet all were thought and discussion provoking. A compact disc especially compiled for the trip is gently playing as our voices rise and fall with it; sometimes there is humming or a lively chorus of song, but always there is a thread of discussion. This dialogue illuminates understanding gained during the conference, connects and rejects ideas while giving birth to new ones. The dialogue helps to construct a genesis for critical learning that takes place by connecting practice and people. As Richardson (1997) explains, “the researcher’s self-knowledge and knowledge of the topic develops through experimentation” (p. 93). Dialogue is a way for novices to experiment with ideas.

The dialogue meandered in every direction during that car ride; it was sometimes funny, curious, provocative and interesting. The dialogue that my supervisor and I started as part of the evaluation course and conferences grew into something much more in the context of time spent together. Christie and Rose (2003) confirm that dialogue and discussion provide another option for learning about evaluation, for socializing new people into the field and for promoting continuous education. The conversations shared with my supervisor and with the evaluation team later on, helped me envision possibilities for future projects. My commitment to developing as an evaluator-researcher had instigated reflection, as evidenced throughout the process of this thesis, about how one makes this transition.

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The dialogue that began in the car drifted into the hallways after class and in tentative questions about evaluators and evaluations. In spite of our growing connection and my enthusiasm from learning from and with her, I was still nervous to ask her to become my supervisor. At the time I could only see the costs I perceived with mentoring someone, the volume of students struggling to complete degrees, the pressures of graduate and undergraduate teaching, the ominous research needed for academic promotion and this list doesn't even begin to take into consideration the personal dimensions that we each bring to bear. I remember an awkward conversation where I tried to articulate my perception of the need for people who embark on a project, such as a thesis, to share a connection. I didn't realise then that I was echoing Carruthers' (1993) depiction of the multiple dimensions of a mentoring relationship.

The Mentoring of a Novice

Like evaluation, mentoring is a somewhat ambiguous term that has multiple meaning and interpretations (Carruthers, 2000; Long & McGinnis, 1985; Semenink & Worrall, 2000). Like so much of our English language, the word "mentor" finds its origins in Greek mythology and denotes a person endowed with capabilities to play multiple roles including companionship and the rearing of young (Carruthers, 1993). There are many words associated with mentoring for example; helping, leading, shaping, creating and developing. Long and McGinnis (1985) suggest that it is a complex and interactive process that involves fulfilling the role of teacher, sponsor and collaborator. During the process of my Master's work my supervisor Lyn and I have begun work in all three areas.

It is not surprising to note that both mentoring and evaluation are social processes and therefore aligned with my goal to build and develop personal and professional

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connections. In graduate studies it is prescribed that students will have a supervisor and at least one other person on their Master's committee. Students who are lucky find a supervisor who is also an advisor or mentor. Carruthers (1993) explored the conceptual levels of mentoring to identify the possibility of having primary and secondary, or major and minor mentors; his distinctions are relative to the breadth of support: professional, personal, either or both.

The mentoring relationship I share with Lyn has grown and evolved over time to incorporate some levels of sharing that are both personal and professional. In this way, our method of working is consistent with Noddings' (1984; 1992; 2002) notion of caring about a person, the ideas and the space that are shared. My supervisor shares her knowledge in multiple ways, encouraging me to learn alongside her in projects and classes; fulfilling all of the strategies set out by Long and McGinnis (1985). In this manner, our relationship is slowly bridging professional and personal boundaries. It is comforting to develop a connection that extends, in some way, into the past while forming an image for working together in the future. Perhaps this view is what I was trying to express in my journal when I recorded the question, "Maybe I am trying to cross the lake before I know how to swim?" (Excerpt from my journal, December 2006).

The dialogue overheard at conferences, in a car, or taking place on a daily basis in the research labs and hallways of our Faculty represent a way of learning how to swim. As I travel both figuratively and literally, I have chosen to carry pieces of my home inside me, with the intent of discovering bits of home along the journey of life. At the beginning of this process I wondered, "If one becomes an evaluator, does one cease to be a teacher?" But now I believe you can combine the best of both. Mentoring relationships

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and dialogue with colleagues have helped me gain perspective of the possibilities as a novice evaluator while seeing pieces of the past, with potential for the present and future.

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Considering the path.

Man arrives as a novice at each age of his life. Chamfort

Exploring the Concept of Novice

Chamfort reminds us that people can learn if they are willing and open for new experiences; entering in to new experiences involves taking risks. Benner (1984) defines novices as “beginners [who] have had no experience of the situations in which they are expected to perform” (p. 20). When considering this definition in the context of our cast of evaluation players, I was the only true novice. Since each evaluative situation is distinct and contextually situated, elements of novice behaviour may always be present. Novice-like behaviour may lead to some anxiety or an unfolding grasp of the situation, a feeling that can be compared to an actor’s entrance onto a stage; excitable jitters and anticipatory nervousness that are always present, adrenaline pumping even though it is not their first time on stage.

Even from my novice perspective, I understood that evaluation required a composite collection of skills and ideas that when artfully combined, created a unique lens for engaging in thinking about questions, problems, possibilities, methods and results.

I feel like a compass without its magnetic centre, spinning, revealing, searching, the questions are endless, the choices plentiful ... to grow, to understand to emerge anew ... read, read, read, write, write, write ... Evaluation - a blend of many skills, qualitative research - a blend of techniques, collect data by blending perspectives - like a water colour, the colours bleed into one another. (Excerpt from my journal, December 2006)

This journal entry reveals some of the anxiety I felt as I embarked on the evaluation process. The idea of a multifarious collection of skills represented my understanding that evaluators have to be adaptable, and respond to changes or developments in the context of

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an evaluation. Teachers are valued for knowing, yet I would have to reveal my lack of knowledge in order to learn about evaluative contexts. Unlike solitary studies where one can creep slowly through theory and digest ideas, working collaboratively with others in a practical situation would expose my inexperience. Benner (1984) identified that novice behaviour is often characterized by a discombobulated feeling, a sense of anxiety and unfamiliarity during which time individuals focus on details rather than the larger picture.

Benner's (1984) sentiments resonated with the feelings I experienced in the above journal entry, which are also found in questions circled throughout my journal. I found it fitting to consider Benner's finding that novices tend to use extraneous words or information because they are trying to cope with remembering the "rules" of a situation rather than looking at the situation as a whole (Benner, 1984). My novice perspective combined with my love for words created an overflow of writing as I tried to shape and to sort through ideas.

Although members of the evaluation team had varied experiences, none had evaluated in a situation that was comparable to this context. This evaluation project required graduate students and faculty to work together effectively to produce the desired results, and would inform the next phase of the modules development. This evaluation was internal, participatory, collaborative and developmental.

Evaluators with considerable experience, or "grey-heads" as Patton (1994) affectionately calls people with a "reservoir of experience," are able to bring forward knowledge or anticipate problems based on past practices (p. 316). Despite the fact that I was clearly the most novice member of the team in both an evaluator and researcher capacity, there was nevertheless a perceived lack of expertise due to the fact that each evaluation situation is unique and our collective experience was far from extensive. It is

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curious that in spite of our diverse experiences, each of the other evaluators on the team considered herself or himself a novice. I am sure there are several sociological, gender-based, personal and professional reasons for this self-judgment that could form the basis for a future study.

The Role of Reflection in the Development of a Novice

Reflection often leads to a deeper understanding of something already encountered; it is this spiralled thinking that can help to move a person along the novice to expert continuum (Benner, 1984). Individuals engage in the reflective process in a variety of ways. I often replay conversations and explore ideas when spending time outdoors, writing in my journal and composing e-mails. I can be heard talking aloud with my computer or enthusiastically reacting to something I have read. The following entry explores some of my early thoughts as I began the evaluative process:

I sat at the poolside table under the mammoth umbrella for most of the day ... concentration is fierce, I am learning a new language and though it sometimes frustrates me, I persist knowing that my first joke in this new tongue will make it worth it...I'm elated from an afternoon of work, "You look pleased" my mother croons, "Good words today" I tell her smiling. She is instantly enthusiastic, having witnessed the opposite frequently, "How many?" I click and word count, "246". I am crestfallen, I thought it was more. My eyes narrow as a familiar brow line forms, I look again at the tangible words on screen and confidence restores a bit, "But these are good words". (Excerpt from my journal, August 2006)

My journal offered me a place to play with words, but it was not necessarily a place I considered to be "scholarly." I felt that scholarly writing would sound different than my personal writing; I thought it would look more organized and feel more structured. Yet further investigations have shown me that Nash's (2004) idea of scholarly as "leisure" or "play" was captured in my writing. This broadening gave me greater freedom to express my ideas in illustrations, mind maps and poetry, while seeking understanding through journal writing. I soon found myself exploring literature, negotiating practical elements of

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evaluation and engaging in professional discussions, and along the way, meeting and making friends. I was reflecting on my experience as a novice evaluator while crafting descriptions and selecting quotations. My journal was a record of the evolving nature of my learning (Patton, 2002).

Reflection also occurred when typing the minutes from our evaluation meetings; I found myself wanting to add in commentary or ideas that had occurred after the fact. At first I resisted, figuring that the minutes were a record of a meeting and not subject to later add-ons. When sending the minutes out I would compose lengthy e-mails explaining what had occurred to me while reflecting on our meeting or evaluative task, and where it fit in the context of our shared work. The main areas of data collection that helped me explore the role of reflection as a novice evaluator were my journal, documentation during the evaluation process and post-evaluation interviews with members of the evaluation team and our mentor. Each of these instances provided a unique and valuable way of reflecting on my learning.

When people approach learning opportunities with an open mind, they consciously or unconsciously bring with them ideas and memories from previous experiences. This is certainly true of my past experiences of being evaluated as well as limited participation in scholastic evaluations. As a novice evaluator I was not encumbered with rigid expectations of how the evaluation could or should proceed. Instead, I began the process in a state referred to by Greene (1980) as wakefulness; that is, paying close attention to the landscape of knowing. Even in this described state of openness, I recognised that biases existed in my desire to follow a winding path as I learn through the process of engagement in the evaluation project. My organically styled

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approach of discovering in this way is similar to the idea of improvisation, figuring it out as you go along.

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Considering the path.

Knowledge is not a series of self consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view; it is rather an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible (and perhaps even incommensurable) alternatives, each single theory, each fairy tale, each myth. Paul Feyerabend

Looking for Understanding through Theory

Feyerabend's philosophical approach to theory reveals unlimited possibilities for making, creating and identifying meaning. Like many graduate students, members of the evaluation team looked for guidance about possible evaluative processes from those around us, current research and theory. Our faculty mentor provided a constant yet distant source of support and willingness to guide us in our journey; this modelling helped to promote a sharing culture within our evaluation team. At the back of my evaluation binder rest three coloured folders: articles we have read, want to read and want to share. It was exciting to be part of a community where people were sharing, passing, recommending and discussing ideas. As this project would provide the underpinning for my thesis I was perhaps more anxious than most to build a theoretical framework in which to situate and better understand our work.

The language from the books and the classes seems disjointed. I find that it is better to read Alkin from the end backwards, the theorists I like the best are generally the most recent. The words are simple and yet so removed from me and my experiences: Utilization focused, needs-assessment, stakeholders, evaluand ... words that sit on my tongue like an enormous sticky candy, weighting down my use of language ... but as I write them I begin to know them, the curve of their letters, the way they slot themselves into sentences. (Excerpt from my journal, February 2006)

Evaluative inquiry, like any professional field, has a professional language. When I started the program evaluation course as part of my Master's in Education I was wading into unknown territory. Never before had I seen this side of an evaluation. Although the

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words were foreign sounding to me I persevered, as it is critical that anyone beginning work in this field (or any other) establishes or creates a shared understanding of the terminology used. With respect to our work as an evaluation team and this thesis, there were four areas critical to examine: internal, participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluations. Initially, I had envisaged our work as primarily participatory and collaborative but working with the evaluation team introduced me to Patton's (1997) work on developmental evaluations. The evaluation team's conceptualization of our work as developmental added an important dimension to our understanding and choices made throughout our evaluation context. The following paragraphs provide a closer look at each of the theoretical ideas.

Internal Evaluations

Internal evaluations are guided by members who work within an organization, and are linked to the evaluation activities (Love, 1983). This evaluation qualified as internal on two dimensions. First, all but one of the members of the four person team had a deep understanding of the Faculty context in which the module was offered. Second, two of the team members had assisted with the development of the module and the other two had been Teaching Assistants during the module. To some degree, all members of the evaluation team had seen the implementation process and experienced the consequences of decisions made during the implementation. The dynamics of evaluations require skilled facilitators; internal evaluations have similar requirements and necessitate consideration of the evaluation's impact as well as the working relationships that need to co-exist.

The literature focusing on internal evaluations highlights the need for the organizational structures and climates necessary for completion of internal evaluation projects (Love, 1983). Time is devoted to thinking about the complexities of social

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organizations, skills required and the compound purposes of an evaluation. Evaluations often lead to change, and such change can sometimes pose problems in organizational structures (Sarason, 2002). This evaluation was initiated by interested parties and aligned with the work of the Assessment and Evaluation Group at Queen's, and was therefore less likely to pose adverse consequences for those involved. Clifford and Sherman (1983) suggested that an internal, participatory evaluation team should be prepared to challenge assumptions, develop alternatives and refine questions and strategies using multiple methods. Our position as graduate students made this an area for concern, one that we hoped to address by having regular communication between the stakeholders and evaluation team. Because this was an internal evaluation and everyone had at least some knowledge of the players and context we needed to be cautious about making assumptions and resolved to use data to verify our ideas and inferences.

The Link between Participatory and Collaborative Evaluations

Much has been written about the possibilities for evaluations to be participatory and responsive (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Fetterman, 1994; O'Sullivan, 2004; Patton, 1997; Rodriguez-Campos, 2006; Stake, 1975, 1980, 2004). The emphasis of the work referred to above has been on meeting the needs of the stakeholders and more recently, how meeting these needs has potential for engaging the stakeholders and possibly, program personnel and thus promoting evaluation use. King (2007) reminded us that all evaluation work is participatory to some extent; evaluators do not work in isolation. At the most basic level, our work could be considered to have been participatory, in that we were involving evaluators, stakeholders and course participants in some aspects of the evaluation. Cousins and Whitmore (1998) identified how the concept of participatory work is used differently by different people: "for some it implies a practical approach to

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broadening decision making and problem solving through systematic inquiry; for others, relocating power in the production of knowledge and promoting social change” (p. 87). In our case, it was a practical approach that guided our efforts to map out the evaluation in ways that met the needs of stakeholders and evaluation users.

There is an abundance of literature reflecting different viewpoints of evaluation theories, practices and use. Additionally, there are multiple manuals that profess to communicate an ultimate, step-by-step way to conduct participatory or collaborative evaluations. Rodriguez-Campos (2006) has produced a succinct volume explaining how to conduct participatory evaluations, while interweaving theoretical and practical ideas. One manner in which I have found these texts lacking is in their ability to communicate the experience of the evaluators. Instead, many evaluation texts describe proprietary approaches to evaluation, with a distinct emphasis on the approach to evaluation, with little consideration for how the process is derived. As a novice, it would have been helpful to have a more comprehensive explanation of how evaluators arrived at the decision-making process, as opposed to following a prescribed list of steps to conduct an evaluation. Part of the emphasis of this work is to provide future novices with this type of explanation regarding an evaluative process.

There are also numerous definitions of collaboration that can be considered. Shulha and Wilson (2003) suggested that we need to identify a basic understanding of what collaboration is: bringing together multiple people with multiple viewpoints. Participatory and collaborative evaluations are linked because they entail the involvement of a group of interested people, who will work together from multiple perspectives to achieve a common goal. One of the distinctions established in the course of this research was characterizing the way the evaluation team worked with others and the way the

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evaluation team worked with one another. Although there is ambiguity in differentiating participatory and collaborative ways of working, for the purpose of this thesis, *participatory* refers to the way that the evaluation team interacts with stakeholders; primarily, the course administrator and module instructors. *Collaborative* refers to the way that the team works with one another.

Learning from the Participatory Evaluation Approach

Participation in something can frequently lead to learning or a deeper understanding. For example, my numerous experiences attending performances as a young audience member helped give me a sense of participation in the theatrical process that spurred further development in the form of academic study and active involvement. It seems probable that by participating in an evaluation, one will learn more about evaluative contexts. Cousins and Earl (1992) describe participatory evaluation as a “partnership between trained evaluation personnel and practice-based decision makers, organization members with program responsibility or people with a vital interest in the program” (p. 399). Initially, I thought we would be working very closely with the stakeholders of this evaluation and basing our practices on a participatory model. To engage in a participatory way of working meant involving others, to some degree, in shaping the evaluation. In my mind, participatory work meant frequent joint meetings between the evaluation team and stakeholders to discuss, decide on, plan and implement evaluation strategies. I now realize that participatory work somewhat resembles the novice to expert continuum, in that there is a continuum with incremental differences (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). Our work was not participatory in the way that I had envisaged, but was participatory in the planning phase because of elements of sharing and feedback that took place. During the planning phase, stakeholders’ opinions were sought

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and information flowed regularly between the evaluators and stakeholders. The joint sharing of ideas and questions allowed the evaluation team to explore and affirm the logic and skills necessary to complete the evaluation project.

When I pictured a participatory approach I envisioned the process described by King (2006) at an American Evaluation Association Workshop I attended; that is, a dynamic process involving various people working together to share and negotiate viewpoints in creative ways. A full-scale participatory evaluation may have looked more like Patton's (1997) idea where people create a model together, making a substantial investment in the process; therein increasing their learning about the process and potential utilization of the product. In a full participatory evaluation, those involved would have learned about the logic and skills of the evaluation by extensive work through all the phases of the evaluation process. In terms of a participatory evaluation, I envisioned an immersion model, where participants would learn in much the same way I did as a novice: by immersing themselves in the process. Patton (1997) explored some of the ambiguity in defining and identifying boundaries of participatory evaluation and concluded that it is not a fixed concept. One aspect that is not negotiable is having stakeholders focus on goals that they consider important for the evaluation (Patton, 1997). In a full participatory model, evaluators, stakeholders and participants engage in ways that are meaningful in that evaluation context and that meets needs while unveiling the evaluation process. Ultimately, our work was not a full participatory evaluation; instead, we borrowed elements from a participatory approach to fit our unique context.

Levin (1993) suggested that there are three main purposes of participating in research or evaluation: as a means to increase use of findings, as a way of establishing perspectives and as a call to action. Patton (1997) takes this one step further by

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considering the participatory evaluation as a context for learning. Levin and Patton are both referring to learning about a program, while this research focuses on the learning that comes from our collaborative approach to evaluation of the program. Our evaluation context certainly was a learning experience; much more so for the evaluators than the stakeholders, who are already established in this field of inquiry. Fortunately, the disposition of those involved in the project demonstrated a clear willingness to view learning and evaluation as an iterative process.

Our process blended a participatory and collaborative approach in a couple of notable activities. For example, the evaluation team planned and structured the focus groups so that we could have an opportunity to speak with the instructors and teaching assistants individually and as a whole group. This approach facilitated an open discussion about the module that provided an enhanced learning opportunity for everyone. The teaching assistants were provided with an opportunity for closure, after their commitment to the course, a chance to share their ideas in a protected discussion and in an open forum with the instructors. The instructors were afforded a learning opportunity by crystallizing ideas during a conversation with evaluators before developing and sharing with the teaching assistants. The evaluation team was able to learn from all aspects of this process, a process that highlights our ability to learn not only from evaluation, but from the activities involved in conducting the evaluation.

The participatory process of this evaluation would inform us of ways which could ensure authentic and regular participation of stakeholders and intended users to use in future evaluations. In order to be successful at their tasks participatory evaluators, need to have skills and knowledge that go well beyond those taught in methodology courses. By

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working through an evaluation process I began to develop a better understanding of the skills, processes and products necessary to work successfully in participatory evaluations.

Learning within the Collaborative Evaluation Approach

The evaluation team chose to work in a collaborative way; that is to suggest, our work can be best described as a dynamic process. Collaborative work involves taking emotional and intellectual risks while negotiating shared goals (John-Steiner, 2000). Building trust within a group is an investment in time which can lead to greater freedom for emotional and intellectual risk-taking. Further, collaborative evaluations involve a team approach to evaluation planning and implementation (Levin, 1993). These definitions help highlight our processes and confirm that our evaluation team worked in a collaborative manner. We drew on the ideas and strengths of each other, sought practices through consultation with our advisor, related theories and engaged in explicit negotiations that led to the shaping of all aspects of the evaluation process. These collaborative strategies complimented the developmental approach we identified as the purpose for the evaluation and helped us to define for ourselves. These characterizations provided the group with a framework for decision making because they enabled us to understand that a collaborative evaluation would require an investment of time that would occasionally move us into areas we were unfamiliar with, working collaboratively we could support each other through unfamiliar aspects of evaluative inquiry.

Working together, we mapped out a route for the evaluation to proceed, and then navigated this course together. Collaborative strategies were beneficial to us because we were learning the principles of evaluative inquiry within the context of the evaluation itself. This collaborative process, our proprietary way of working, is further described throughout Act Three and Act Four to highlight not only the progression, but the

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contribution of collaboration to our deepening understanding of evaluation theory and practice.

Collaboration allowed us to open ourselves to the teaching of others and build on what we taught each other (John-Steiner, 2000). Working in collaboration helped provide a broader base for learning with and from one another. As O'Sullivan (2004) suggested, collaborative work provided ongoing opportunities for giving a blend of formal and informal feedback and communications. Our collaborative efforts resonated with the notion put forth by Shulha and Wilson (2003). We had a shared passionate interest that was able to propel, at least in me, transformative learning in both personal and professional realms. This was the first of many incidents that reinforced the complex personal and social dynamics present in collaborative work (John-Steiner, 2000). Both the positive and challenging aspects of our collaborative work are detailed in Act Four. Whether internal, participatory, collaborative or some other hybrid theory of evaluation approaches, evaluators need practical and theoretical skills that allow for responsiveness to shifting conditions of evaluation players and contexts.

Developmental Evaluations

A developmental approach was identified because it fit well with the stage of the module's maturity, the needs of the evaluation users and the expressed goals of the evaluation. Fullan (2001) identified that improvement in education evolves through three stages: initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Under this guise, the module was transitioning between initiation and implementation. Hall and Hord (2001) emphasized that change is a process, rather than an event; in their view equal importance should be placed on program developmental and implementation. A developmental framework looks for links between the process and learning while including all aspects of

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the activities that lead to innovation. In this respect, it is an approach well suited to understanding the development of a novice evaluator.

Patton (1997) coined the term “developmental evaluation” to explore an undefined way of approaching evaluation planning. In doing so his work recognized that each evaluation has goals and outcomes that can evolve during the evaluative process. A developmental evaluation employs flexibility to capture the changing and multiple perspectives of something over time (Patton, 1997). From a novice evaluator’s perspective, and that of a collaborative evaluation team, a developmental framework is an appropriate approach that would allow us to be responsive to emerging ideas and information. In this way our evaluation team would have the greatest degree of flexibility while planning and implementing our evaluation strategies. Our team rationalized that as novice evaluators in a developmental evaluation, we could expect to create a winding path in answering the evaluation questions (Meeting minutes, January 25, 2007).

One of the key features of Patton’s (1997) developmental evaluation is that of goal setting; initially one of the goals of this evaluation was working in participatory and collaborative ways. The evaluation process allowed us to consider ways that we could align our work. It is important to note that a developmental framework was also consistent with the view of our stakeholders, that it takes multiple years to establish a course and a year one evaluation would be sensitive to the flux-like state of the course. At the conclusion of the course, without the formalities of the evaluation, course instructors and the administrators identified changes that needed to be made to help the course develop. The need for change in some areas is an example of tacit knowing and is consistent with the iterative process of course design. Contrastingly, some areas identified for change were more explicit: informal and formal discussions and e-mails between

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instructors, teaching assistants and students. Students also had an opportunity to express any thoughts related to this course at a forum hosted by the Dean and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Education. Our evaluation would collect data to guide changes within the Classroom Assessment module, and also provide possible direction for evaluations in future years.

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Summation of Act Two

In order to better understand the role of an evaluator or the potential impact of novices in a participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluation project, I considered that “an evaluator is both a researcher and a concerned educator” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 436). Act Two has provided an introduction to the characters involved and their roles in this evaluation drama. Additionally, it began to explore how this evaluation opportunity presented a kaleidoscope of learning opportunities for evaluators at the early stages of the novice continuum. Act Three continues this exploration by sequentially examining the process of the evaluation and the learning activities contained therein.

CHAPTER THREE

Act Three: Climax

Considering the path.

Here is the world, sound as a nut, perfect, not the smallest piece of chaos left, never a stitch nor an end, not a mark of haste, or botching, or second thought; but the theory of the world is a thing of shreds and patches.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Composing the Evaluation Structure

Act Three presents the world of our evaluation delineated in scenes that stitch together the shreds and patches of our interconnected and overlapping work. The climax provides an opportunity to refocus the path by chronicling our evaluative explorations. These explorations exist in the detailed minutes from our meetings, e-mails, field notes and reflections in my journal. Less tangible moments exist in images and memories of conversations, facial expressions and experiences that have been sewn together to make our evaluation process explicit. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) brought forth the notion of a “bricoleur” who blends together many pieces for use in new and unconventional ways. The blending creates a complex, dense reflexive-like collage that represents the researchers’ images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis. The notion of the bricoleur is another way of depicting my method of inquiry.

As identified in earlier Acts, the data collection strategies used in our evaluation project and this thesis were multiple, overlapping and interwoven. As Fontana and Frey (2005) indicate, “humans are complex, and their lives are ever changing. The more methods we use to study them the better our chances will be to gain some understanding

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of how they construct their lives” (p. 732). The eight scenes described in Act Three provide another way of understanding how our team of novice evaluators constructed their work together. Although the process was not linear, the pieces of our process were reviewed and divided into scenes, such that each scene deals with a specific focus. Often, our evaluation team was working on multiple ideas; suggested routes were considered, examined and laid to rest, while we worked on something “more pressing.” The scenes were created after identifying, sifting, negotiating and investigating meaning from the many experiences associated with the collection of data for the evaluation project and this thesis. Each scene recreates the essences of our experiences, so that readers will be able to join in our overall process.

The multiple data collection strategies described in these scenes portrays both the personal and collective experiences of our evaluation team from my vantage point. The types of questions we asked, the data we chose to collect, and ways that we recorded information all impacted the results of our study (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Although we worked collaboratively on the evaluation project, the data embedded in this chapter are my personal account of what occurred; the words and ideas that connect these data are a synthesis of my learning.

Since the goal of this thesis is to capture how an evaluator-researcher makes the personal and professional transformation. My account, informed by our experiences, is the story of interest. The connections evident in Act Three echo Luce-Kapler’s (2001) idea that sharing experiences connects us to the world. My attempt is to capture and reveal the evaluation process of our team from my perspective, while stating the rationale that informed our collaborative and developmental work on an internal, participatory evaluation project.

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Scene One: The Meetings

Exploring our meeting routines and our way of working may help the reader to understand the emotional and intellectual climate of the group.

Our first meeting: We sat around the Wilson Room table looking outward at such different individuals. Even as I look inward to this shared purpose; I feel grateful that everyone has agreed to participate, that they will allow me to participate. Working in groups is both pulling and pushing, it is active and passive, listening and sharing. I feel like I am on a tightrope, I want to dance across it... (Excerpt from my journal, December 2006)

At the outset, our evaluation team had scheduled weekly meetings. Later on our meeting schedule became less rigid, and we met as needed. The scene described in my journal establishes the context of those meetings. Confirming a regular time and place to meet was an important commitment to the evaluation process and to each other.

Our meetings generally lasted three hours, and took place over lunch with each of us contributing something to eat. Sharing food and drink was an important part of building relationships, as this created an informal working environment which allowed the growth of personal relationships within a professional context. Our sharing of food mirrored a larger cultural idea about the functions of community; as such, we are not the first students to study evaluation through dialogical inquiry that involves the sharing of food (Christie & Ross, 2003). Meetings often started with some general discussion left over from the previous week's gathering, or an issue one of us was facing in our graduate studies. As we began cleaning up lunch, the meeting room door stood open, and other graduate students or professors would stop to inquire about our work; I learned that sharing food can help enhance a collegial environment.

Occasionally, there was an explicit agenda, hastily thrown together at the end of our previous meeting. There was always a goal of what we wanted to accomplish during our

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time together, and discussion about where we needed to go with the evaluation. The goals and future directions were most often negotiated from our previous individual experiences, relevant theoretical ideas or practical assessments that emerged as a result of our discussions. I volunteered to take minutes at each meeting and e-mail them to the evaluation team for checking prior the next meeting. This experience taught me that minutes of meetings can invite dialogue about ideas and future directions our work might take. This e-mail dialogue between meetings served as an important opportunity to celebrate the work we were accomplishing together, and raise ideas or questions prior to the next meeting.

Our evaluation team meetings played a big role in shaping the questions, data collection and analyses within the evaluation process. The meetings generated flowing dialogue, where we brought forth new ideas, listened to one another and examined suggestions from various perspectives to create a shared plan for proceeding with the evaluation. These meetings were as dynamic as our way of working together. Through our meetings we developed the evaluation plan, data collection strategies, discussed analysis of data, reporting and continued making plans for future steps. As these scenes reveal, I learned that each stage in the evaluation process led to another.

As might be expected in a developmental evaluation, our ideas would occasionally change or morph. Shifts in our ideas evolved slowly, as our trust and respect for working with one another grew. Reflection has helped me to see that there are multiple ways that respect and trust within our evaluation team evolved: through sharing our past experiences, deepening our professional and personal relationships, or addressing questions that arose in the context of this evaluation and open-minded contemplation of

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theoretical ideas. Finally, our team grew together because of a shared commitment to examine what was possible, or potentially useful, in this evaluative context.

Invigorating meetings occurred when there was a joyous improvisation of ideas, overlapping dialogue and information darting quickly around the room. At a professional level, moments like this felt as though we were really getting something accomplished, working on “important” questions that could help shape the future development of the course. On a personal level, I was excited to be part of a team, to share ideas while learning from others in such a positive and energizing way. Naturally, there were meetings that felt like we were creeping around in the dark, unsure of where to go or how to resolve a particular question. During such meetings, time would inch by, characterized by pauses in dialogue and frustrated sighs from team members. Meetings like these left me feeling discouraged and frustrated by the lack of direction we had, discouraged by my own lack of experience and doubting my contributions to the overall evaluation. At times, the confusion caused me to question my role in future evaluative and collaborative projects. Overall, I see that this sense of chaos, the ups and downs of our experiences at these meetings was a rich place for learning about evaluation ideas and ways of working together as a team.

Whether joyous or confusing, the meetings were never uninteresting affairs; they were places of broad learning. Sometimes things would happen at our meetings that we had not anticipated; a team member’s unavoidable absence, a professor dropping by or recognition that we had overlooked an important question. In a theatrical setting, an unintended occurrence is called “the uninvited guest”; sometimes manifested by “stealing an actor’s line,” or having a prop “disappear” during a crucial moment. In the world of evaluation, the uninvited guests are slightly different but no less present. For example, a

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team member's absence would alter the group dynamic and temporarily shift our way of working together. Being flexible as a group and staying focused helped us to make the most of our time together. A professor's visit might provide a helpful opportunity to clarify an evaluation question, engage in a discussion related to our graduate studies or the institution, but might not necessarily be conducive to the momentum of our evaluation. Uninvited guests re-appear in a future scene, and are reflected upon in their context; providing further opportunity to examine how the evaluation team welcomed or dealt with them on the evaluation stage.

Lessons learned in these unanticipated moments had benefits; we had to remain flexible to identify learning in every opportunity, and be patient with the process. The professors working in the Assessment and Evaluation Group, along with other faculty within the building, have modelled cooperative behaviour as a place where time is "created" and given as needed. Observing these people and experiencing the diversity of learning that comes from being attentive to dialogue, reinforced for me the need for patience when working in a collaborative process. This patience sometimes meant reorganizing priorities or ideas to create more time to further explore our options. An example of this is reorganization found in the section about focus groups and surveys.

At our second meeting on January 10th 2007, the graduate student coordinator introduced a seven-page booklet with worksheets to help direct the evaluation. This booklet was a culmination of ideas and resources she had pulled together from past evaluation experiences, workshops and courses. The booklet, called "Evaluation Worksheets," was a rich resource because it provided a framework to begin structuring our evaluative questions. Within its pages were starting questions for determining evaluation needs, elements for describing a program, a stakeholder chart, evaluation

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thoughts to consider, a table for evaluation planning and a template for developing a logic model. This booklet “generated a lot of discussion and provided an interesting place for examining evaluation ideas and creating a shared understanding of evaluation language such as: inputs, resources, and outcomes” (Meeting minutes, January 10, 2007). I found it valuable as it enabled us to continue developing a shared language for discussing the evaluation; it helped refine our ideas about where we needed to start collecting information, and how the information might be structured.

This booklet prompted our next steps by helping us realize that we needed to have a “comprehensive description of the program and what stakeholders wanted to know” (Meeting minutes, January 10, 2007). We needed to identify who key stakeholders were, and what their goals for the evaluation were. Additionally, we recognized that different stakeholders would have different goals, and that we would need to analyse their ideas while considering what information we could feasibly obtain while still meeting our evaluative goals. Given our different experiences prior to joining this evaluation and our differing places on the novice to expert continuum, the booklet was crucial in generating dialogue which gave our evaluative ideas concrete shape.

Meetings were a place where we made decisions; Scene Two explores the action of one of our decisions and the outcome of collecting data through stakeholder interviews. Christie and Rose (2003) suggest that dialogue reflects the practical nature of evaluation, but can also offer opportunities for theoretical growth, so it should be considered an important and relevant tool in developing evaluation skills, ideas and experiences. At our meetings I affirmed that people can gain insight through dialogue and that this dialogue had the potential of developing our evaluation skills.

Scene Two: The Interviews

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The evaluation team decided that the best way to gather data was to conduct interviews from the three primary stakeholders: the course administrator and two course instructors. Although there were other stakeholders, such as the Teaching Assistants and the Bachelor of Education students, at this point we focused on the three primary stakeholders. This method of collecting data was our first opportunity to engage in this evaluative dialogue with professional practitioners who had an interest in the course as well as experience with evaluations. The interviews were consistent with our desire to work in a participatory approach in that we had identified a need to talk to the stakeholders to find out what evaluation information would be most valuable for them. Fontana and Frey (2005) provide a comprehensive guide to interviews that help novice and relatively novice researchers understand the tools, trends and future directions of interviewing as a data collection technique. They ask us to consider the “interview as a practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the interaction of the interviewer and the respondent” (p. 717). There were multiple choices to be made when considering interviewing as a data collection strategy.

One meeting helped us generate a list of questions that might be helpful; these questions were revised via e-mail, until a final set of questions for our interviews was formed. Our two main areas for concern were the type of interview we wanted, and how we would conduct the interviews. Techniques used in interviewing have broadened in the past decade, and it has been recognized that different types of interviews are suited to different situations (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Minutes from one meeting reflect how we agreed that:

All interviews should follow the same basic framework but be guided by the comments of the interviewee and interviewers. We agreed to ask participants if

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they minded two interviewers or if they minded being taped. The notes will be compiled and discussed at our next meetings (Minutes from meeting, January 11, 2007).

The evaluation team decided that they wanted a less formal and conversational interview, where the questions could guide our discussion without restricting it. In essence, the questions would provide a loose structure but interviewers would allow for and expect a certain degree of improvisational dialogue. I had not realised that there was so much to consider when preparing for an interview, but now realise that these preparations are more likely to yield a thoughtful interview.

One final aspect to be considered was determining which of our evaluation team members would actually conduct the interviews. We wanted to work in pairs, but were concerned that the presence of two researchers might hinder the conversational style we were hoping for. It was pointed out to us by our faculty mentor that people often interview in pairs, where one person facilitates the interview while another takes notes. Working in pairs was thought to be good practice for us, as our limited interview experiences meant that having a partner present would provide a sort of “safety net.” This allowed us to learn from each other and experience approaches to interviewing outside of our own. In the end, we decided to approach our interviewees in advance to ensure they would not mind having two researchers present.

I was excited about the prospect of interviewing stakeholders for three main reasons; it would give me an opportunity to hear directly what they were hoping for from our evaluation. Second, I was enthusiastic because the interviews were my first opportunity to collect data, outside of our evaluation team meetings, in a “real” setting. Finally, I anticipated that the interview process would teach me more about how both the other researchers who comprised my team and the faculty members we were

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interviewing, conducted themselves at interviews. This provided me an opportunity to learn how they established setting and tone, as well as what other techniques they used to develop and maintain momentum.

As we got ready to conduct our interviews in pairs, it was decided that I would take notes for all occasions, affording me a prime seat as a participant observer. Each of these interview experiences provided me with an opportunity to learn more about the views and experiences of others as well as myself. Eisner (1998) claimed that “the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situation in which they work” (pp. 81-82). Participating in multiple interviews with different facilitators was an excellent opportunity to better understand my evaluation colleagues’ perceptions of interviewing in this evaluation, and to learn from the stakeholders themselves. Like many aspects of qualitative research and evaluative inquiry, it was not as straight forward as it seemed at first.

Ethical concerns were addressed prior to the start of each interview, by reviewing the goals of the interview as well as the evaluation project itself, with each interviewee providing a signature indicating informed consent. My principal responsibility was to take notes, but at first I was unsure of what to record, as it seemed that so much was happening at once. I recorded pieces of dialogue on the question template we had established, and made notes about the interview environment in the margins.

At our first interview we benefited from the established familiarity because the interviewee, a course instructor was both a client of the evaluation and our advisor on the evaluation process; as such, there was some anticipation of the interview questions and well thought out answers were provided. Overall the interview went smoothly, there was a cheerful banter of ideas, and probing questions emerged from all directions. Although I

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was primarily there to take notes and observe, I soon found myself drawn into the conversation and tabling prospective ideas. Rather than viewing this as deterring from my role, it actually seemed like a natural element of the conversational tone we were hoping for. I learned that ideas gained from interviews could be helpful in shaping not only our evaluation questions, but in directing us to areas that needed more clarification in future interviews.

Our second interview was conducted with the course administrator. I expected this interview to be more formal in tone, because his role is more removed from the course and our evaluation. Once the interview was underway, I quickly realised how much I was learning from this experience. The interviewee expressed a sincere interest in the evaluation, and shared with us a bit of his past experience in evaluation research. It was helpful to learn about his growth as an academic, and to picture him in the role of a data-collecting graduate student. It was a unique opportunity to have a discussion that blended and transcended our current graduate work with his past experiences. The interview lasted much longer than we expected. Our conversation helped us learn about the institutional factors that played into the module decision and broad perspectives about shifts in the teacher education program that related to the development of new curriculum. Eisner (1991) identifies that, “it is surprising how much people are willing to say to those who they believe are really willing to listen” (p. 183). I learned a lot watching how my partner organized ideas in response to the interviewee’s answers, as she carefully restated his ideas and kept the dialogue seamlessly moving.

Partnered with a different member of the evaluation team, a third interview was conducted with the other course instructor. This interview had a very different feel than either of the first two. A familiarity between the interviewer and interviewee was evident,

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given that a working relationship among the two had been previously established. They were relaxed in speaking to one another, and the dialogue flowed naturally. Despite my role as note-taker and observer, I was frequently included in the conversation; this inclusion enhanced my feelings of making worthwhile contributions to the interview and overall evaluation process. One of the resounding ideas from the third interview came from a comment made by the interviewee:

There is a need to develop a professional culture and to engage students in part of the learning, to get them out of student mode and thinking: how does this impact my practice? We may be trying to create this personality but it is hard to measure this early (module 1) in the program. (Transcript from interview, January 11, 2007)

This interviewee echoed the importance of student learning through engagement, and vocalized questions that I was asking myself. The final interview presented a unique opportunity to think about ways that faculty and curricula intersect with student learning during theoretical and practical studies.

Since I worked with the same researcher for both the first and second interviews and a different researcher for the third interview, it was informative to see how my partners presented differently in each interview. For example, in our second interview the conversation was more structured, and there was less bantering of ideas because the questions were of a more investigative nature. My theoretical learning was enhanced by participating in the interview experiences. In addition, we were gaining valuable information about what the stakeholders in our evaluation were looking for. I was reminded how rich the field of evaluative inquiry is, because of its inherent nature to marry theory with practice. Overall, we learned a great deal from our interviews, contributing to the shaping of our evaluation and offering a glimmer of our shared relationship as researchers in the field of education.

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A record of each interview was compiled using notes taken during the interviews, combined with a listening of the recording made. I was surprised at the amount of work required to create interview transcripts. Following Schumacher's (1993) advice, I spent time after the interviews reflecting on the information gleaned, also clarifying notes made during the interview. The interview data were then shared with the other evaluation researchers and reviewed at a meeting. In a group reflection after the interviews the evaluation team noted:

It was generally agreed that we all have different approaches to interviewing and that there might not be one "best approach" but that approaches are situational dependent and if you feel most comfortable you are more likely to conduct an in-depth interview process. We established that our processes evolved as the interview was conducted. Although amount is not a reflection of quality, it was interesting to compare the amount of data gained from each interview. (Minutes from meeting, January 25, 2007)

The notes that I took during the interview and my recollections after our group discussions about the interview process, proved rather useful. These allowed me to revisit the interview data in writing this Scene and later, when I planned the post evaluation interviews.

The interview data allowed us to move deeper into the evaluation process, as they helped clarify and shape the evaluation questions. Merging ideas from the three identified stakeholders required patience and negotiation, as we sifted through the interview data during our meetings, clarified and summarized ideas looking for connections. As Fontana and Frey (2005) suggest, "no matter how organized the researcher may be, he or she slowly becomes buried under an increasing mountain" (p. 713). We were not yet buried under weighty data, but at times it was difficult to give recognition to all of the ideas brought forward during our interviews. Ultimately, I felt that the interviews contributed to

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my growth of evaluation ideas that were later refined by combining the interview data and our circuitous dialogue.

The booklet shared at our earlier evaluation meeting provided a reference point as we organized interview data by creating a platform upon which to add other pieces of necessary data, and determine how we would collect them. Based on these investigations, we borrowed an idea from Patton (1997) and created a set of questions people “cared about.” At one of our post interview meetings, “the group decided that they wanted to send questions to each person interviewed to see if (a) the questions accurately represented what was said and (b) if the interviewee would rank the ideas, from 1 onwards to reflect ideas that they felt should be prioritized” (Minutes from meeting, January 25, 2007). . Since a participatory evaluation is a partnership between the evaluation team and stakeholders, we felt that this approach was consistent with our participatory way of working. The interviews and work done at their conclusion provided an important learning opportunity for me to see how dialogic data could be analysed and used. In addition, interviews provided an excellent opportunity for the team to develop greater depth in our relationships. Much of the work prior to the interviews had been subjective; whereas data from the interviews helped us work more concretely, and move the evaluation project to the next level.

From this process I learned that interviewing is a popular way to collect data because it has potential to lead to powerful understanding (Fontana and Frey, 2005). The interviews that we conducted with stakeholders showed us that we needed to review the documents associated with the course before we could finalize our evaluation questions; the process of this review is documented in Scene Three below. Later on, I revisit the idea

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of interviewing to document a second set of interviews that I conducted individually, with each member of the evaluation team at the end of the evaluation process.

Scene Three: Reviewing Program Documents, Creating Evaluation Documents

During the evaluation process, we wanted to gain a broad perspective to create an evaluation plan and answer evaluation questions. The interviews had stimulated new ideas so to broaden our understanding of the course content and structure, we reviewed the program documents. Our review of program documents primarily focused on information gained from examining the website, and archived student data that were compiled during the first year of the module.

The website held course-related information such as: the syllabus, on-line units, assignment information, assessment and evaluation links, a posting board for student questions, and test students completed at the end of the module. Reviewing course documents helped us to consider how the evaluation questions fit into a larger context, and how we were going to collect data to answer our evaluation questions.

We were able to access data compiled by the Teaching Assistants that focused on student comments regarding the course content and structure. Because of this information, “it was decided that a review of the student comments and interview data would help us identify areas for concern” (Meeting minutes, January 25, 2007). Doing this allowed us to pursue our goal of comparing student areas for concern with concepts put forth by the stakeholders, to see how these ideas compared to our proposed evaluation questions. We were fortunate that the Teaching Assistants had compiled the data, as they added another dimension when shaping the evaluation questions and future modes of data collection.

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Prior to our meeting, each evaluator had a chance to contemplate the ideas presented on the website in conjunction with the interview data and proposed evaluation questions. As we huddled around the research lab table with remnants of our shared lunch, we worked between the screen of the module website, our notes from the archived student data, and the large blackboard that held our growing ideas. At the beginning of this process, energy amongst our evaluation team was high; we looked for comparisons between stakeholder ideas and student ideas.

We analyzed the data by looking for connections between what the stakeholders and students identified as areas for celebration and concern. There were moments where it was difficult to find points of comparison, or even to understand clearly what we were looking for. The room felt crowded with evaluators, stakeholders, graduate students and the hum of the computer. This process had a chaotic and frenzied feeling to it that nearly derailed our group during that meeting. Staying focused was challenging, as our frustration was nearly palpable and nerves were getting frayed. Our graduate student coordinator helped organize our way of working, so that each member of the team took a turn explaining what they saw while others listened. We were rewarded soon after this rather helpful organizational structure was implemented; our re-energized efforts produced a diagram that helped give shape to our multiple perspectives and overlapping ideas. I learned that a graphic organizer could help clarify priorities in an evaluation.

The juxtaposition of ideas from the primary stakeholders with those of Teaching Assistants and students, who were also stakeholders, led us to consider how the views of students could be represented in our future data collection. Having worked through most of the pre-evaluation ideas in the booklet, we decided to attempt building a logic model. We recognized that, “there are several excellent hand outs in the packet ... but we need to

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learn when and how to use what” (Meeting minutes, February 8, 2007). When we learned about logic models in the program evaluation course, I struggled to understand how to make complex ideas fit into a sequential pattern. Our graduate coordinator explained that the overall purpose of the logic model was to describe what the module was, and what it would do in a way that allowed us to look for links.

Attempting to create a logic model collaboratively at one of our meetings was complicated. There was much to consider; on one hand we were looking back to describe the program, while also looking forward to establishing the evaluation questions. We were also mindful of the need to consider feasibility in designing the best approach for our evaluation. From an evaluation standpoint, it was inherently difficult to collect data after the conclusion of the module and trying to involve students in their final three weeks of study:

We discover how important the wording can be and how loaded our words are! One sentence that makes sense to one of us causes confusion for another and we are finding a need to take time to write “good” questions (Meeting minutes, February 1, 2007).

Overt tension was growing as people questioned how we could meet the goals established for the evaluation and how we would track our progress. Based on our interviews and review of the documents, I reflected that “good questions are difficult to make, and more time is needed as we search for the best strategy” (Excerpt from my journal, February 2007).

In the end, we did not create a logic model that looked anything like the one represented in the booklet, or was similar to any I had worked with during my program evaluation course. We did create a table that contained similar information and “made sense” to the evaluation team, because it organized the program, stakeholders, evaluation

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goals, questions and data collection strategies in one place. This experience taught me that a logic model requires continual clarification of an evaluator's viewpoint, and identification of where data required to substantiate an idea can be located. Collaborative creation of a logic model can be rewarding because it may push teams to work more cohesively, listening carefully to what others say while working cooperatively to expand upon ideas. Upon completion, a logic model can indicate some of the "next steps". As described in the next scene, our next steps allowed us to see that we needed to again collect data from instructors, as well as the other stakeholders: Teaching Assistants and students.

Scene Four: To Focus Group or to Survey, that is the Question

The choice of data collection strategies, like the choice of evaluative strategies, needs to be context specific. Greene (1998) reminds us that while there are historical methodological traditions, qualitative evaluation practices are highly variable. This sentiment echoes Patton's (1990) idea that methods should be chosen "given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available" (p. 39). We needed to collect data from a broader group of stakeholders. Our discussions about focus groups and surveys quickly highlighted that it was not a case of one method being better than the other, but rather which would act as the best spotlight on the evaluation questions. At times, there was overlap; an evaluation question could be answered by more than one group. Our goal was to identify and move forward with the best strategies for collecting data that would answer our evaluation questions.

Our target audience was clear: instructors, Teaching Assistants and students, but what was not clear was the most effective route for collecting data. Initially, based on the success of information gathered from our interviews, the team favoured the person-to-

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person data collection method. Many meetings were spent imagining how we could organize these groups to engage in discussions about the assessment and evaluation module. At the outset, I was advocating for focus groups rather than a survey, because I was excited to work directly with teaching assistants and teacher candidates. They represented the only part of our cast not yet familiar with the content and direction of our “evaluation play,” and I felt they would be able to contribute relevant suggestions for answering our evaluation questions:

Everyone has an opinion about focus groups and other stuff thrown into the mix, the conversation goes all over the place! What could I say? When we did the focus group with the teaching assistants [in another course I worked on] I really enjoyed it, I thought it was a useful way to come full circle, it was an important discussion, but everyone was there. How important is it that we represent the voices of everyone? No matter which way we go focus group or survey someone is left out (Excerpt from my journal February 1, 2007).

This entry touches on some of the ideas circulating the room both at the meeting, and later on in my thoughts. My ideas and preferences were guided by Krueger and Casey’s (2000) focus group theory and my beliefs about the power of shared interaction as a way of learning. When we were making methodological choices, I learned that my lack of experience in this type of research capacity should lead to greater listening and a more internalized dialogue on my part. While I certainly did not have an answer for the philosophical and ethical questions that were raised, in fact no one else may have had one definitive answer either (Greene, 1998).

Multiple meetings were spent revisiting the focus group and survey questions; the struggle to find appropriate phrasing was consuming time and energy. In addition to the complex rationale supporting focus groups as well as surveys, evaluation team members were aware that our data collection and reporting strategies needed to align with the questions we were investigating and the audience we were working with. As the literature

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and our discussions revealed, both focus groups and surveys have distinctive advantages and disadvantages. A journal entry about one of our meetings illuminates our earliest thinking:

We have discussed focus groups at length, to find out if we think that is the best way to proceed. We are aware of the complexities organizing the groups, the somewhat limited perspective they can offer ... still, and we have decided that we would like to try to have four focus groups. (Excerpt from my journal, February 1, 2007).

Having multiple focus groups was one way that we could achieve diversity of respondents, and ensure adequate representation of our 500 person student body. Initially, we felt it was important to hear from a cross-section of students that would represent different grade levels, subject areas and diverse viewpoints about the module content.

As our discussions continued, we recognized that there was no need to lump the data to be collected from instructors, teaching assistants and teacher candidates together. Scheduling and time constraints meant that the teaching assistants and instructors were the most accessible. In addition, we had similar questions for both these groups. Eventually, the evaluation team decided that we would conduct focus groups with the instructors and teaching assistants, but hesitated to make a decision about how to involve teacher candidates.

We hesitated because of the awareness that focus groups require much time and organizational commitment in order to properly collect data, in addition to the fact that a focus group of teacher candidates would yield a relatively small sample size. At our meeting on February 8th 2007, we made a list of pros and cons to give direction in making these methodological choices. In our estimation, advantages of focus groups included the ability to have open-ended, face-to-face discussions. We felt another positive aspect was that students might want to introduce ideas we had not yet considered, and focus groups

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would allow us to be responsive to such ideas. Surveys would allow us to have a much broader representation of respondents. Although it initially seemed like focus groups would afford the best way to collect data from teacher candidates, we gravitated toward conducting a survey for this portion of our data collection as our discussions evolved.

Surveys would allow us to collect a broad spectrum of ideas from many students, and one member of our evaluation team brought a great deal of experience in survey creation; enabling this team member to act as the lead in this aspect of the project. The quantitative data generated from the survey would be analyzed as part of one team member's course work. We were aware the survey would require a lot of work to develop and an opportunity to pilot, but felt it would also provide us a broader range of respondents. Another perceived advantage of the survey was that it could provide us with a tool to be used in future module evaluations.

Our discussion ultimately evolved to the point where we viewed the data collection as two separate parts; the small group of instructors together with teaching assistants and the larger group of teacher candidates. In keeping with our participatory style, we encouraged stakeholders to give feedback about our methodological choices. As we discussed these ideas pointed questions were asked about our choices; everyone agreed that this two-pronged route might be a good way forward, while enabling the creation of a useful tool. Stakeholder ideas were also incorporated later to improve the survey structure and questions, to help ensure they would provide a range of data to answer our evaluation questions. The notion of creating a resource that could be part of future evaluations was once again consistent with the iterative process of the course's design and our developmental evaluation. Scene Five examines the impetus for moving

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forward with the focus group's data collection, and Scene Six explores how we negotiated the survey for teacher candidates.

Scene Five: Instructor and Teaching Assistant Focus Groups

The instructor and teaching assistant focus group was discussed in more detail at our meeting on February 14th, 2007. It was an unusual discussion, as two of the teaching assistants were also members of the evaluation team. These individuals were therefore helping to conceptualize a process in which they would later take part from a very different perspective. We knew that we wanted to interview the instructors and teaching assistants, and decided to conduct a "rolling focus group."

Our conception of a rolling focus group meant that we would reserve a block of time for the discussion and divide the block into three parts: instructors only, instructors and teaching assistants and teaching assistants only. It was important to us that we interview the groups separately and together, because both individual parts as well as the whole had important information to offer. This idea was conceived so we could honour the spaces where different groups of people might want to address overlapping perspectives, while also respecting group contributions and minimizing hierarchal entrapments that some participants might feel.

There were advantages and disadvantages with the focus group structure we devised. On the one hand, we would enjoy the advantage of working with a group of people in a dynamic social interaction, with the goal of developing and sustaining a collegial discussion that would help us understand how people felt about the module (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The structure also allowed us to invite participants to the evaluation with minimal interruption to their professional and personal lives. Having multiple focus groups instead of a rolling one, would have necessitated greater time

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commitments and involvement from the instructors as well as teaching assistants.

Multiple focus groups were also a problem because of the small number of participants engaged in this phase of the data collection.

I learned that there were several drawbacks regarding our choice to conduct this style of focus group. Time constraints limited the evolution of discussions or ideas. Further, the overlapping of discussions meant that we were denying ourselves the time required to properly reflect on the discussions of one group, and later use their ideas to build on subsequent discussions. Moreover, it was difficult to organize and stage questions so that each group had a sense of developing momentum or sequence. Krueger and Casey (2000) cautioned that questions structured for focus groups need to be developed in a pattern that increases flow from one idea to another, moving from general to more specific ideas. In spite of said disadvantages, we were able to foster thoughtful discussions where people introduced, explored and reflected. Overall, the focus groups were an opportunity to go beyond our initial investigations and allow ideas to emerge from within the group that addressed our evaluation questions.

In planning for the overall structure and goals of the focus groups at our evaluation meeting, it was decided that our graduate coordinator and I would craft the questions separate from the other evaluators who were also teaching assistants of the module. We hoped this arrangement would minimize the impact of their dual roles as teaching assistants and evaluators of the same module, and foster a fresh perspective in the way they shared ideas during data collection. The evaluation team decided to utilize a similar strategy to that employed during the earlier interviews, where two researchers guided the progress of the focus group. We hoped that this combined approach of a rolling focus group with multiple facilitators, would increase the authenticity of and

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learning gained during the experience, while leading to a shared and genuine dialogue amongst the teaching assistants and instructors.

Initially, the graduate student coordinator and I drafted individual sets of questions, keeping in mind the lessons learned from our program evaluation course about asking clear, open-ended, one-dimensional conversational questions. In spite of this guidance, I knew that my 20 questions were too many, too repetitive, too broad or too narrow to bring to the table. Krueger and Casey (2000) explain that “often beginners generate interesting questions, but it isn’t clear how answers to those questions will help achieve the purpose of the study...developing good focus group questions requires time, help from buddies, and attention to a few guidelines” (p. 39). Together, the graduate student coordinator and I compared and organized our questions into the three proposed stages of the focus group. An excerpt from my journal explains how “we revised and clarified our questions with conscious intent; limiting the scope of our questions while developing questions that would encourage participants to answer openly and honestly” (Excerpt from my journal, March 9th, 2007). As we looked through Krueger and Casey’s (2000) work, I was astonished to see how many different types of questions there were, and wondered how each type of question could be analysed, labelled and then carefully slotted into a space. I realized that good questions, like good art, take time to develop.

As we began the focus group, an uninvited guest visited, wreaking havoc with the intended structure of our questions and the time allowances that were our guidelines, mixing up the three question sets that were on individually separated papers for each section of the focus group. In spite of this disruption, the momentum was flowing nicely when, realizing the gaff halfway through the question period, we moved to a little improvisational questioning and ordering. The uninvited guest forced a delay in starting

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the section with the teaching assistants, and created a rushed feeling that we had to consciously dissipate. In no time at all, the teamwork between the facilitator and I allowed us to refocus the discussion, proving one benefit of having two researchers in attendance.

During the focus groups, I took notes and made recordings that were later transcribed, shared with the evaluation team and analyzed. My process of transcribing was guided by Krueger and Casey's (2000) practice hints. I transcribed the focus groups using Dragon's Naturally Speaking, a voice recognition package that allowed me to listen to the focus group while speaking into a microphone trained to convert my voice into typed text. I hoped that transcribing data in this manner would be faster than more conventional methods. During the process of this evaluation I discovered that transcribing data is a time consuming activity despite the method used, but is nevertheless a valuable aspect intrinsic to the process.

The time spent with the data allowed me to increase my familiarity with the content and review the responses in conjunction with our evaluation questions. Despite my involvement in this process, I remained unsure of how the data would lead to an effective analysis or how an analysis would reconnect with evaluation recommendations. Sending out an e-mail request for guidance allowed the team to consider strategies and bring them to our next meeting. The minutes from our meeting capture this process of helping work through data:

We spent the first two hours of our meeting reviewing and discussing the transcripts of the focus group. I brought down two lap tops and a hard copy of the transcribed focus groups. After transcribing and reading over the transcripts I began coding the focus groups with common themes that I perceived had emerged during my reading. During the revision of the transcripts categories changed to be more encompassing and categories were added when important ideas did not seem to fit the ones already in place. The categories at the end were: Lectures (Yellow),

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Teaching Assistants (Dark Blue), Computers (Light Blue), Course Structure (Green), Assessment for Learning (Pink), Assignments (Red), and Instructor Perceptions (Grey). We reviewed about half of the transcription (about 11 of the 25 pages) and decided although this had generated some very interesting discussion to increase the validity of our findings and the use of our time, it needed to be independently coded by me and another person on our team and then revisited (Meeting minutes, March 22, 2007).

After a brief reading of the transcripts, the evaluation team decided that I should analyze the focus groups according to a set of themes. My analyses were conducted using highlighting functions in Microsoft Word, supplemented by secondary analyses conducted by one of the other evaluators. We compared our themes as well as any new ones that emerged during the process. The other evaluator, a more experienced researcher, took responsibility for writing up our analyses and relating our findings back to the evaluation questions. While analysis of the focus groups was underway, we began considering how the information that we had gleaned here could inform our development and create a survey for teacher candidates, the process of which is explored in Scene Six.

Scene Six: Mixed-Methods Survey of Teacher Candidates

The term “mixed-methods” generated many questions in my mind, as theatre inherently mixes strategies of writing, acting, directing and producing in the creation of a piece. With this image in mind, I pieced together an understanding that mixed-methods in survey research would involve a blend of quantitative and qualitative-styled questions, to create a comprehensive overview of ideas. This understanding was verified during the construction of our survey questions at evaluation meetings and our continued revisions of these questions through e-mail.

The focus of our survey was to engage teacher candidates to think about the Assessment and Evaluation module, while gathering feedback to address the evaluation questions. The evaluation team decided that an online survey would allow us the greatest

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accessibility and diversity of teacher candidates. We hoped that an online administration of a mixed-methods survey would allow the widest possible access for potential teacher candidate responses. I learned that using an online survey tool would also make the analysis of survey data easier to facilitate. Finally, our choice of an online survey was guided by the retroactive timing, and concerns about the placement of this evaluation, as it was conducted toward the end of the teacher candidates' program.

Once again, we began the difficult and complex process of devising questions as a group. We initially drafted and edited our survey questions in a Word document, with each evaluator contributing ideas and the bulk of the edits performed by one evaluator. As mentioned earlier, our draft questions were also shared with the course instructors; in an effort to maintain our participatory approach, and ensure that we were asking questions that would meet their evaluation goals. Developing the survey questions was complicated by consideration of what survey vehicle we would use to administer and manage the survey. A subsequent meeting addresses our progress:

We discussed the links for the survey [getting the course instructors] to approve the survey and the purchase of Survey Monkey for one month. She [the graduate student evaluator] will also seek their ideas on how best to pilot it. At this point, our idea is to create a paper copy of the survey, and e-mail it out randomly to 40 B.Ed e-mail addresses from a list that was generated during the 2006-2007 Assessment and Evaluation Module. It is our goal to have the pilot survey out by March 28th. [After the pilot] students will receive three notifications of the survey. It is hoped that some, if not all data from the survey will be available for analysis by April 20th (Meeting minutes, March 22, 2007).

This excerpt of minutes addresses some of the complexities in developing an online survey in an internal and participatory evaluation.

This experience taught me that although there are many potential benefits there is a lot of work involved in creating, loading and editing a survey. A pilot of the survey was conducted by two members of the evaluation team and willing teacher candidates in a

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high-traffic, student space using paper versions of the online survey. I recognized that pilots are an important exercise because they can result in further edits and clarifications. Without a specific budget for the evaluation, a concern was the cost of procuring software required to conduct and analyse the survey. We were also concerned that an online survey might not help us access a cross section of student voices. This final area of concern identified that initiating data collection through the use of technology limited our respondents to those who felt technologically proficient, or had access to technology during the administration of the survey. Future evaluators may want to consider offering paper versions of the survey as an option for those who feel less technologically proficient, or do not have access to the Internet. Although these concerns were identified, they were not easily addressed during the first year evaluating this module. Future evaluations of this module may more readily be able to address similar concerns.

The student evaluator who took the lead on this aspect of the evaluation printed off the quantitative survey results, and had a cursory examination of the data as well as a discussion about what we were looking for and how the analysis might take place. The evaluation team decided that two different members would take responsibility for analysing the survey data. Neither of us had much experience analysing this form of data, but thought that together we could figure out strategies and probe surface understandings:

It took us longer than we expected! It was an interesting and fun exercise, who ever thought I'd say that with relation to quantitative data... [the other evaluator] should receive an award for patience while we manipulated the mouse in excel and ran a zillion tests: frequencies, Tukey's (I like to call them turkey tests), Chi's (not like the latté version), ANOVA's, and a plethora of Pivot Tables just to name a few! Sometimes other graduate students dropped into our world to see what we were working on or laughing about, some of these people even offered advice about how to run a new test. One of the highlights of our marathon was when someone asked why we working together, as if it were the strangest thing to see graduate students collaborating. (Excerpt from my journal, April 2007).

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We combined our skills in Excel and SPSS to maximise analytic strategies. There was a fair amount of data generated from the survey; some of them proved to be more useful than the rest. At the end of our first round of analysis, we had a solid set of descriptive stats to draw conclusions from, and some excellent graphs to help understand teacher candidates' responses. It was also clear to us that we needed a bit of help to dig deeper into the data. In response to this realization, we utilized the skills of one course instructor more experienced with quantitative data. This process of working together and seeking advice from the course instructor reinforced our participatory approach and extended the context of learning. The other evaluator, a more experienced researcher than I, elaborated on what we had learned together from the survey, combining multiple perspectives from the evaluation team.

Throughout the process of the evaluation, particularly the explorations of the focus group and survey methods, our team developed in many ways: our cohesion as an evaluation team, our skills as researchers, and our clarification of ideas that would answer our evaluation questions. Ultimately, the laborious process of developing, inputting and administering the survey yielded a broad collection of responses from teacher candidates that later proved helpful in clarifying evaluation data that emerged from the focus groups and answering our evaluation questions. I learned that one step leads to another; the data compiled in all of the previously examined scenes informed the evaluation report examined in Scene Seven.

Scene Seven: Construction of an Evaluation Report

The evaluation report is first mentioned in my journal late January 2007, as a scribbled reminder in the margin of notes taken for a meeting. A draft of the evaluation report was not finalized until June 2007. Based on a suggestion from our faculty mentor,

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the evaluation team had very good intentions of writing the evaluation report contemporaneous with the evaluation process.

One of the graduate students who had previous experience participating in collaborative report writing offered to draft an outline of our final report. This team member had experience writing two different evaluation reports, and was familiar with traditional components of evaluation reporting. The draft outline consisted of fairly traditional report sections that were thought to be the most suitable framework for meeting the needs of our clients who work in an academic context. Despite having an outline in place, the work of writing the evaluation report and connecting all of the pieces was actually left until the end of our evaluation.

My only previous experience drafting a report in relation to an evaluative context was during the program evaluation course. Although we did not complete a full-scale evaluation, each student did devise her or his own evaluation plan. The instructor wanted to understand how to help students make a distinction between expectations for the program and their previous courses in high school. This prior evaluative situation reminded me of Alice in Wonderland, because both Alice and the instructor were continually trying to understand and clarify their predicaments. I thought this metaphor would make an ideal format for representing my evaluation plan ideas. When I discussed it with the client however, I found out that this literary framework did not resonate for her, nor did she find it useful for the science-oriented context that she worked in. I learned an important lesson from that experience that I carried into this report writing situation; the needs and expectations of the clients are a priority.

The draft outline provided an excellent opportunity for me to imagine how the pieces of our evaluation process would become a whole, and how a formal report would

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best meet the needs of our clients. Future novices are encouraged to build the report framework early on and ensure that they are meeting their stakeholders' needs. We realized that our stakeholders would most likely need a fully documented report to help explain potential recommendations and changes that might be beyond their control. Our ideas were confirmed in two ways. Initially, we discussed the report outline with the instructors and got their feedback. Subsequently, during the drafting phase of the report we sought greater clarification by e-mail, to uncover what documentation needed inclusion in order to meet their needs.

The drafting of the report involved stitching together pieces from our process, mirroring the process of this thesis, where I have taken ideas from various places and crafted them into a larger body. As we worked on our evaluation report, the content grew and required refining. To help the refining process, a draft report was sent to all members of the evaluation team, with each member invited to revise the report. At our June 5th meeting, we reviewed the conceptual changes and crafted an implementation plan.

Reading through each page of the document collaboratively while discussing possible changes, was a slow and detailed process. The report was quite dense, and not everyone had the opportunity to prepare for our meeting or formulate their comments on our report. In addition, we had no preconceived way of looking at the drafted report; so some of our time together was spent devising a way to work with one another efficiently, intellectually and creatively. Tension grew as we tried to identify who would continue the editing process. The report represented an imposing final hurdle that we had to navigate before concluding the evaluation project.

The ownership of writing each aspect of the report manifested itself through increased tension among the team. With each of the team responsible for different pieces

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of the final report at different times in the evaluation, some people found it difficult to accept suggestions or stay focused. My reflection from this process explains this:

Writing the report was both joyful and difficult; it was nice to see the project closing for this year, to feel free of the process. But sorting through the ideas, marrying the words of others with my own perspective into a drafted outline was tedious. I feel proud of the work that we have accomplished but I feel we have let it go at the end, even as we sit here you can feel that some of the evaluators have moved on. Thankfully we are of similar mind-set to do this report to the best of our abilities and not simply to “get it done”. Residual tension from our last meeting made some of my replies terser than I intend. I am hurt but unsurprised that one person did not read the report. I am thankful that the same person suggested a way to complete the revisions and tighten it up because I don’t know where to go from here (Excerpt from my journal, June 2007).

The final sections of the report, the reference list and the executive summary were completed in the process of editing the body of the report. Ultimately, we devised a satisfactory plan so that each person would make her or his changes to the document and e-mail them to the next team member. Future novices need to consider a plan for writing and revising the report at the outset of the evaluation project.

I learned that a report can serve multiple purposes useful to clients as well as to the evaluation team. It was both a place to consolidate our ideas, and an instrument to convey understandings derived from the evaluative process. The report also provided a learning opportunity for the evaluation team to develop skills and reflect on the process as a whole. Writing the report forced us to elaborate on what we discovered, and become conscious of areas where our analysis was weak. Like other aspects of collaboration, I learned that having multiple people working to create a shared document leads to complexities that need to be navigated and negotiated.

Upon the report’s completion, I had an opportunity to speak individually with each my colleagues about their views of our evaluation process. The set up of these interviews is explored in Scene 8 and the content examined in Act Four.

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Scene Eight: Interviews of Evaluators

The first set of interviews completed as part of our evaluation process, was a learning experience that had a direct impact on my desire to use interview techniques to learn more about the perspectives of my evaluation colleagues. In the first instance, learning occurred from multiple vantage points: the content and context of the interview, the people interviewed, observations of members of the evaluation team “in action”, and my own reflective participation. The possibilities of interviews unveiled themselves to me and I recognized that learning in this context provided an understanding that was not evident when I read about interviews or initially tried to conduct one on my own. My reflections from our early evaluation interviews illustrated that both craft and purpose were to be considered when conducting interviews. Once again, I realized that strong research questions provided a greater chance for powerful responses in helping to explore perceptions and illuminate ideas.

This scene depicts the interviews I conducted with the other members of the evaluation team. It was relevant to talk with the other evaluation members to learn about their experiences and perceptions within our evaluation project. Specifically, the purpose of these interviews was to clarify previous evaluative experiences; question how these experiences shaped their work on our team, and examines how our work may have contributed to personal and professional growth. These interviews were seen as an opportunity to explore future advice they might offer to novice evaluators, or to those working in internal, participatory, collaborative, or developmental settings. The interviews provided a chance to reflect on work accomplished individually and as a team.

As with our previous interviews, I reviewed existing literature for guidance on how to conduct successful interviews. The literature about qualitative interviewing

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suggested numerous styles that illustrate the differences in crafting questions, setting tone and following up with participants (Patton, 2002). Identifying a specific interview style seems similar to planning and participating in an improvisation. You can have an established framework, a set of goals and a tentative plan to follow; ultimately, however, it is the energy created and shared between two participants that will guide the direction of the work. I was hopeful that individual interviews would afford the interviewees the greatest level of confidentiality in expressing their ideas, and allow for the most natural flow of conversation.

When planning my data collection strategies at the outset of this research, I did not fully realise how much the stories of our evaluation team would blend with my own, or how much their experiences and impressions would shape mine. With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had interviewed each team member at the start of the evaluation process and again at the end. In thinking about the post evaluation interviews, I wrote:

I no longer felt the unease associated with wanting to say the right thing, the process of this evaluation has changed everything, I know more and less. We have grown and shared together. Even as I write these questions I picture you answering them, the laughter, the sighs, explanations, backtracking and new questions forming. We have given parts of ourselves in this process in the context of the evaluation and as fellow students. In doing so we moved away from our individualized identities to that of friends. This relationship allows me to relax into a new kind of knowing, when to be quiet, when to probe, when to wait and when to share in return (Excerpt from my journal, May 2007).

At the start of the evaluation process, I was nervous about saying something that would reveal my lack of experience. Having worked closely together for seven months, I was no longer nervous about interviewing my evaluation colleagues, fellow graduate students and new friends. However, I remained curious yet excited to see what new ideas would emerge from our discussion.

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The interviews were held after our final evaluation, meeting in the familiar place where we worked. At the start of the interview, I provided the interviewee with a copy of the questions, so they could begin thinking and making notes about the ideas they wanted to share. I also made notes during the interview, which allowed me greater familiarity when analyzing the data. Our dialogue was recorded digitally as well as on tapes, which were later transcribed and analyzed using Atlas-ti, and a cut and paste method. The two types of analysis were used because each provided me with a different perspective to think about the data. Atlas-ti enabled me to see themes that emerged and patterns amongst the interviewees.

Once these patterns were established, the imported data were printed and cut up so they could form the dialogue now present in Act Four. It was important to me that voices of other evaluators were reflected in this thesis, as a way of recognizing their combined efforts throughout this evaluative learning process that I have scripted. The interviews would help me in strengthening the voices of the other evaluators contributing to this thesis, and allow their views to resonate with mine. Overall, the interviews were a positive experience that drew together many ideas, introduced new perspectives, and provided an opportunity for us to reflect on the journey of our evaluation.

Final Thoughts on the Evaluation Structure

These scenes illustrate the sequence and resulting decisions of our evaluation process, as well as beginning a synthesis of my learning that evolves throughout the final two scenes. The effect of multiple people working collaboratively on evaluative ideas ultimately forged a process and report that provided wide ranging suggestions for improving the module and continuing on the iterative process of course development. As a whole the experiences described in Act Three provide a place for building a strong

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foundation for a novice of one possible process of an evaluation, as well as an understanding about possible components of an evaluation.

My aim was to make explicit the process of our evaluation, and to capture the intricacies in such a way that you, the reader, might feel as though you were there with me and my fellow cast mates. I endeavoured to portray these thoughts as an intermission, for an intermission is typically a time when the audience and those involved with the production take a short break. In our case, the evaluation team has concluded their work for year one of the evaluative process and is taking a break to focus on aspects of their individual graduate programs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Act Four: Falling Action

Considering the path.

We have more information now than we can use, and less knowledge and understanding than we need. Indeed, we seem to collect information because we have the ability to do so, but we are so busy collecting it that we have not devised a means of using it. The true measure of any society is not what it knows but what it does with what it knows.
Warren Bennis

The Drama of Data Collection and Analysis

As I look over notes in my journal and binder, I am struck by the amount of paper this evaluation and my study of it has produced. I carry Bennis' thoughts with me as I sift through amassed evaluation articles, wondering if I have more information that I can possibly use; or the ability to use this information to continue shaping my understanding of the evaluation process in a way that is transferable for others. This evaluation has reaffirmed a need for patience in a process. Novices can learn that scholarship takes time to develop and the process of collecting, sifting, sorting and reconfiguring data has been a route ripe for learning. When considering the path I was reminded of my purpose, to make meaning from the ideas gathered in our evaluation work to shape a narrative that illustrated my own learning, but more importantly, helped to inform others.

In a Five-Act play structure, Act Four generally depicts the falling action, by exploring the unravelling plot and characters. To better understand learning throughout the progression of the evaluation, I opted to collect additional data. Referred to in Scene Eight, these were collected in the form of reflective interviews with my evaluation colleagues. The unravelling of Act Four presents a synthesis of learning, and provides an opportunity to blend the perspectives of other evaluators with my own. This structure

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allowed me to present a more holistic view, by allowing the chorus of our voices to overlap. Dialogue crafted and presented here reveals emerging understanding about evaluative work that can contribute to the growth of future novice evaluators by sharing reflections on the evaluation process.

The Structure of this Act

Act Four also signifies an opportunity to further explore the theatrical structure borrowed for this thesis, by fusing together dramatic elements with an evaluator-researcher perspective, illustrated in three playlets. A playlet is a short play shaped around a central theme; it offers readers a break from traditional narrative structure and invites them to hear, as well as to see, the dialogue. To enable easier understanding for the reader, the three playlets are organized around three themes explored earlier in this thesis: the concept of an internal evaluator, a paradigm of participatory and collaborative ways of working, and finally, aspects of professional and personal growth.

Before each playlet there is a short introduction, followed by the playlet dialogue and then my analysis. Analyses following the playlets summarise my perspective on the data, and make suggestions for future thinking. Although playlets might be considered an unusual form for presenting data, displaying the information in this manner encourages readers to test the veracity of my analysis. Playlets are crafted by isolating, as much as possible, discrete comments related to each of the three themes. There are, at times, overlap and interconnectivity among the ideas that are evident in the analysis. Like the evaluation team's multidimensional research, presenting data marrying narrative and dialogue enriched my learning process by providing an opportunity to work through ideas again, thus helping me make explicit what I had learned. Future novices involved in the writing up of qualitative research will want to consider multiple ways of presenting their

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data and select one that enhances understanding. In this case, readers are invited to draw their own meanings. In keeping with the goal of this text, I wanted to script a process that would engage and invite readers to form their own understandings.

At the outset of this thesis, I touched on Bruner's (1996) idea of multiple ways of making meaning. Evaluation and research have been blended to build on Bruner's established doctrine and evoke a new methodology, incorporating aesthetic ways to think about evaluation and research findings. Act Four takes this process one step further, by offering several choices: a reader might choose to read through the Act in its entirety, might prefer to read the dialogue only, or instead might wish to read only the analysis. In whichever way Act Four is approached, the picture of our evaluation learning by offering additional viewpoints of the evaluation process within a dramatic framework is completed.

Many educators, researchers and evaluators are looking for new ways to make material engaging to their readers, and find ways to have their ideas appeal to a wider audience (Patton, 2002). It is possible that these playlets will engage some readers in a new way, because they present detailed data creatively while honouring the confidentiality of the participants. Act Four candidly reveals perspectives of the graduate student evaluators and how their learning might inform future novice, internal, developmental, participatory, or collaborative evaluators.

Crafting the Playlets

The playlets were crafted by piecing together data in the form of actual phrases and ideas from the interviews with my evaluation colleagues. It was important that we be able to speak openly during the interviews and that I could truthfully represent the ideas without disclosing the individual speakers. For this reason, I have borrowed three

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characters from literature to “cast” the playlets. Although this dialogue represents discussions conducted with three evaluators and myself as the interviewer, dialogue occurs in the following playlets using only three characters. The intentional omission of one voice is meant to limit potential hypothesizing about who each character might represent. In casting the playlets, I have artfully reconfigured the speakers and order of ideas, while maintaining the original wording of the interviewees.

The characters depicted in the playlets were selected because of their symbolic identities. The interviewer is represented by the character of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd created by Coelho (1988), who asked questions throughout his fabled journey. Participant responses were grouped into two main characters, Malvolio, a somewhat pessimistic character from Shakespeare’s (1998) *Twelfth Night* and Pangloss, a euphorically positive character from Voltaire’s (1977) *Candide*. Responses from me and the interviewees are couched in the dialogue among Santiago, Malvolio and Pangloss. This choice of dialogue allows for the authenticity of the participants’ voices, while also respecting their need for confidentiality.

The somewhat simplistic symbolizations of these characters are not meant to detract from the depth of the original authors’ works. Rather, the characters’ discussion provides a way of grouping ideas and considering the dialogue. Earlier, I mentioned that this thesis was like the work of a bricoleur; in the same manner that I have stitched many ideas from inside and outside traditional academia and joined the past with the present, this thesis stitches the real with the imaginary, the literal world with abstract. Using characters from literature enriches this script, is consistent with the narrative strategies and extends the theatrical analogy used in this thesis.

Considering the path.

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*Words of a poem should be glass
But glass so simple-subtle its shape
Is nothing but the shape of what it holds.*

*A glass spun for itself is empty,
Brittle, at best Venetian trinket.
Embossed glass hides the poem or its absence.*

*Words should be looked through, should be windows.
The best words were invisible.
The poem is the thing the poet thinks.*

*If the impossible were not,
And if the glass, only the glass,
Could be removed, the poem would remain.
“Glass” by Robert Francis*

An Introduction to Playlet One: The Concept of Internal Evaluation

As alluded to above by Francis, conducting an evaluation within an Assessment and Evaluation Group may be akin to reading a poem about the art of writing poetry. Novices can find this an encouraging framework for graduate student evaluator/researchers to learn about evaluation practice while working in a community that advocates for the potential purposes and uses of evaluation.

At the outset of this research, I envisioned that an internal evaluation was quite distinct from an external one. In fact, I was reminded of my initial foray into the defining characteristics of participatory and collaborative evaluations, where distinguishing characteristics were present more in theory than in practice. Distinctions and categorizations that appear rigid from a theoretical standpoint often are time or context specific. For example, Patton (1997) believes that evaluations can be internal, external or a hybrid of models. The notion of hybrid models creates infinite possibilities for finding ways to identify and define your method of researching and evaluating. Our effort was most certainly an internal evaluation, and bore several hallmarks of Love's (1983) ideas: it situated graduate students and novice evaluators within their faculties of study for an

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extended commitment, in an environment where they had previous experience, as well as an ongoing relationship with mentors who explicitly fostered, supported and developed evaluative inquiry.

As with any social organization, tensions emerged during the process of our evaluation. It is likely that pressures will arise whether an evaluation is of an external, internal, or hybrid nature. Some of the tensions occurred as a result of: poor communication, conflicting egos, lack of flexibility, disparity in evaluation and individual priorities, or simply a lack of understanding. Love (1983) introduced some complexities faced by internal evaluators: role definition, power struggles and issues of use. By acknowledging the types of struggles and obstacles an evaluation might come up novices and those who work with them can engage in proactive problem solving.

During interviews conducted with the evaluation team, people expressed their perceptions about some of the rewards and challenges they had experienced. Despite Love's theoretical guidance the complexities our team encountered were unanticipated, and for the most part, unacknowledged. In reflection, I see that everyone in the group worked hard to maintain a peaceful and productive working relationship. As these concerns surfaced during interviews, it was particularly important to speak openly with evaluation team members and ensure ideas from our conversations were confidential. The first playlet explores perceptions my evaluation colleagues held regarding the influence of the "internal aspect" of our evaluation. This evaluation experience taught me that working internally made a difference to our work in ways that were both positive and challenging.

Playlet One: Internal Evaluations as a Way of Working

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A small spot light brightens on an otherwise blackened stage. two people are seated at a rectangular table: Santiago is scribbling notes and glancing at his watch, while Pangloss works contentedly on a laptop.

Santiago: Do you think we should get started?

Pangloss: It's up to you, but I am in no hurry, we can wait if you'd like.

Santiago: *[Nods and moves to check the tape recording device]* Today is June 6th, this recording marks the reflective interviews with the evaluation team at the conclusion of the Prof 150/155 evaluation project. *[Rewinds tape and plays a section back]*

Pangloss: So, you're all set. I am looking forward to this discussion.

Malvolio arrives from stage left, in a hurried and frenzied fashion, arms loaded.

Malvolio: Sorry I'm late; I had to run errands ... great lunch!

Santiago: Help yourself. We jokingly identified that food played an important role in our process, so the snacks are meant to thank you for coming and provide fuel as we begin our discussion. Let's get started by thinking about the internal aspect of the evaluation. How do you think this evaluation may have been shaped differently than your previous experiences, because we were working from an internal perspective?

Pangloss: One thing that seems to come out of internal evaluations is that, because you're working in a context where you're very familiar, there are two areas that might be different than when doing an external evaluation. First, you already have a very deep sense of what that program's about, so you bring a lot of assumptions to it in terms of what needs to be changed. Whereas, when you're going into an external evaluation, you don't know what it is, how it is enacted, or how it is received by the clients. With internal evaluations you have a better sense of that already, so I think that sort of colours your judgement about the findings, it certainly contributes to a different interpretation, I think.

Malvolio: When you are an external evaluator you are always worried about what you are missing, at times you feel like a burden and it can have a very uncomfortable feel. There is a big time commitment and a lot of complexities with both internal and external evaluations. The distinction between internal and

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external is difficult; evaluation is always a sensitive undertaking. You are almost privileged in an internal evaluation, because you know the politics that you are dealing with, whereas in an external evaluation, you have to figure out and negotiate the context.

Pangloss: There are always problems, about people not seeing eye-to-eye on things. I think the discussions we had were more complex than my previous experiences. They were more interesting and engaging, so much more theoretical. It is because of who we are, and where we are, and where we're heading because of this interest in evaluation. I remember, we had some interesting discussions about collaborative and participatory terms, the rationale of developmental evaluations, and about research and evaluation. These discussions are very fulfilling for me. And this is a positive thing, which I did not experience in other evaluations.

Malvolio: On the other hand, in other evaluations I felt there was a more genuine interest in what was happening, too. It wasn't manufactured here, but a big piece of it was competing interests, because people wanted to use pieces of it for their own interests.

Pangloss: In a way, this was a positive thing, because they invested a lot in what they were doing.

Malvolio: This is part of the internal influence, to have a different layer of people. It's not just an evaluation. It's fulfilling course requirements.

Pangloss: I enjoyed it, because I enjoy the process, I enjoy working and talking.

Malvolio: If we had just listened to the reflections of the teaching assistants and instructors, we would have addressed a lot of changes. And my sense is that the changes were already happening regardless of the evaluation.

Pangloss: I agree. The most powerful outcomes occur during the evaluation process, not at the end. As you are asking questions, ideas form. As we went along and had discussions and interviews, they definitely influenced the changes that needed to be made. Everyone shared their opinion.

Malvolio: Well that is just great, but we are not basing our recommendations on opinions of what needs to be done, the recommendations are based on the findings.

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Pangloss: We brought a lot of ideas to the table with us, from our previous experiences. But a problem that happens when people just work with what they know is that there is a lot of thinking and talking but not a lot of action. This evaluation has developed tools that we can have ready for implementation with minor edits for the fall. That is hugely important. I think that we have some important goals that can be distilled for the second year of this evaluation project. These goals were validated by the evaluation. Also, the evaluation has helped us to prioritize more easily, in terms of what absolutely has to be done to the website, what can not wait. This evaluation has helped us think of future directions.

Santiago: These are interesting comments about internal evaluation. Thank you!

An Analysis of Playlet One: Our Internal Evaluation Experience

Ideas emerged in the interviews that confirmed the celebrations and challenges referred to by Love (1983) and Patton (1997). As was made clear in the course of these interviews, evaluation is always a charged practice. It involves people, change and valuing; a mix of ideas that frequently leads to some discomfort. This playlet connected ideas from different interviews, to examine aspects of participating in an internal evaluation.

There were many rewarding aspects to working in an internal capacity. At the most basic level, it allowed us greater ease in coordinating and finding space for meetings. As documented in the playlet, the meetings and discussions contained therein provided rich experiences for learning. Learning emerged during meetings, conversations, acts of data collection or analyses, and led to shared revising of ideas or assumptions. Trevisan (2004) identified that by “making tacit knowledge explicit and conveying ideas through verbal communications” we can move to a new place of understanding (p. 261). The interviews confirmed my impression that working in an internal capacity provided us

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with a conduit for learning about the evaluation process. The playlet's characters commented on the stimulating discussions that took place. Our ongoing dialogue was enriched by a shared interest in this evaluation project, as well as the complexity and theory of evaluation as a research domain. Learning from conversation is a lesson for novices; the message from the playlet and our experiences was to attend closely and deliberately to the meanings embedded in the dialogue that surrounds you.

John-Steiner (2000) advises that “working together productively toward shared goals is a human activity unique and valuable in its contributions to individual and social well being” (p. xi). As this playlet, and to a larger extent, this thesis reveals, the experience of participating on this internal team affected each of us uniquely. The internal context of our evaluation and the commitment we shared in conducting this evaluation gave us access to information and understandings that would have taken much more time to amass were we instead individual, external evaluators working on this project. Novices and those who work with them can remember that it is important to share information that people bring with them to the evaluation, and find ways to examine these data. Novices will want to honour what they know, shape thoughtful evaluation questions and collect data to learn how well their ideas match the data collected.

Pangloss identified that there are always problems; one of the challenging aspects of this evaluation was dealing with tensions when they arose. Even within a team that had built up trust and communication, it proved difficult to express concerns when they arose. Our novice status might have made it even more difficult, as we lacked the experience to judge how our evaluation was progressing, or how the team was working in a broader framework. Although our evaluation went smoothly overall, and we completed our project within the necessary time, there were some tension-filled meetings. Patton (1997)

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indicated that “one of the most fundamental issues in considering the role of the evaluator is the location of the evaluator inside or outside the program and organization being evaluated” (p. 138). The tension experienced at these meetings was due to challenges the group faced as well as our combined lack of experience dealing with such situations within a collaborative evaluative framework.

Working internally necessitates attentiveness to personal relationships and an awareness of the institutional culture. The negative implications of internal evaluations may have been most evident in the things that did not get recorded during our interview; the discussions that were not part of this formal data collection. If a discussion was heading to a place that the interviewee felt uncomfortable with, we simply turned off the recorder. It may be in such unrecorded instances that people more openly expressed their concern about the implications of internal evaluations in the organizational structure where we work. Two of the main concerns revealed in this playlet were the question of our genuine interest in the evaluation itself and the relationship between prior knowledge and evaluation findings. Novice evaluators can bear in mind that although reflective conversations have the potential to reveal negative aspects, people should always respect professional and personal relationships.

Assumptions and Expectations in Internal Evaluations

Two aspects of internal evaluations considered in the dialogue were the explicit and implicit assumptions and expectations people bring with them. Pangloss talked about internal work as affording a deeper understanding of the evaluative environment; this enhanced understanding can work as an advantage as well as a disadvantage. For example, the known can be enhanced by understanding more about people, their motivations, and prior social or political biases; however, it can also be limiting, because

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the context might be pre-determined in a way that restricts the emergence of new ideas or experimentation with existing ones. In this case, most of us had a pretty deep understanding of the course and a fairly clear idea of what areas needed clarification to make improvements for the next iteration. As Malvolio pointed out, having insight to an internal organization can potentially lead to lack of distance, which might result in a skewed view of what needs are to be addressed. Evaluators need to be aware of their biases, and ensure that these biases are not inadvertently influencing the shaping of evaluation questions, collection or analyses of the actual data.

Working as an extension of the graduate student community and the Assessment and Evaluation Group also provided us with “in-house” mentors to help us with all aspects of the evaluation. This collegial network extended beyond the bounds of this evaluation, contributing to the fruitful development of ideas and relationships. These support systems can provide assistance for novices as they hone their skills and develop their ability to cope and manage contingencies (Benner, 1984). During this evaluation, as we expanded our knowledge and practical skills, there was movement along the novice to expert continuum. Our previous personal and professional experiences, coupled with lessons learned as graduate students, helped us to understand institutional features during the early shaping of the evaluation questions. For example, we were able to discern that there were some aspects of the module that were beyond the control of the course instructors or administrator. As indicated in the playlet, it was important for us to allow our experiences and knowledge to guide us, while staying focused on the evaluation questions and data.

Clarification of Purpose and Role in Internal Evaluations

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When Malvolio talked about the layering of people, he referred to a web-like structure that pulls together evaluators who are also graduate students, stakeholders who are also our supervisors and faculty who are our professors. These interconnections drew us together in ways that enhanced and bound our practice. Patton (1997) was concerned with evaluation use; in anticipation of increased use he explored themes related to internal evaluations and highlighted the need for people to clearly define their roles. Our post-evaluation discussions illuminated the need for all evaluators, especially novices, to consider the implications of purpose and roles, such as: composition of the team, clarification of roles, and negotiation of power relationships as well as the delegation of work. The idea of role clarification is dealt with further in the second playlet, which investigates participatory and collaborative ways of working.

We did not clearly delineate purpose and roles at the outset of our evaluation, and thus clarification of these factors became an ongoing process. We negotiated what pieces each evaluator would take responsibility for, and how our collaborative approach would shape the work as the evaluation progressed. This serendipitous route allowed us to explore multiple avenues before committing ourselves to an idea, but proved time consuming and may not have been as transparent or equitable as desired. It was fortunate that some of the data collected and analyzed as part of the evaluation could also be used as pieces of graduate coursework. The dual nature of the data collection for coursework and evaluation purposes helped ensure a high quality of analysis. Despite our collaborative approach, it also meant that the bulk of the analysis itself as well as the work involved with writing up the analysis may have been inequitably delegated.

Novices may want to be proactive in trying to determine what is expected of them, and offer to undertake tasks or learning opportunities. Alternatively, facilitators may

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choose to help direct clarification of the purpose and role of the evaluation while ensuring that there is a shared vision within the evaluation team about task assignments., This evaluation has demonstrated that novices, in spite of their lack of experience, benefit from taking an active role in the process; by doing so, they can expect to learn more about themselves, team members, the evaluation project, evaluation theory and the institution.

Work delegation reveals the complexities inherent in thinking about interests and motivation in internal evaluations. One of the tensions identified in the playlet was the question of genuine interests amidst the evaluators, who had additional responsibilities. Genuine interest can be denoted by the fact that at the concluding stages of our project, when people were the most exhausted from the effort required as well as their other responsibilities, they were still committed to making a good effort with the evaluation report. Rogers and Williams (2006) referred to this as “personal mastery”, because it engages people by stimulating their curiosity and ambition. The work submitted at the end of the project was something that each of the graduate students took ownership of and felt pride in. Overall, working in an internal context provided a situation for developing a community where specified, yet flexible purposes and roles within the specified project could enrich other aspects of the learning journey.

Time and Relevance in Internal Evaluations

Both internal and external evaluations require a substantial investment of time and effort. Like the characters in the playlet, all of the interviewees commented on the amount of time the evaluation project required. There are multiple reasons that the evaluation process may have taken more time than necessary. Due to my novice level of experience, it is unclear to me whether time is a factor in all evaluations, or whether it was simply the fact that we viewed ourselves largely as novices. Our time commitment was also

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influenced because of our approach as internal evaluators and our efforts to work collaboratively. Rogers and Williams (2006) indicate that there are two overall challenges for practice improvement and organizational learning that are relevant to our thinking about internal evaluations; “generating information about performance that is both timely and relevant; addressing the difficulty of people taking in information that does not match their assumptions” (p.77). Whatever the combination of factors, the amount of time required designing, executing and following up this evaluation caused tension for members of the evaluation team. However, this same commitment also created a unique learning experience, deepening of relationships and hopefully, a useful product. Novices can anticipate that a deep commitment is required when engaging in an evaluation project. Those who work with novices can help by making suggestions to ensure efficient use of time and guidelines for evaluation timeliness.

Our experiences were deepened because the evaluation required a commitment of at least one term. Clifford and Sherman (1983) stated that a time commitment is essential in an internal evaluation. During our evaluation process, the team got to know one another much better, by working with the course instructors and administrator. As a result, our knowledge of the people and processes within the institution was deepened.

A final consideration about timing is raised when thinking about the relevance of our internal evaluation; the evaluation aimed to make recommendations that would benefit modifications of the module before fall 2008. Malvolio and Pangloss both addressed the need for relevance and future implications of the evaluation findings. Although our final report was in advance of this deadline, modifications to the module had begun taking place, creating some ambiguity in the necessity of the evaluation findings and recommendations. Although the ongoing nature of this evaluation was

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crucial to our learning, some members of the evaluation team have questioned the relevance of our report in light of the changes already taking place. The immediacy of changes contradicted one of Patton's (1997) themes, which suggests internal evaluators are frequently not part of decision-making processes and therefore have little ability to help situate the evaluation for use. In our evaluation, new plans, such as the creation of an Assessment and Evaluation Learning Lab, were launched because of the ongoing nature of the evaluation. Future commitments from members of the evaluation team and a willingness to be involved in subsequent evaluations of this module are a testament to the richness of learning through involvement in internal projects, and an overall verification of the positive aspects of this learning process.

Considering the path.

*Practical wisdom is only to be learned in the school of experience.
Precepts and instruction are useful so far as they go, but, without the
discipline of real life, they remain of the nature of theory only.
Samuel Smiles*

*We know more than we can tell.
Polanyi*

An Introduction to Playlet Two:

Experience and Intent in Participatory and Collaborative Evaluations

Working together on a collaborative evaluation, which endeavoured to engage people in a participatory manner, was an invitation to consider our perceptions of these words and how they played out in this evaluative context. Smiles and Polanyi remind us that perceptions and theory need to be tested in real life; but even then, we are not always able to convey our understanding. Experience and intent intersected in our work, which

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facilitated a collaborative environment amongst the evaluators, and created a participatory setting for the other people involved.

When I considered that we would be working in participatory and collaborative ways, my initial goals were rather lofty. I imagined extensive consultation and team work during all phases of the evaluation. I hoped this environment would permit the exploration of the creative strategies I previously learned from the American Evaluation Association 2006, Pre-Conference collaborative and participatory workshops led by Jean King and Rita O'Sullivan. My initial vision was that the evaluation team and stakeholders would work together regularly at meetings, during all phases of the evaluation. I envisioned dialogue that would lead to data collection, data that would lead to clear findings and findings that would result in future changes to the module content and structure. While all of these things ultimately happened, none of it was as linear as my original perception hoped it would be.

We had stimulating and ongoing dialogue amongst evaluation team members and stakeholders. However, involvement of the faculty as stakeholders was primarily limited to the beginning of the process. Reduction of the formal contact between the evaluators and stakeholders was a mutually acceptable trend. Once the evaluation framework was established the faculty acted as mentors and were consulted on a needs basis during the data collection and analysis phase of the project. The evaluation team may have placed more emphasis on the evaluation than the stakeholders believed necessary.

The following playlet illustrates discussions about our goal to work in a collaborative way and create an evaluation that was participatory in nature. Wilson (1996) suggested that learning is an ongoing cognitive process; by engaging in the collaborative process, ideas can be internalized, experimented with or adapted as they develop. Playlet

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Two reveals our experiences within the collaborative process, for the purpose of understanding how we developed our working relationships, how we might engage in collaborative and participatory processes differently in the future and what recommendations we can make based on our experiences.

Playlet Two: Learning about Participatory and Collaborative Evaluations

The scene opens in the middle of a discussion among Santiago, Malvolio and Pangloss.

Santiago: Can you begin by telling me how you viewed the collaborative process at the start of our evaluation project?

Pangloss: Collaboration is where everyone is learning from each other, it is greater than the sum of the parts.

Malvolio: We're all at a point where we can sit around and talk about things; we obviously weren't as comfortable at the start as we were today. I think that a lot of collaboration just takes time to emerge by itself, to see different people and their different attitudes and perspectives on things.

Pangloss: I know that people took opportunities to learn from one another.

Malvolio: We got into the habit and that was a good thing, like we met every Tuesday, people know that is the time reserved for the evaluation, there's a commitment to it.

Pangloss: I think one of the key elements of a good working group, in any respect, you need to value one another and respect their knowledge, and what they bring to it. I think for our instance, when we first started to say what our experience was in evaluation. That was a way of building that respect saying that okay here we are, while we all identify as novices, we do bring something to the table, we do bring some diversity and you know, we can capitalize on that in our discussion. If you're working with someone who thinks very similarly, your product is going to be similar. Whereas, when you're working with people that have diverse backgrounds, it may be harder to gain that respect and to see their perspective, but the product will likely be better if you can achieve that respect.

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Santiago: How can novices work and learn in a collaborative environment?

Malvolio: Novices can learn from this work because it underlies the need for leadership and guidance. Working with people is individual, and certain types of people you have to work with in a particular way, with other types and at other times you work in a different way.

Pangloss: A successful collaborator, novice or expert is able to adapt to different contexts while making sure that their ideas and perspective are being recognised. When you're asking someone to voice their opinion you've got to feel comfortable doing that to make the project better.

Santiago: Were there aspects of our collaborative process that stood out for you?

Malvolio: We had to remind each other that this was a collaborative process, that we needed to come together at a meeting, sure we can do some things apart and we tried, I think we had a good balance between communicating online, through e-mail and working in pairs or groups.

Pangloss: I think we did a good job of that, don't you think?

Malvolio: Part of our problem was our process. Collaboration does not mean together in a room within four walls. That is a standard conceptualization, but it is not a necessary component. I see it with a wider perspective. I raised this issue with other instances, I was saying, this is not the way, we need to find more effective ways of working. Let's not waste our time.

Pangloss: This is the true nature of participatory and collaborative, it places demands on people's time and schedules and this came through, I think people were getting tired, but this is a natural outcome of collaborative work. We were bridging knowledge, and we were successful at doing that because we could speak from our experiences.

Malvolio: I think there are some tasks that need to get done, so you can jigsaw; you need to prioritize what you will negotiate and what you will get done. The idea would be to say, okay so-and-so will work on the qualitative and so-and-so will work on the quantitative; therefore for the next meeting, each pair needs to draft the recommendations for each. Then people still work individually and send out what they discover, people review them and add to it. That is productive collaboration in my view.

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Pangloss: There are levels of collaboration, people go off to do things, that is still collaborating you are still bringing it together. It was an interesting structure we had, perhaps because we are novice evaluators. Participatory and collaborative work is a spectrum; I think for us, this was a pretty good level of collaboration.

Malvolio: There is always an option for greater collaboration, just like there was an option for greater participatory influence. If we are going to carry this out again next year, we need to look at the areas we were competent at and areas we need some more work.

Santiago: What things could we do differently to facilitate a more collaborative or participatory process in the future?

Pangloss: There may have been a mismatch between where we started the evaluation and where the evaluation already was. In a sense we already had a big experience with the module, we knew a lot about it.

Malvolio: I really believe as a team we brought a nice combination of strengths to the table, but these may not have been leveraged to their full potential.

Pangloss: I think people respected working in a non-threatening way. People were not competing with each other and that was a good thing, we weren't trying to impress anyone.

Santiago: How are roles shaped in the collaborative process?

Malvolio: People interpret the role of facilitator, coordinator and leader in different ways. It is important to clarify how the team and individual conceptualize the role of leader, facilitator or coordinator. We could have negotiated this as a team more explicitly. There is always an issue of should there be a leader and does the leader have power?

Pangloss: I think this is where the facilitator role comes in, you listen and make sure things are working well, when you get to a point where things are getting uncomfortable you intervene, remember we are working together at this.

Malvolio: We did not have a dominating leader in the group, which isn't always a bad thing. But, the facilitator needs to put organization to the process in a way that still allows for people to share their diverse perspectives. It takes a lot of

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time. If you are going to be investing so much time and work into it, you want to feel the results are going to matter and the work is going to influence something.

Pangloss: If we go back to one of the goals of the evaluation, it was to develop evaluation capacity, right? I would give people the opportunity to see if they are comfortable working collaboratively before I assume that they are. But in our case, we didn't have much of a choice.

Santiago: What did this experience teach you about working collaboratively?

Malvolio: I learned that I really like agendas for meetings, they should be made collaboratively, but there should be an agenda, with time allowances that need to be followed. Especially as we are intellectuals, we can pontificate for hours!

Pangloss: For example, this meeting was planned for a long time, and people came unprepared. People need to remain committed, there should be guidelines.

Malvolio: It has brought to light issues about how work gets delegated and how I react to the work being delegated, how I negotiate work load. The idea of working collaboratively on tasks is very time consuming and does not always result in a better quality. It is often better if one person takes care of something and sends it out for others to comment on.

Pangloss: The evaluation and these interviews have helped me to think about the conceptualization of organizing a team.

Santiago: Thank you for sharing your ideas.

An Analysis of Playlet Two: Characteristics of our Collaborative Process

Our discussion illustrated that, as we worked together; we drew upon elements of our previous experiences and forged a schema for understanding our collaboration in an evaluative experience. We learned more and more from one another as our comfort with working together increased; the group's combined strengths allowed the diversity of our experiences to push boundaries in developing a thorough evaluation. Barone (2001) identified that growth occurs when action leads to fusion, as a result of new experiences.

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We drew on the strengths of one another, blending our roles and expertise while reconfiguring our internal images to fit this evaluative context. Rather than focusing on the differences of our past experiences or our viewpoints, we engaged in a process that honoured multiple perspectives.

Our collaborative process was not fixed; it evolved throughout this project and will continue to evolve in future experiences. Malvolio's comment about our blended way of working, which included face to face and emailing one another depicts our fluid notion of collaboration. Shulha and Wilson (2003) identified some of the activities involved in collaboration, including: risk taking, testing out ideas, playfulness, expressing belief in another, challenging and valuing other collaborators. Looking back over our dialogue and the images collected from our meetings, I can recall feeling tentative, and then growth in confidence and the ability to articulate ideas; all of which lead to shared laughter.

Not everyone enjoys working in person-to-person collaboration; collaborative work requires negotiating with diverse personalities towards a common goal. Boden (1991) outlined some criteria for success in collaborative work:

It is most successful when you meet regularly and set realistic but flexible deadlines. Basic conditions for success include respecting each other, not getting one's ego too involved, being willing to give and take constructive criticism without being too defensive, not worrying about an exact division of labour, being willing to explore topics that may not be of primary interest, and being willing to keep going even in the face of obstacles. (p. 35)

In the playlet, team members indicated that they valued having regular agreed-upon time for evaluation work. This commitment to meet regularly provided a framework for trust and respect to flourish. Like communication, these virtues were built over time as people got to know one another better. Pangloss talked about deepening relationships as our group worked together; meaningful respect involves valuing our diverse backgrounds,

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sharing perspectives and listening to others. Even with time set aside and growing respect for our various understandings of how to work together effectively and efficiently, multiple meanings of collaboration, combined with our novice experiences in this form of inquiry to create challenges. Novices can expect these challenges and view them as learning opportunities.

A collaborative evaluation approach does not specify how the team will orchestrate the evaluation components; instead, a collaborative approach is reflected in their decision making strategies. Levin (1993) indicated that collaborative evaluation involves a team approach to evaluation planning and implementation. Although more is not necessarily always better, as the playlet indicates, we could have been more collaborative during some of our evaluation activities; including the planning of meetings and clarifying goals for the evaluation. Future evaluation meetings seemed to be hastily planned; we would have benefited from advanced planning and a suggested time structure. This playlet recognizes that such planning would have contributed to the “big picture” and could have informed the development of the overall evaluation as well as our novice understanding.

One task where greater collaboration could have been usefully implemented was in the drafting and editing of our evaluation report. We could have better negotiated the work load and planned for revisions in advance of the report. In fairness to all of us, it was difficult to anticipate the amount of work that would be involved in writing an evaluation report for stakeholders who are part of an academic audience, given our inherent lack of experience. Writing the report generated questions about the value of formal reports. Novices need to recognize that the process and outcomes, like those of a performance art, are never the same twice.

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Novices and the Collaborative Process

Overall, I learned that working in collaboration requires skills and finesse, patience, perseverance and a willingness or desire to be part of the collaborative process. We travelled a long way since our first meeting, where we sat collegially as fellow graduate students with our faculty advisor. Our meetings and reflective discussions were tacitly moving to the heart of the matter: what is collaboration, what does it mean to you, and how does it work? Like Bruner (1986), I believe that multiple realities are possible, and that meaning and veracity are created, not discovered. Although we traversed through the evaluation, our idea about the notion of collaboration remained indefinite. We created meaning by working collaboratively, but at the end of the process, we still had differences of opinion about what it meant to work in this manner, how this can be done effectively and efficiently, and the benefits for individuals involved. Every iteration of collaborative research leads to clarification of how to structure this work most effectively for all involved. Future work together will help to define possible collaborative ways of working in evaluative environments. Novices must remember that planning and negotiation that recognizes multiple experiences and preferred styles of working can help to facilitate positive communication amongst the evaluation team.

Discoveries and Learning from Collaborative Work

This evaluation provided novice evaluators at varying stages of the continuum an opportunity to work together, while developing problem solving skills, protocol development skills, data collection ability of a variety of forms, and general report writing ability. Trevisan (2004) reviewed literature about practical training in evaluation, and concluded “that for many non-technical issues practical experience may be the only way for students to learn” (p. 256). Based on our experiences, I suggest that working

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collaboratively on “real projects” has the potential for deep learning that enriches individuals, groups and even organizations. Our work together has provided us with a compilation of theoretical understanding, practical experiences and questions about evaluation and research that we can pursue further individually or as a group. This work also stimulated ideas about ways to improve work in collaborative evaluations.

One aspect we learned was the value of identifying and clarifying role expectations for ourselves and others at the outset of our evaluation; this may have enhanced our overall communications and expectations. Although we had a clearly identified coordinator for our evaluation team, we did not have clearly defined roles. In our case, a clearly defined role would have made an explanation available to others about how they viewed their role on the team, and what aspects of the evaluation that role might have involved. The complications of language may have prohibited a clear understanding of what each person’s role entailed, but the discussion would likely have clarified what aspects each person would have been responsible for. Furthermore, this type of clarification on an ongoing basis may have created a forum for establishing if the evaluators’ needs were being met. Novices are reminded that there is an inherent need for the delineation of responsibilities and clarity in collaborative work.

In the playlet, Malvolio discussed the importance of an agenda as a way of working together; had this need been addressed earlier, it might have made positive changes to our evaluation process. We discovered that teams need to be organized and have an overview of the whole process, so that work can be fairly delegated and time strategically planned for. As novices working on this process we were conceptualizing and implementing strategies throughout the process. More experience might have

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equipped us with the foresight to engage in proactive problem solving that would have allowed us to address or acknowledge potential struggles.

We learned that leadership, although essential, can be tricky to navigate. On one hand, a leader must act as the facilitator to maintain a balance of power and encourage reciprocity of ideas. This open style of leadership must balance maintaining a clear vision and goal of the evaluation priorities. Clear leadership helps keep the team on task by setting goals, agendas and deadlines for work. Capable leaders provide guidance and direction, while continuing to maintain the evaluation's momentum. The booklet discussed in Act Three, used in the planning stages of the evaluation process, provided organizational strategies and direction that helped to generate evaluation momentum. In addition, the playlet identified the deepening respect shared by members of our team. This respect led to deepening personal and professional relationships, and may have been an indicator of leadership that fostered a positive evaluative environment.

Through our work we discovered the value of improvisation and reinvention of the way we worked together and negotiated tasks. The process unfurled itself in such a way as to change directions, allowing us to continually adapt and organize new information and ideas as part of the overall process. These ongoing interpretations involved integrating our individual understandings of people with whom we shared a context (Bateson, 1990). Neigher and Metlay (1983) used an interesting analogy linking the framework of organizing complex social systems to conducting an orchestra. They suggested that "talented musicians, even exceptionally talented soloists, are not always good conductors. In addition to musical ability, a good conductor must have the skills necessary to mold individual talent into a cohesive musical whole" (p. 48). Although we had an evaluation coordinator, our meetings did not have a distinguished conductor. In

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every sense of the word, our work was conducted collaboratively. Each member of the team had the same opportunity to share and contribute to the leadership and direction of our work. Some people enjoy, and even prefer working this way. Novices and those who work with them can remember that everyone has a different perspective about the “best” way to work; some people like the freedom of working with a set script, while others prefer a more overt style of leadership.

The interviews conducted at the end of the evaluation project affirm the value of reflection. This thesis is the opportunity that Malvolio requested at the end of the playlet; a chance to re-examine what aspect of the process worked well for us and what areas we need to work on further. Ultimately, we discovered that working in collaboration helped us learn in many different ways. We formed a deeper understanding of the evaluation process, how practice and theory can shape our work, and uncovered possibilities for future work together. In addition, we learned about things outside of the evaluation, more about our academic culture, the structure of the organization we are learning in and especially, more about ourselves.

This researcher approached collaborative work with anticipation of creative possibilities. Collaboration unfolded as a dynamic experience that allowed us to learn from one another in this evaluative context. Rogers and Williams (2006) explained that we need to understand how learning occurs at individual and collective levels, enabling us to promote change in organizations. The evaluation team had individual views of optimal collaboration; the process of working together helped us broaden our understanding of collaborative learning within evaluative contexts and our own organization. Cousins and Shulha (2006) indicated that there has been “considerable work done on understanding the justification for collaborative work, the nature of this work and ultimately its

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consequences” (p. 286). Among other things, this playlet suggests that those working in collaboration might consider exploring and explaining their collaborative goals at the outset of the process, allowing this dialogue to continue explicitly and develop clarity throughout the project. This idea would be reflective of Schwandt and Burgon’s (2006) notion of “communicative action,” where those involved learn through deliberation, action and reflection together.

If one of the goals of participatory and collaborative evaluations is to promote use of the evaluation findings, we ultimately achieved this goal (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). The evaluation findings were used to revise the module structure and content for the upcoming teaching year. Professional and personal growth of evaluators was an ancillary benefit of this evaluation. Professional knowledge amongst members of this evaluation team will continue to develop in future collaborations that are planned for projects, papers and presentations submitted for conferences. Future projects, such as further evaluations of this module, or other work connected with graduate studies, will lead to further knowledge acquisition.

Considering the path.

*But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future’s sakes.
Robert Frost*

Not gifted with genius but honestly holding his experience deep in his heart, he kept simplicity and humanity. Issa

An Introduction to Playlet Three: Fusing Professional and Personal Learning

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Frost's poem (1969) evokes insight to a desired relationship between professional and personal identity. The experience of taking part in and reflecting on this project has developed both my theoretical as well as my practical understanding in the areas of research and evaluation. Throughout this thesis, I have explored simplistic connections while blurring conventional distinctions, by blending theatrical, literary and poetic voice with research as well as evaluation. The goal of this blurring is to make the boundaries between art and research less definable; this blurring parallels my belief that learning is enriched when there is a joining of personal and professional relationships.

All of the evaluators in this project are committed to work in graduate studies linked to areas of assessment and evaluation; this shared interest facilitated a desire to engage in working with one another. It would be difficult to be involved in a collaborative experience without gaining a deeper understanding of the context one is evaluating, while learning more about others and oneself. Playlet three depicts the evaluation team's reflections about shifts that have occurred in their professional and personal lives as a result of participation in this evaluation. Our different locations on the novice to expert continuum affect the way we view professional and personal growth in this experience.

Playlet Three: Professional and Personal Learning

The lights come up on a conversation still in process ...

Santiago: A final area I would like to discuss with you is how this experience shaped your professional or personal learning?

Malvolio: Well professionally, one aspect is the methodology and the structure for the evaluation that, you know, while decisions needed to be made about what we were doing, that I had a sense of the components that needed to make up this evaluation.

Pangloss: I was thinking about the fact that courses and modules are not a finite

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entity, but developmental. The process of our evaluation was also developmental; articulating our thinking like this helps us reflect on our work.

Malvolio: It is the same thing with the evaluation, I look at the module and I think how we are going to target or solicit information about teacher candidates' experiences with each of these elements? We need to ask them to reflect, and we need to reflect. So for me it's quite schematic of how this evaluation works.

Pangloss: I think about it like a story, so the course instructors wanted to do this, they did this, they got this, they started the course, they wrote the course content, the course content was supposed to do this, and then the teacher candidates came in, and what happened to the teacher candidates, and what did the teacher candidates think about that? So I was thinking about the evaluation process as a story, the plot was the course content, characters were the course instructors, the teaching assistants and the teacher candidates. The evaluation and the evaluators became another part of the story.

Malvolio: Each context is different, so each evaluation is going to be different.

Pangloss: You can bring some of your previous experiences but ultimately, you have to learn how to interact in different contexts.

Malvolio: There's always this point where you have to push people. I mean because you can push too far or too hard, and then you get conflict and tension. You can push gently, you can do a tug and push, that's very interesting.

Pangloss: It's all in the way you set it up.

Malvolio: People can get frustrated by the process.

Pangloss: You have to keep pushing, we're going to do this, trust me, you might not see it right now. But later, in my experience, it works out.

Malvolio: It takes time. I understand more about the difficulties of being an internal evaluator and the challenges of working with intelligent people.

Pangloss: Working with people who are aspiring academics spiralled off into other learning, they were interesting discussions, we came up with a potential study to carry out in the future, so it was fruitful for future professional needs as well.

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Malvolio: I was thinking about the theory, working with it, we actually arrived at a pretty good understanding of what participatory, collaborative and developmental evaluation was. This will help us in future work because the theory and practice are not separate.

Pangloss: I've got a good sense of theory and practice of evaluations now, and finding ways that all of it fits together.

Santiago: Has our evaluation process affected your personal learning?

Pangloss: There is a lot of overlap. The things we have learned in this professional experience will benefit our personal relationships. Like how we work together, share ideas and negotiate.

Malvolio: This evaluation has helped me to also think about, you know, how much of a commitment I want to have to program evaluation in terms of career, and whether or not I see myself as a program evaluator or if that's something I want to pursue more fully or not.

Pangloss: Working together makes a really rich exchange. These exchanges make me feel more self worthy. As a graduate student our identity is in transition, I am not a teacher, a researcher or an evaluator. This experience has helped me feel more confident that I fit into this environment because I understand it better. I feel that I know people better so the social element comes into it, learning about people and who they are.

Malvolio: The social contact is important but sometimes it derailed our conversations into discussions and analysis. The conversations were interesting, and some of them were theoretical, but some of them were also just unrelated, and they weren't helping us get to the evaluative situation, and I remember feeling frustrated by that.

Pangloss: Learning to navigate personal relationships is time consuming. The project we worked on together develops supportive social links; that is important to our overall professional and personal development.

Santiago: Thank you for sharing a glimpse of your personal and professional learning.

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Analysis of Playlet Three: Professional Learning in an Evaluative Setting

This evaluation project was “field work” in more than one sense, as it enabled us to directly engage in seeing the world we were investigating at many levels (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Our evaluation explored curriculum of a module for the Bachelor of Education program while deepening our knowledge of the organizational structure; it was a lengthy process that interwove our personal and professional cultures. Van Maanen (1988) explained that field work is a long process that evokes social complexities akin to the intricacies of life, in that they are difficult to predict. Length is a relative idea. Instruction of this module occurs over a relatively short time span, approximately three weeks. An evaluation constructed over a period of seven months, more than one term of graduate work, may therefore be considered a long process. Working together for a period of time permitted the growth of connections that crossed professional and personal boundaries; involving celebratory as well as problematic moments.

At the outset, this thesis established that there are multiple ways to approach the acquisition of knowledge and a range of outcomes as a result of this acquisition. Kolb (1984) identified that “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). This evaluation provided an opportunity to acquire understanding during the process of a project. Mezirow (2000) suggested that “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one’s experience as a guide to future action” (p. 5). Formal report writing at the conclusion of this project was pieced together, requiring that the four evaluators involved draw on previous practical and theoretical experiences. We all had different conceptions of how this report might look, the purpose of the report, and the

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depth of information needed. The final playlet specifically addressed learning from our evaluation and its potential impact on our professional and personal practices.

The interviewees identified several ways that this project enriched their professional learning. For example, by persevering through the unknown evaluative landscape, the team gained greater insight into the practice of evaluations. Evaluators expressed their deepening understanding of evaluative concepts such as, participatory, collaborative, and developmental evaluations. This practical and shared learning environment enriched our developing theoretical perspectives; although evaluations are contextually situated, there are transferable lessons from one evaluation to another. General wisdom about a possible structure and components that comprise an evaluation were gained from our experience. Our work also illustrated how to generate evaluation questions, organize data collection strategies, and develop formal evaluation reports. Although the context of future evaluations will change, working through all facets of an evaluation can deepen understanding of the rewards and challenges associated with this type of inquiry.

Reflecting on our learning within the evaluation process was an experience that allowed us to draw conclusions about the work we completed together. These individual reflections generated ideas that will benefit future evaluative experiences. After I interviewed my evaluation team members, two of the three e-mailed me to tell me how much they enjoyed talking about the process. The interviews made us realise that we had missed opportunities along the way to explicitly connect our own learning to the evaluation and incorporate these reflections into our work. Preskill (1997) addressed the importance of critical reflection as part of collaborative learning. In the reflective interviews we hypothesized how our evaluation might have unfolded if we had set aside

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time for collaborative critical reflection. As a result of these conversations, we began thinking explicitly about how reflections could form part of the process in future collaborative projects. Future novices may be able to build in reflective activities during the process of the evaluation.

Evaluations are a form of social inquiry; in particular, internal participatory, collaborative, and developmental evaluations provide opportunities for people to learn from and with each other. This learning can be transformative, in that it has the capacity to move people into fresh places with their thinking. Mezirow (2000) identified that “transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experiences of others ... [and it] has both individual and social dimensions and implications” (p. 8). At the most basic level, transformative learning has the potential to take place when people engage with others. This evaluation project brought together evaluators with different experiences, who were on different levels of the novice to expert continuum and engaged them working with one another, with other students, and faculty members. The collaborative nature of our work fostered respect as well as recognition for one another in a context that helped connect our past, present and future experiences.

Learning takes place by engaging with others in the act of inquiry, in this case evaluative inquiry. In an experiential learning context such as this, learning is viewed as a human process that may be transformative (Kolb, 1984). These ideas connect Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning to Mezirow’s (2000) concept of transformative learning; as both recognize that knowledge is shaped by individual experience. Recently, Kolb, Baker, and Jensen (2005) added a dimension to experiential learning that looks at conversations as experience; these moments can inform growth and contribute to the development of meaning. Through our evaluation process much of my learning occurred

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in the context of our evaluative field work; the premise of these experiences was dialogical. These settings reflected experiential learning, because they identified the value of “conversational learning, [as] a process whereby learners construct new meaning and transform their collective experiences” (Kolb, Baker, & Jensen, 2005, p. 412). Our work together provided ample opportunities for dialogue that could enhance understanding and could lead to transformative growth. Through cooperative experiences, people have an opportunity to move beyond their personal perspectives and try to increase understanding by working together (Kolb, 1984). Our work yielded insights about evaluative inquiry, the dynamics of internal evaluations and facilitation within participatory and collaborative processes.

Reflective comments during the interviews revealed that our evaluation expanded upon professional ideas. Pangloss explained that thinking of evaluation mirrors the plot of a story; there is development and progression that involves a spectrum of characters. The story-like process of this project leads to expanded thinking about curriculum design and the link between design and evaluation. These are unique ways of constructing and sharing understanding that propel ideas from the evaluation of the module, into thinking about broader concepts of research and evaluation. Professional learning for those involved will continue as new questions are investigated and future studies lead to different dimensions of collaborative research.

Personal Learning in Evaluative Inquiry

Professional and personal learning are not exclusive concepts. Like many of the themes explored in this thesis, they are connected and have the potential to develop each other. Kegan (2000) relates transformational learning to a personal level and suggests that it occurs when there is a change “in one’s fund of knowledge, one’s confidence as a

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learner, one's self-perception as a learner, one's motives in learning, one's self-esteem – these are potentially important changes” (p. 50). In asking about professional and personal learning during our reflective interviews, I wanted to know if anyone had experienced these types of shifts.

Pangloss reflected that this evaluation did increase her self-esteem and sense of belonging. For some, developing confidence in an academic setting requires patient attentiveness as a participant and observer. The social process of our evaluative inquiry provided an excellent stage for developing confidence in our evaluation and group work capacities. Our evaluation team built up social links that enhanced the structures already in place within our academic community. The social links revealed multiple dimensions of our graduate personalities and shed insight into our lives. Malvolio noted that these social links can have a negative effect, in that they are sometimes distracting to the group's purpose. Whether these distractions are a function of our social network, lunch time meetings or academic playfulness, working with intelligent people who share an interest provided a creative and engaging place for personal and professional learning. Novices should be aware of these opportunities in their learning communities, and take advantage of them where possible.

Participants articulated some ways our evaluation impacted their personal growth; more impact may be recognized later.

Individual members of an organization may well find themselves more emancipated in their thinking, even in ways that they initially chose to keep private. At the end of each day, increasing people's awareness of personal choices available to them is the important outcome of transformative learning. (Yorks & Marsick, 2000, p. 275)

It is possible that with greater reflection, members of our evaluation team might find additional ways to look at how this experience enriched their learning. Malvolio indicated

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that our evaluation project has allowed him the opportunity to consider future career involvement in program evaluation. The reflective interviews at the end of our project helped us to think about the growth of our professional and personal identities in an experiential learning setting. The social nature of this critical reflection has illustrated that the links established as part of our evaluation will continue to enrich our professional and personal practices.

Considering the path.

I began to have an idea of my life, not as the slow shaping of achievement to fit my preconceived purposes, but as the gradual discovery and growth of a purpose which I did not know. Joanna Field

If you consider what are called the virtues in mankind, you will find their growth is assisted by education and cultivation. Xenophon

Considering Act Four: Development in Evaluative and Research Contexts

The previous playlets saw Santiago, Malvolio and Pangloss engage in a discussion about the evaluation to reflect on the learning, possible outcomes and future implications of our evaluative work together. Eisner (1997) explains that educational significance is found when we illuminate the potential consequences of behaviour and provide reasons to account for what we have seen. The playlets are a way of illuminating evaluator perspectives about the evaluation process and provide a context for presenting recommendations to future novices; those who work with them and those who are interested in similar evaluative contexts. In my experience, songs are best sung and poetry and drama best read aloud, so the cadence of a reader's voice might uninhibitedly and temporarily become immersed in the ideas of another.

Considering the path helps one to think about the process of discovery that can take place in connection with education. Playlets and analyses throughout this Act have

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interwoven the ideas and voices of all members of our evaluation project. Patton (1994) looks at developmental evaluations when considering the ongoing nature of some evaluative contexts. This evaluation was considered developmental in two main ways. First and in recognition of the iterative process, it drew together evaluators who will continue to work on aspects of program development. Second, no definite structure was imposed on the evaluation process; the shape changed as needs were identified and new information was collected. The concept of developmental evaluation has not been specifically addressed in these interviews. However, these comments illustrate an acceptance of the ongoing nature of our relationships with one another and this evaluation project, both of which were founded on interactive responsiveness to one another as well as emerging ideas.

I have learned that there are multiple ways of situating an evaluation. These playlets explored the nature of internal evaluations, collaborative and participatory work and ultimately, professional and personal learning. Our understanding of these concepts is responsive in nature, in that experiences from this learning process provided stimuli for transformative thinking and future exploration in evaluation and research capacities.

CHAPTER FIVE

Act Five: Conclusion

Considering the path.

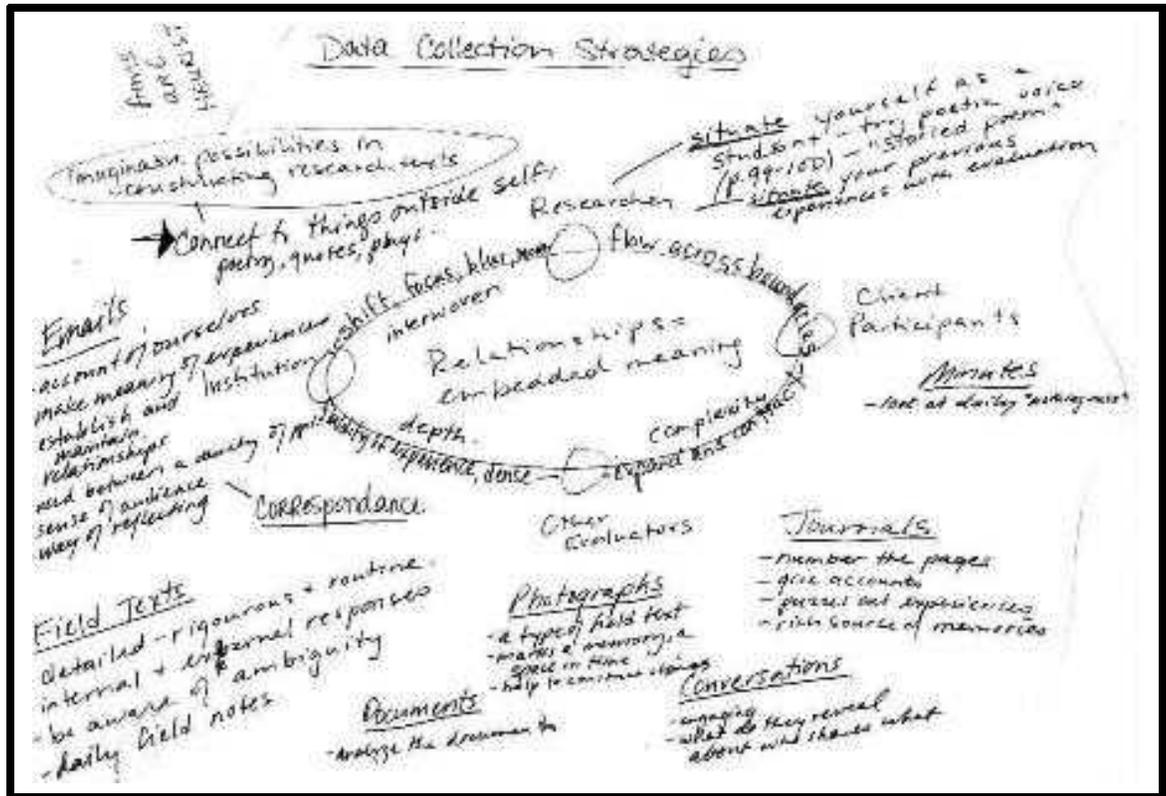


Image 3 - At the end of play, we look back at the beginning; an image that captures the reflexive strategies for data collection.

Learning in an Evaluation: Weaving the Thread

When I consider the paths of this evaluation I recognize that my learning in this area has only begun and the learning that has occurred as a result of this project has taken me into conversations and ideas for future research projects that I had not imagined. Both the evaluation as well as the writing of this thesis was a much different experience than I expected. As the above image, and the ideas detailed throughout this thesis both indicate, my thinking about the this thesis has revealed that strength is created when aspects of learning are woven together. The image at the start of this chapter identifies multiple

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modes of data collection, and the interconnectedness I perceived and strived for throughout this evaluation and thesis. During the evaluation, I hoped that our practical experiences would lead to a deeper understanding of theory, and that theory would inform our practice. I was not disappointed. Spiral-like learning occurred when my independent thinking informed our group practices, and our progress as a group enlightened my understanding. I envisioned that relationships would also be symbiotic; that working in a supportive learning environment would lead to growth in both professional and personal relationships. Ultimately, the process could be depicted as circles that spiral outwards; the evaluation itself unravelled slowly and indirectly, my method of recording reflections in my journal led to a continual revision of ideas, and the structure of our collaboration required ongoing sharing of information and energy.

Intertwined Learning: Writing from the Beginning

Starting this project as both a novice evaluator and researcher allowed for a great deal of learning about qualitative research and ways that ideas can be presented in narrative form. I expected that writing about our evaluation project and what I had learned from it would be an easier task. Instead, I found that I could not separate what I was learning in our evaluation context with growth generated in other areas of my life. This union is depicted in my writing as well as in my thinking. One outcome of narrative writing about collaborative work may be that it broadens our learning and thinking to such an extent that previous paradigms, no longer fit. In my case, participating on an evaluation team that worked collaboratively was a process better represented by using storytelling traditions, in a holistic way that built on my theatrical experiences. At the outset of writing this thesis, I did not know what the final product would look like. In the

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same way that our evaluation evolved as we worked through it, the ideas and shape of this thesis were developed over time.

At first I kept separate journals; my professional thoughts recorded in one and my personal murmurings in another. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) instructed that researchers need to “make themselves as aware as possible of the many layered narratives at work in their inquiry space” (p. 70). As parallels in my personal and professional reflections began to emerge in my thinking, the boundaries that I created no longer seemed necessary. For example, a story I was reading about a man and his dog prompted me to think about the power of relationships. I also reflected on stories as a way of connecting others with our experiences. A leisure book designed for animal lovers may not have a direct place in my thesis, but it managed to illustrate the way that I was able to find interconnects amongst our experiences. Clandinin and Connelly identified that “as explaining takes place, clarification and shaping of purpose occurs” (p. 73). They also encouraged readers to consider the “centrality of the researcher’s own experience, the researcher’s own living, telling, retellings and relivings” (p. 70). Connections merged as I clarified my purpose by shaping aspects from our collaborative work with my developing sense of identity and growing confidence as an educator-researcher-evaluator. In surmising my experiences throughout this evaluation I learned to untangle my experiences to explore what has been learned from this project. Boden (1991) captured this interconnectivity; “a highly complex computational system – such as the human mind, allows for many differing routes by which to generate a certain structure, or idea” (p. 5). Learning takes many shapes and forms; the process of this evaluation and thesis have illustrated that there are multiple ways to approach an evaluation, just as there are several ways to present academic text. As a novice researcher I have gained confidence

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and now understand that the biggest limit when considering future research opportunities is my own imagination.

Navigating the multiplicity of ideas, or the tentativeness of understanding, was at times a burden. I was weighed down by indecisions, unsure of how to convey the work that our evaluation team was engaged in. As a result, I was left wondering whether I was knowledgeable or practised enough to extract learning from these experiences. Initially, I was worried about how I would adapt to the multiple roles, of educator-researcher-evaluator. I wondered what aspects of my identity I might have to give up, so that new parts of me could emerge. Working through this thesis in a non-linear progression has helped me situate developing academic ideas within an artistic framework. My thinking at the conclusion of this research is less dichotomous. Working in narrative style has helped me see that the experiences of the past, present, and future are interconnected with my development from novice evaluator-researcher. Thinking about the multitude of ways one can develop and present research is significant for other novices and those who work with them as a reminder for novices to read widely, engage in broad discussions frequently and remain open-minded. By remaining attentive to the process of learning we can recognize that ideas are not fixed and search for links, as well as opportunities that extend our understanding.

Writing this thesis has allowed me to reflect on the power of words to convey or distort understanding; the ambiguity of language and search for clarity continues to inspire and awe me. Prior to this thesis, words were playthings; symbols that evoked my curiosity or were simply perfunctory. They remain as such, but working to convey my early understanding of evaluation and research throughout this thesis, has enabled me to work with words in a purposefully creative and academic manner that I have never

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experienced before. Richardson (1990) identified that “narrative mode is contextually embedded and looks for particular connections between events” (p. 13). At the outset of this research, I naively perceived that events between my professional and personal life would remain distinct. I assumed that there was a standard academic voice that I needed to find or invent, to portray my understanding. Instead, the process of writing about the evaluation project has evoked a deeper understanding of our evaluative reasoning and meaningful consideration about how to represent learning.

Considering the path.

*Nothing reinforces a professional relationship more than enjoying success with someone.
Harold Ramis*

Interpreting Moments: Learning in a Practical Setting

Ramis instructs that success is one way of celebrating professional relationships; our learning, in a practical setting, was successful in many ways. Lots of things stand on stage in the production of an evaluation: politics, social dynamics, past, present, and future experiences, or the goals of an organization or individuals. Centre stage was occupied by the dimensions of our internal, participatory and collaborative, developmental evaluation. Faculty members of the Assessment and Evaluation Group appear to be friends as well as colleagues, and seem to enjoy working together. Their respect for each other is central to their evaluative practices. Working within this group has taught me about the way they negotiate their working relationships, not only with one another but with other faculty, graduate students, teacher candidates and all who work in our building. I was impressed by the way they made time for people, listened to each other, shared and built on the ideas of others, while recognizing each person’s unique contributions. Our evaluation team built on these practices of respecting and honouring one another in our collaborative work. This thesis is more than a celebration of our

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success as an evaluation; it is a document of a novice's growth summarized in a learning narrative. This text provides explanation about one evaluative experience and the growth of a novice evaluator.

Learning from our Evaluation Activities

Learning occurred individually and collectively as a result of our evaluation activities. The interviews conducted as part of our evaluative process enriched my understanding of the structures of data collection and the potential for this method of inquiry to contribute to learning. I anticipated that the initial interview process would teach me more about how experienced researchers conducted themselves at interviews, how they established setting and tone, and other techniques they used to develop and maintain momentum.

At meetings, a diagram was drawn reflecting our ideas; a comment in my journal reflects our way of working together, "lots of times when we are thinking, talking and mapping about evaluation ideas we're using circles inside of circles" (Excerpt from my journal, January 2007). Together these circles create spirals that represented growth that occurred by looking forward while looking back to analyze themes from our discussions; images of our way of working together and conceptualizing ideas. As with the review of documents, we were continually revisiting ideas and connecting them to the data, incorporating them into our personal and professional experiences while considering theory related to evaluation and learning that we were familiar with. The interviews conducted during our evaluation and at the end of the process emphasize the spiral like nature of learning that reveals insights arising from a collaborative experience.

When learning with others or by oneself, there is a flow or a rhythm that one can become engaged in. Another example of this flow was the cyclical process of devising the

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focus groups we conducted as part of our evaluation. The rhythm for this aspect of the evaluation was irregular to start; we debated about which direction to go in, selected a direction, and devised questions individually before sharing together. Even with the disjointed progression, we were always mindful of the purpose of the focus groups. The focus groups themselves were dynamic places of discussion and allowed for the emergence of rich content. In hindsight, we could have utilized a more participatory approach by sending out a summary of our findings to the focus group participants and asking for their clarification and additional comments. This process developed my awareness of the work involved in devising, designing and conducting focus groups and was enriched by the multiple perspectives of our evaluation team. Overall, it enabled me to feel more confident in my maturing skills within the dynamics of qualitative data collection for evaluative research.

Another concrete example of growth occurred during the process of writing the evaluation report. Collaborative efforts in this area of the evaluation project were complicated by our different approaches to writing and revising, our distinct conceptual ideas and some of the broader questions associated with the goals of reporting. In addition, the report was being completed later than we originally anticipated; a time when each member of the evaluation team was involved in different professional and personal experiences. People were eager to complete the evaluation process, but determined to produce a report of high quality. In reference to their own collaborative experiences, Shulha and Wilson (2003) remark that, “we each used our own understandings to sense and make sense of each other’s ideas and work. In doing so, we not only made the implicit explicit but also analysed the underlying assumptions that shaped reasoning and

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behaviour” (p. 662). As we neared the end of our evaluation process we needed to maintain open-mindedness, to share our ideas and listen carefully to one another.

The insights gained from our report writing and in our reflective interviews, taught me that it was useful for our team to consider the purpose of our evaluation, how this purpose was met, and how the theory and practice guided us. Flinders and Mills (1993) identified that theory in qualitative program evaluation is important:

Such an orientation could contribute enhanced responsiveness and increased political authority for the work of qualitative evaluators. It could expand the import and impact of qualitative evaluation beyond the “telling of stories.” And it could thereby contribute to a revision of the heritage of what it means to do science... A more explicitly theory-oriented qualitative evaluation can help rewrite the nature of knowledge about human phenomena. (p. 33)

Our report drew together the theoretical and practical learning from the evaluation process and bundled this learning so that it could be shared with others. The report told one perspective of the story of our evaluation based on the data collected, while this thesis shared another. Patton (1994) talks about the capacity of language to both aid and limit expression; he reflects on his move away from formal reporting in the latter stages of his career. During the process of writing the evaluation report and in the reflective interviews I contemplated the power of words to represent or misrepresent an understanding. The process of this evaluation and the final report also instigated my thinking about the clarification required in creating effective communications that could strengthen collaborative work.

Spirals of Learning from an Evaluative Setting

Already, the growth resulting from the evaluation project has led to work in graduate student courses, and conferences within the graduate student and the evaluation communities. Ideas presented were developed as a result of work on this module, and can

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be found in the form of a poster, presentations and co-authored papers. Concepts shaped from our experiences in this evaluation project have also been accepted, in the form of two papers at the American Evaluators Association Conference being held in November 2007.

This experience has been a transformative one for me, because it has provided a context to conduct my own learning by moving through points of interest and tension that have allowed me to take risks that shaped a new perspective (Mezirow, 2000). Working as part of this evaluation team and reflecting on our work for this thesis, has pushed me to look further, question more deeply and engage actively in the process. Many pieces that I read have created additional areas of interest for me; this growth has led me to ask new questions, consider new dimensions and think about future directions for research. For example, I am interested in future collaborative investigations that reveal the outcomes of participatory evaluations in school settings. I also have questions about the visible rise of females in the field of evaluation. A final area of interest is alternative possibilities for creating evaluation reports that meet client and stakeholder needs. The possibilities in the field of evaluation are broader than I originally imagined; in fact, the boundaries are only defined by our imagination and the contexts we work in. The work completed as part of this thesis has engaged me as an individual and as part of a collective, in multiple ways: creatively, academically, and socially.

Considering the path.

A leader is someone who steps back from the entire system and tries to build a more collaborative, more innovative system that will work over the long term. Robert Reich

Shared laughter creates a bond of friendships. When people laugh together, they cease to be young and old, teacher and pupils, worker and boss. They become a single group of human beings. W. Lee Grant

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The Impact of Relationships: Mentors and the Evaluation Team

As I look back over our evaluation project, I see that it has been successful in numerous ways and at various levels. Success was attained at the end of the project with the submission of the evaluation report that prompts use of evaluation findings. Our success is not defined by this report; success can also be found in how our work together has built and reinforced our professional relationships while creating myriad opportunities for learning. Individual growth and the blossoming of professional relationships are hallmarks of our success. This project provided a broad opportunity for students who are interested in evaluation; to work together as a team and for this team to connect with faculty who work in this area. Future novices can understand that learning has occurred as a result of diverse interactions sustained through a multitude of activities.

The Influence of Mentors on my Learning

One of the reasons I have been able to explore our learning experiences and share my burgeoning knowledge with others is the freedom, support and encouragement provided to me by my supervisor as well as other members of the faculty who advised me throughout this research. Their assistance was invaluable through my earliest writing experimentations, which allowed me to find a voice and express our learning within the evaluation process. Davis (2002) referred to academia's desire to straighten out ideas to fit a preconceived form; "this strew of notions, I tell myself must be structured into a linear narrative, a plausible tale of educational research, a line that any competent reader can follow" (p. 4). In writing this thesis, I was instead limited primarily by my own ability to conceive of and articulate possible forms. Boden (1991) identifies that "creativity, whether in children or in adults, involves exploration and evaluation" (p. 63). Throughout this research I have read or revisited texts from a range of fields. These texts

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have demonstrated that there is not one exclusive way to present scholarship.

Richardson's (1997) ideas parallel this discovery; "this text steps outside the normative constraints for social science writing" by using a dramatic framework, interwoven quotations, images and personal journal entries (p. 167). Support from mentors made possible the creation of this thesis that blends personal and academic writing with narrative and theatrical styles. Although somewhat irregular in its presentation, this thesis nevertheless takes readers on a journey to share insights that make explicit my transformation in the evaluative research undertaking. Novices can take away from this experience a need to take the time to find their voice, and to consider the plethora of ways to represent their ideas.

Working Collaboratively: Shaping Learning in an Evaluative Context

Working with my thesis committee and the evaluation team has helped me recognize the scope and potential for work in assessment and evaluation. I have also realized my knowledge about the breadth of available evaluation and research methodologies is relatively undeveloped. My thinking in these areas has grown extensively from the work we completed as part of our data collection for the evaluation team, and my reflections on this work. These developments are a result of having the opportunity to listen and take part in discussions about methodological choices that shaped not only our data collection, but guided our developing theory and reporting strategies. This growing understanding has been reflected in my ability to make thoughtful contributions, and has started to subtly shift relationships within our evaluation team and other faculty, over the course of my work on this thesis.

Although I am the main participant in this study, others engaged in their own learning participated in creating a learning environment from which I have drawn

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conclusions for this thesis. While participating in the evaluation project, we were afforded the opportunity to be evaluators of the program, evaluation researchers and authors of our own story of growth. At the outset of our evaluation, we worked with stakeholders in a participatory way to establish evaluation priorities; our communications encouraged stakeholders to “make the major focus and design decisions” (Patton, 1997, p. 100). Participatory and collaborative evaluations share this idea of involving people in the process, but doing so requires conscious selecting of appropriate evaluative contexts to encourage participation. Patton (1997) expressed that, “the processes of participation and collaboration have an impact on participants and collaborators quite beyond whatever they may accomplish by working together” (p. 97). Although our work was not as participatory as I envisioned it would be, it did provide a framework that exposed us to this type of evaluative reasoning and its potential use in future contexts. Future novices who want to consider using a participatory framework will need to contemplate what it might mean to their evaluative setting. In addition, it may be useful have a long range view when identifying potential participatory activities at the outset of the project, and to make an effort to maintain this approach throughout.

Participatory and collaborative evaluative research joins multiple people of varying experience levels, who are interested in blending multiple styles of working to enhance individual and collective growth. Kochan and Mullen (2003) identified that “different interpretations of what it means to be collaborative can also create conflict ... those individuals must be willing to share with and learn from one another, and to establish expectations” (p. 163). Both participatory and collaborative works exist on a continuum. This project confirmed that differing perceptions and approaches to

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collaboration need to be made explicit and considered to foster respect and development in collaborative work.

Traditionally, when referring to benefits of participatory and collaborative work, the focus is on learning for the participants of the evaluation (Patton, 1997). In our case, activities conducted in this way primarily enriched the learning of the evaluation team. In addition to the usual constraint of finding time to work in collaborative and participatory ways, one of the reasons our work may have been less participatory could be correlated to the fact that stakeholders involved in this evaluation did not need the opportunity to learn evaluation reasoning or logic. In this regard, their experience and understanding of evaluations meant that they were more skilled than any of the evaluators on the team. Patton (1997) identified that not all participatory evaluations lead to learning, but there is a potential acquisition of evaluation skills and modification in ways of thinking. Our evaluation team grew from our perceived novice status, because of skills utilized in this evaluative process. Ritchie and Rigaro (2007) suggested that “working with more experienced colleagues ‘unveiled’ some of the mysteries of research and help[ed] less experienced researchers develop effective practices” (p. 143). Benefits for less experienced evaluative researchers working in collaboration with more experienced evaluative researchers in participatory and collaborative ways are broad.

O’Sullivan (2004) identified some of the things that evaluators should look for when considering levels of collaboration: the organizational culture, previous evaluation history and level of documentation necessary. As our evaluation developed, we became less participatory in the way that we worked. The evaluation team worked to develop effective collaboration strategies in this evaluative context. In this evaluative situation, evaluators have gained an understanding of professional practice and the relationship

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between practice and theory. In addition, more experienced researchers working with less experienced researchers may lead to an expansion in their thinking, by making their ideas explicit or exploring new directions.

Our collaborative work was an immersion into evaluation practice that enabled us to share ideas, encourage, and support one another in a purposeful learning environment. Hafernik, Messerschmitt and Vandrick (1997) note that collaborative work helps overcome both trepidation as well as a lack of confidence because, “working in collaborative projects allows tackling more complex projects than individuals might choose to, or be able to, on their own” (p. 35). This evaluation project was enhanced by our multiple ways of shaping questions, looking at the data and making sense of our findings; explicitly, it was a much broader project than any of us would have taken on individually. Shulha and Wilson (2003) identified that collaboration can enhance inquiry when collaborators strategize, solve problems and engage in various roles that meet the needs of the project.

Learning on a Novice to Expert Continuum

I now understand that I expected our evaluation team to work together to make sense of what needed to be done and to formulate a plan for doing it as we went along. This was an expectation I believed the others would share, and one I took for granted. In my early thinking, I failed to recognize that collaborative work meant incorporating not only multiple people, but their working preferences as well. Novices need cues on how to proceed, support to help set priorities, practice planning, and coordinating projects (Benner, 1984). They can access the academic and theoretical underpinnings of evaluation concepts individually, in a course or within a discussion group. Our work, completed as part of a project, provided an ideal opportunity to build on our evaluative

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experience. Benner (1984) identified that “experienced-based skill acquisition is safer and quicker when it rests on a sound educational base.” (p. xix) This idea concurs with Eisner’s (1994) suggestion that one should possess both the knowledge and the skill to access many ways of knowing or understanding ideas. Those who work with novices are advised that learning in context allows for blending knowledge with deepening skills.

Movement along the novice to expert continuum precipitates shifts in relationships. In addition to being a student who learns from the professors I work with, in some situations I am also beginning to view myself as a researcher who works with them. Benner (1984) emphasises the importance of recognizing context in the development of a novice, and growth from novice to expert. My confidence has grown, I feel comfortable asking questions that will not only help me learn, but may also challenge the ideas put forward by others, therein allowing us to learn from one another. Overall, it is the encouragement and collaborative working relationships that have directly and indirectly encouraged me, while providing additional stimuli to deepen questions and think about possibilities for evaluative inquiry in future research.

Considering the path.

I haven't a clue as to how my story will end. But that's all right. When you set out on a journey and night covers the road, you don't conclude the road has vanished. And how else could we discover the stars? Anonymous

Final Thoughts: The Cycle of Evaluative Inquiry

Imagine a spiral; at its base a circular shape where friends meet to discuss, design and plan; everyone is welcome and you need only have an interest to join. The shape is symbolic, the circular aspect represents infinity or wholeness but the spiral-like dimension depict upward movement that allows you to look back. This shape welcomes novices into these activities making it possible for evaluators, clients, participants,

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interested parties, and novice evaluators to become part of the evaluation and learning continuum. This thesis has been an invitation to the reader to join the learning spiral and to share in our diverse experiences, our varied ideas and our understandings that emerged through a joining of visions.

This study has been a satisfying process of investigating literature and theory related to aspects of evaluation, acting as a participant observer in an evaluative capacity, reflecting, thinking and sharing evaluative ideas with others. I was surprised at my need to transgress before I could move forward, but see now that my initial thoughts were an important way of connecting my past, present and future experiences. This movement reflects the spiral like nature of my learning, looking back while moving forward.

When I sat down to write this thesis, the connections between my past and present drew me into the complexities of reporting and incorporating narrative in its fullest dimension. The structure of this thesis arose from my developing understanding that little is fixed, new definitions and boundaries are continually being re-defined to incorporate new ways of seeing and making meaning. These re-conceptions are identifiable in the growth of the field of evaluation and the expansion of qualitative inquiry.

Once I recognized that a more traditional approach was not the best fit for my ideas in this case I found that the theatrical structure of this piece emerged naturally. Each Act allowed me to tell a different piece of the story, to craft the pieces into a whole. Rather than dividing up and sectioning off, I tried to blend the literature, methods and analysis. I have lived with the books represented in this thesis, dipping into them to confirm an idea or simply find solace in the ink on the page. I have moved forwards and backwards in my journal, added notes, quotations, highlighted, reworked words into images and tried to express images in words, imagined metaphors and planned strategy.

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Sometimes I can imagine the page faster than I can find it. I have borrowed liberally from the arts throughout, to convey my insights about this process seeking clarification while shaping this experience of developing as a novice evaluator. At the end of this process, I am left with a feeling that working as an evaluator-researcher is an all-encompassing way of being; that we weave all the aspects of our professional and personal selves into what we do.

Personal Insights: The Nature of Learning

Learning within an evaluation context takes place in many different ways. The notion of learning within evaluations works well with the spiral image because of the multiple directions as well as the layering of ideas and experiences concurrently. When considering the spiral of learning, it is important to recognize ways previous experiences might contribute to shaping personal and professional ideas that ultimately become part of an evaluator's framework. Evaluation does not stand alone but is connected to and shaped by the individuals involved, the organization they work within and other, unseen forces are both professional and personal. This experience taught me value of developing and considering an individual evaluation philosophy. Sharing ideas about the way we work, the specific and broad goals we have for evaluation and research at our team meetings were valuable learning experiences. Previous personal and professional experiences may help to understand institutional features during shaping of the evaluation questions. Additionally, they allow you to understand areas of individual strength developed in previous experiences while identifying present or future goals for individual and collective development.

In evaluative contexts people have varying levels of knowledge and while it is important to draw on past experiences, evaluators also need to be cautious about making

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assumptions. In our case, having an easily accessible support system provided assistance as we developed our evaluation skills and our way of working with one another. It was important that we kept asking questions to challenge one another, as well as being challenged by others. This evaluation was a unique learning process because of the overlapping roles, the relationships of people working on the project and a genuine desire by those involved, to learn from the experience of our evaluation. In some cases, these interconnected relationships might prove problematic because of power or hierarchal issues. In this evaluation, that was not the case instead; our work together was enhanced by shared interest in ideas about evaluation and research that have contributed to a growing community of researchers working in this area at our Faculty. Evaluators, and especially novices, do need to consider the people-people dynamics within evaluation contexts. Overall, this was a powerful experience that would not have been possible on my own; it was only made possible by the collaborative way in which we worked and the guidance we were provided. There are multiple outcomes from our work together. Learning about the module and meeting the goals established by the evaluation, growing as evaluator/researchers in our practical and theoretical knowledge and developing the relationships we continue to share.

Learning to work as a team was a key feature of this evaluation that may be different in future instances. From this experience, future novices can keep in mind the need to consider the implications of purpose and roles, such as: composition of the team, clarification of roles, and negotiation of power relationships as well as the delegation of work. By initiating strong communication from the outset a team can clarify individual roles and collective goals. Collaboration can build in a structure for growth, because you are constantly revising your own ideas for sharing, considering the ideas of others and

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finding ways to negotiate professional and personal aspects within your work. In collaborative work, growth from an experience requires a shared investment of ideas and time, as well as individual work.

As a group we were able to share our theoretical and practical experiences. During this project my understanding of evaluation theory has grown. Working as part of a team, I have also learned ways in which practice shapes theory. This experience has provided a distinctive place for growth of this multidimensional perspective of evaluation. In addition to learning theory and practice, the sharing aspect of our work together was also a unique feature that created enduring relationships and support systems within our graduate community for those of us interested in working in the area of evaluation and research. Theory and practice were developed by creating opportunities for reflection. While my journal is a testament to my reflection, it is important to recognize that there are multiple ways to engage in reflection. Based on this experience I suggest that novices participate in ongoing opportunities for formal and informal reflection at individual and collective levels. Dialogue can form an important part of this reflective process and provide another window for looking at the theory and practice of evaluations.

The goal of this research was not to offer a solution or an answer to a specific research question. Instead, I wanted to reveal insights from my journey as a novice into the process of evaluation. Instead of answers, I have new questions and have entered a new cycle of learning. This new cycle has been shaped by the ideals and emergent understandings of participatory, collaborative and developmental work. These understandings include recognition of the importance of an iterative process for shaping and refining ideas, while engaging people in learning.

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