

Editorial

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

He mihi mahana ki a koutou me ō koutou whānau whānui.

My warmest greetings to you.

Welcome to this fifth volume of *Evaluation Matters—He Take Tō Te Aromatawai*. We're publishing a little later in the year than we have in the past, but this has allowed us the time to gather together another great volume to inform evaluation theory and practice in Aotearoa and around the globe.

We begin this volume with two of the keynote speakers at the ANZEA conference—Frances Valentine and Jess Berentson-Shaw. Those lucky enough to hear these two amazing women will recall how provocative and inspirational they were as they each allowed us a small peek into the worlds they inhabit. Frances drives us forward once again to think about the impact the “future” will have on evaluation. Unsurprisingly the future is already here and getting made anew on a daily basis. She reminds us that those in Generation Z are part of a global population, just as Aotearoa is part of global economy. Our education system therefore needs to keep up if it is going to be relevant for and responsive to the aspirations of young people. As she says, “Our education structures need to adjust to accommodate a deeper understanding of the economy and our changing society as well as enabling the development of specific contemporary skills to respond to the daily requirements of work.”

Jess also reminds us that the world is a changing place in which communication and miscommunication are often intertwined like a messy ball of string that is often difficult to untangle. This democratisation of information impacts on whether or not evaluations are considered to be the trustworthy and credible. As Jess says, “Why does any of this matter? Because evidence suggests that the evidence we see and believe is contingent upon the values we prioritise.” By following a pathway based in values and being informed about the latest findings from cognitive science, evaluators can help ensure that the messages they want to communicate find their intended audiences.

The third article in this volume is by Rick Williams, and is based on his presentation to the 2016 Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) Conference. The inclusion of Rick’s article, along with the series of panel articles on Evaluation for the Anthropocene: Shaping a Sustainability-ready Evaluation Field from the 2018 CES marks the beginning of the journal’s relationship with Canadian evaluation fellows. This mutually beneficial relationship will bring to the journal cutting-edge provocations from international evaluators, government agency representatives, and those in private industry. In future volumes of the journal we plan to reflect on and reflect back our own views and context in response to the issues and challenges raised in these articles.

In his article, Rick reflects on his time in a central policy agency in the government of Nova Scotia, describing it as a “dangerous time”. In describing why, he reflects upon the issues facing governing bodies around the world, writing, “We face deep and far-reaching challenges—climate change, income inequality, disruptive technologies, globalised markets, etc.” (I cannot help but agree with him, as the recent co-editor of a recent volume with my colleague Rodney Hopson (2018) that gathered several of our colleagues together to contemplate evaluation in complex ecologies.) He then describes

what this meant for policy and political leaders in a “first time” government that had a commitment to monitoring and evaluation, in a province that was in “deep trouble”. In the second part of his article he looks to Scotland for the progressive answers that may have better informed initiatives for change in Nova Scotia.

Heather Hamerton and Amanda Torr then provide insights into the use of self-assessment at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, a regional tertiary education organisation based in the Bay of Plenty and South Waikato regions. Three cases studies of formal evaluations are described, as the institution sought to understand how new initiatives were performing and learn from programmes that were achieving good outcomes for students. As the authors confirm, “It will never be possible for the organisation to conduct formal evaluations of every aspect of its work, or of every programme offered.” The tailoring of evaluation in response to specific organisational desires for information can, however, create a culture of continuous organisational improvement and a positive environment for the practice of evaluation.

Value and valuing is one of the central pillars of evaluation. In her article, Jo MacDonald considers “questions of who values, how, and under what conditions” when it comes to evaluators assessing the worth, merit, and significance of an initiative. Her literature review reveals debate about whether and how the synthesis of evidence is undertaken by evaluators. While she is not surprised that there is little consensus, she leads us through the implications for evaluation. The end result is encouragement for evaluators to increase our theoretical knowledge and reflect more on our practice so that we are making deliberative, informed decisions about our synthesising of evaluative evidence.

The practice article by Aneta Cram, Rodney Hopson, Marvin Powell and Asia Williams sets out their experiences of developing programme theory with a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering

and Math) + Families National Parent Teacher Association program based in Alexandria, Virginia (USA). While a little removed from our own context it is interesting to follow along with their experience, and learn how they engaged with stakeholders and see some of the by-ways of programme theory development. Their challenges ranged from the definitional to expectations and the role of the evaluators. As they write, “Relational challenges can arise. Reflecting on these and using dialogic skills to recognise and mitigate them is, at times, part of the evaluation process and central to the role of an evaluator.”

In the final section of this volume we visit with a panel deliberating Evaluation for the Anthropocene at the 2018 CES conference. The topic and speakers are ably introduced by the panel’s convenor, Andy Rowe. Andy recently visited with ANZEA and held us spellbound with his weaving of people back into nature as he sought to inspire us to practice environmentally sustainable evaluation. Andy also pays tribute in this writing and work to Indigenous worldviews that remain well connected to land, place, and the wider environment. Three panel members—Juha Uitto, Sean Curry, Patrick Field—then present their views about evaluation for the Anthropocene; that is, the age of humanity. The final article is from our “own” Jane Davidson, as she serves as discussant and more generally a critical friend. The volume concludes with a book review by Jane Furness.

My hope is the you find this volume interesting, informative, and a motivation for you to put your own fingers to keyboard / pen to paper, and contribute to the forum this journal provides for local as well as international evaluation learning and sharing.

Ko te kai a te rangatira
he kōrero

Discussion is the food of
leaders

Ko te tohu o te rangatira
he manaaki

Hospitality is the mark of
leaders

Ko te mahi a te rangatira
hei whakatira te iwi

The work of leaders is bringing
people together

Fiona Cram, PhD, Editor-in-Chief
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References

Hopson, R., & Cram, F. (2018). *Tackling wicked problems in complex ecologies: The role of evaluation*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.