

Moving Measures: Employing Visual Theater and Movement to Convey and Augment Participatory Learning in Program Evaluation

American Evaluation Association Annual Meeting, November 8, 2007

Presenter: Geri Lynn Peak, DrPH, Two Gems Consulting Services

Overview: This innovative approach to measurement responds to a client's request to literally convey evaluation results beyond words and diagrams. By creatively expanding participatory action research approaches with techniques from visual theater and dance, stakeholders can combine movements and words to: identify priority program components to evaluate; illustrate program characteristics; or articulate perceived results. Evaluators working with diverse groups can use these techniques as qualitative tools throughout the evaluation cycle. Incorporating movement can prove meaningful in building equity when divergent ages, power levels, language abilities or cultural perspectives dictate stakeholder involvement.

Experience: Suggested process for using Moving Measures in your evaluation practice

1. Introduce the concept and purpose of the Moving Measures gathering (very brief) – include introductions of participants and any other relevant information
2. Conduct nonverbal exercises to dispel our voices and get some comfort with nonverbal expression, gesture and movement. Adapt from theater exercises. Quest for the Arts is a great resource.
3. Identify a focus (or set of foci). Written responses can be used or solely use gestural responses
4. Create a movement, gesture or mime for each of the foci (not necessarily related to what people wrote).
Videotape these segments
5. Share findings with one another. People will have the opportunity to speak and show their responses individually and/or in small groups, potentially broken down by themes addressed if there is some resonance among the themes. *Videotape these segments*
6. Share insights: collectively pinpoint key learnings, insights, ideas.
7. Wrap up: suggestions for use and more in-depth follow-up with more traditional evaluation techniques or with actions that the center can/should take on. (15 minutes)

Learning Together: You tell me!!

How might this be used?

What would you do to make this work in different environments?

What adaptations Modifications?

Permissions: People don't like getting their pictures taken. You need to develop some sort of release form as this method moves forward. For now, I am using simple verbal and written permissions. (see back)

Inspiration: Johns Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health Prevention Research Center Advisory Board
<http://www.jhsph.edu/adolescenthealth/>; Quest: art for everyone, <http://www.quest4arts.org/>; Vincent Thomas, choreographer <http://www.towson.edu/dance/vthom.htm>

HANDOUTS: Worksheet

Focus1: What four (4) words come to mind when you think of AEA? Write them here:

Gesture: Illustrate your words with a movement sequence.

Observations:

Focus2: In what way do you contribute to AEA? (Develop a gesture)

Observations:

Release: I agree that I am comfortable with being filmed for the purposes of:

1. Re-creation of my movements/gestures to show to others (not using the videotaped footage itself) and/or
2. To share visually to augment the learning of others and contribute to this developing methodology.

NOTE: Images from this workshop will not be used for entertainment purposes.

Name: _____

Signature: _____.

What I told AEA about this workshop:

Moving Measures: Employing Visual Theater and Movement to Convey and Augment Participatory Learning in Program Evaluation.

Relevance statement

Language is powerful. Evaluators rely on words to describe, assess and shape programs. Increasingly, evaluators are required to engage diverse stakeholders throughout the evaluation life cycle. Many existing participatory techniques exist that facilitate full participation of all stakeholders, yet they primarily rely upon verbal communication or the translation of verbal information into pictures or diagrams. This technique of moving measures is inspired by the work of choreographer Vincent Thomas and an organization, Quest: Arts for Life, which promotes visual theater often performed by hearing impaired artists. Their work inspired this evaluator to recognize the value of gesture and movement to convey ideas succinctly and in a way that transcends many of the boundaries that exist between peoples. At the same time, a mandate to find ways to move a client's evaluation off the page opened the presenter's mind to finding new ways to allow stakeholders to convey evaluation data. Together, these two opportunities inspired the use of gesture and movement to describe program results by first allowing participants to act out or move specific measures previously identified as part of their evaluation.

The result allows people to create, individually or collectively, representations of a variety of programmatic circumstances that illustrate everything from critical action pathways required to document program implementation to their ideas regarding how their actions achieve desired results or their perception of existing outcomes. Engaging stakeholders in movement can also bond groups striving to work together to affect their own assessment or contribute actively to professional evaluation efforts. Academic/Community partnerships, for example, can use movement to reduce the intimidation that can result when researchers strive to convey their perspective to lay people. Young people, who may be shy to speak in front of adults and professionals, may be inspired by their familiarity with skits and role plays to be more forthcoming regarding their perceptions and ideas. All of these efforts help groups to gather deeper meaning from what they are learning from traditional tools and techniques that may be implemented in an evaluation plan, or these may stand alone as part of an exploration to determine what to evaluate or how to use findings and results.

Those who participate in this workshop will, using a simple evaluation life cycle, explore how using movement enriches collective learning at each stage of an evaluation: planning, implementation, analysis, utilization of results. Then, the group will engage in brief series of visual theater exercises as a warm-up, ice breaker and skill-builder. Finally, participants will use sample data from case studies, or may take examples from their own experience and articulate statements with gestures or full body movements that serve as measurements for evaluation questions. The group will discuss the process together briefly in closing, allowing all participants to collectively contribute to the growth of this form of data collection, analysis and reporting.