<div style="text-align: center;">CHAPTER</div>

5

Creative Forms of Communicating and Reporting

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Topics Discussed

- Photographs
- Cartoons
- Poetry
- Drama

Questions to Ponder

- ☐ *What are the benefits of using creative formats to communicate and report evaluation findings?*
- ☐ *When is it most appropriate to use different creative forms of communicating and reporting?*
- ☐ *How might creative approaches be used in conjunction with more traditional communicating and reporting formats?*

Creative forms of communicating and reporting, including photography, cartoons, poetry, and drama, are increasingly being used by evaluators to present evaluation findings to a variety of audiences (in addition to the case examples provided in this chapter, see Brady, 2000;

Denzin, 2000; Greene, 2001; Harper, 2000; McCall, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Creative formats facilitate personalized representation and interpretation of evaluation findings on many levels. First, photography, cartoons, poetry, and drama are particularly good at capturing multiple voices, allowing program participants to "do their own talking" (Denzin, 1994, p. 503), and allowing "the world being described to speak for itself" (p. 507). Second, evaluators' perspectives are represented through their data analyses and presentations of the findings (often developed in collaboration with stakeholders). Third, each person—who then views the photographs or cartoons, reads the poems, or participates as an audience member of a dramatic performance—creates his or her own meaning and interpretations as the person engages in the dialogue, reflection, and visual, oral, and kinesthetic stimulations these formats encourage (Altheide & Johnson, 1994).

Photographs, cartoons, poetry, and dramatic performances are particularly useful for communicating tacit knowledge, including insights, apprehensions, hunches, impressions, and feeling (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). *Photography* can help convey the context of an evaluand, and/or reveal aspects of implementation or outcomes that might otherwise be overlooked by traditional data collection methods. It can help cross language barriers that may inhibit participants' ability to express their opinions or assimilate written information.

Cartoons illustrate simple or symbolically complex issues in an accessible and concise format. The message(s) or theme(s) of evaluation findings can be conveyed via cartoons in the same way that political cartoons are used to reveal the perspective or viewpoint of their creator. Cartoons can also convey evaluation information to audiences with low reading levels.

Poetry can illuminate the emotions, contradictions, and complexities of evaluation contexts. "Poetry and literature . . . were invented to say what words can never say and, through what they say, we can come to understand what we cannot state" (Eisner, 1990, p. 90). Poetry can be used to integrate the experiences and perspectives of multiple stakeholders (program staff, participants, funders, evaluators, etc.) into a collective voice.

Through orally spoken and written text (script), *drama* recreates lived experience—combining realism, fiction, and poetic genres (Richardson, 2000). It can also help create a balanced representation of the perspective of multiple stakeholders. All of these formats can promote dialogue, reflection, and learning based on evaluation information in a group setting.

In addition, these creative formats share a number of commonalities, with respect to evaluation communicating and reporting in particular. Generally, photographs, cartoons, poetry, and drama

- Can increase the accessibility of evaluation information for particular audiences.

- May be more culturally or audience-appropriate in some cases than in others.
- Are most typically used for conveying findings based on qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interviews, observations, document analysis).
- Are particularly powerful when used as a basis for interaction with program participants and stakeholders to interpret and discuss their meaning.
- Warrant special efforts to communicate the methods used for their creation and to obtain stakeholder feedback prior to dissemination
- Add costs in terms of time and budget to a typical evaluation endeavor.
- Are best used in conjunction with traditional formats (e.g., written reports and summaries).

Use of these creative formats has a particular advantage for evaluation practice. When evaluators experiment with different methods for communicating and reporting, they may find that their approach to more traditional formats improves because they understand the evaluation information more "deeply and complexly," having tried to craft it into a variety of creative forms (Richardson, 1994, p. 524). "By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it," and are more aware of the communication choices we are making when creating an evaluation document (Richardson, 2000, p. 923). The remainder of this chapter presents detailed information on using photographs, cartoons, poetry, and drama for evaluation communicating and reporting purposes.

Photographs

The purpose of using still photography in evaluation is to represent the realities of program participants, as they exist at one point in time. For communicating and reporting evaluation processes and findings, photographs have a tremendous capacity to convey context, provide complex information, stimulate discussion, and promote self-reflection. Relatively inexpensive digital technology makes photographs available, without processing, that are easy to edit, insert in documents, and transmit electronically.

Evaluators who use photography to communicate and report findings often achieve a more personal knowledge of the phenomenon being studied, enabling them not only to describe and analyze, but also to communicate understanding. Case Example 5.1 describes how having photographs helped one evaluator provide a more accurate and balanced report than might have otherwise been possible.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.1

Influence of Photography on Evaluator Perspective

Findings from an evaluation of a summer camp for gifted adolescent students revealed numerous problems with its administration. The four-week summer camp provided classroom and experiential learning in marine biology taught by university faculty. Chief among the findings were the difficulties caused by the availability of only one sign language interpreter among the dormitory and teaching staff. This person was expected to be available at any time that the youth were awake or in the classroom. In addition, none of the university faculty had had prior experience with, nor were they provided any training or orientation to, working with deaf or adolescent youth, or with a sign language interpreter. Consequently, the classroom time reflected a lack of discipline, and the staff felt a high level of frustration.

   In the two weeks she spent on site at the camp, the evaluator used photography to document the camp activities and experiences of the youth. Experienced herself in deaf education, the evaluator's sensitivity to these problems was particularly acute. During the evaluation process, she engaged with the camp's administrators to provide formative feedback as the findings emerged. In writing the final report, her first inclination was to focus on all the turmoil that she had seen and that had been expressed by the staff. However, a look through the pictures that had captured the enthusiasm on the faces of the youth—at the beach, conducting experiments, laughing, and playing—reminded her that some good things had happened. The gifted deaf adolescents themselves seemed to be fairly immune to the travail that was being experienced by those running the program. In viewing and reflecting upon the photographs, she was able to give a more balanced report of the weaknesses and strengths of the camp. The program did receive funding for the following year, and was implemented with remarkable improvements, including the hiring of a fully fluent dormitory staff, two interpreters for the classroom, and a science teacher from a residential school for the deaf.

SOURCE: Personal communication, Donna Mertens, 2004.

   Using photographs in communicating and reporting evaluation processes and findings is particularly effective when

- Visual information is of primary interest.
- Information about the program looks different to various people.
- It is important to understand and describe the subjective nature of participants' experiences.
- The evaluation is focused on discovering and describing the unexpected, unobtrusive, secondary effects of the program.

- Studying program implementation is important.
- The evaluator is interested in counting, measuring, comparing, qualifying, or tracking artifacts or information that can be captured visually.
- The evaluator wishes to develop a framework for understanding and classifying some of the important events that occur during the course of a program.
- The evaluator wishes to illustrate the activities of a single participant in a program.
- Language or cultural barriers may inhibit participants' ability to verbally express their opinions, and/or easily assimilate information in written reports.

When used to convey interim or final evaluation results in a written report or a visual presentation (see Case Example 4.2), photographs provide an opportunity for stakeholders to construct their own meaning of the findings. The photography can be a catalyst for dialogue that stimulates audiences' participation in interpreting important events and experiences, enabling the findings to be used for developing action plans. Case Example 5.2 illustrates how using photography as both a data collection and reporting method led to new insights about the program and a revision of the next year's evaluation plan.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.2

Using Photography to Collect Data and Communicate Evaluation Findings

Parent University is a parent involvement program for elementary school children and their families in a small town in rural South Georgia, where there are few community resources. The program is designed to maximize the opportunity for creating and maintaining parent involvement in their children's school success. In creating healthy norms for parent involvement, it was important that the school create a welcoming environment where parents and children could learn together and have fun doing it. The more families the school can expose to the same information and experiences regarding parent involvement, the better chance it has of creating and maintaining a healthy community norm. During FY 2003, the program sponsored 25 parent activities involving 2,064 participants. During a typical session, children attend a story time and activity to learn about the value of money. Meanwhile, their parents learn about family financial strategies from local bankers. This strategy gives family members a shared learning experience that is developmentally appropriate, providing a foundation for many important family discussions.
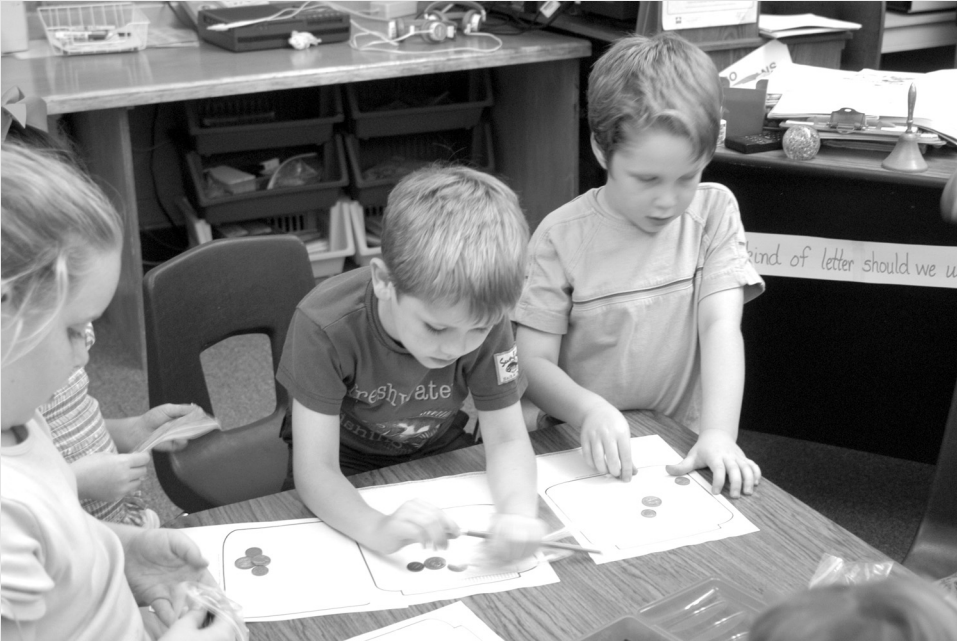
(Continued)

CASE EXAMPLE 5.2 (Continued)

An evaluation of Parent University was undertaken to determine how it has helped parents get involved in their children's school success. Throughout the program's implementation, photos were taken during regularly scheduled activities to depict the real-time interactions among school administrators, teachers, parents, and children. The photos (see below) were included in the evaluation's final report and were used to facilitate a discussion about the findings with various stakeholder groups and to develop a three-year strategic plan. The program's external evaluator, Mary Cofer, believes that the photos provided a series of "poetic glimpses into the inner workings of the program that could not be adequately conveyed by words alone." (To view these photos in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

Parents learn about money management.

Children learn about money value.

The game of Bingo is a family activity.

(Continued)

CASE EXAMPLE 5.2 (Continued)

Children help parents with computer learning.

Family fun can be intergenerational.

Siblings of all ages lend a helping hand.

During the discussions it became obvious that members of the collaborative were impressed that the photographs revealed program qualities that were not being reported otherwise. "Until we looked at the photos, we were not aware of the extent of inter-generational participation and support for the program. This support system is an important one for school success." As Cofer further explains, "the simple act of viewing the visual images of a program at work generated new revelations of knowledge and understanding. Each person saw the photos from a new and different perspective and pointed out aspects of which others were unaware." For example, in some of the photos it appeared that the children were helping parents learn about computers. Other photos revealed parents helping children learn.

In developing the three-year strategic plan, Cofer reports that the "photos were instrumental in raising the level of discussion regarding programmatic and evaluation issues. As a result, we will refine the evaluation instrument to include more questions designed to broaden the scope and deepen the nature of information collected. There will be questions that ask about the parents' school involvement and community involvement that go beyond just attending the Parent University program activities."

The ways in which photography was used in this evaluation facilitated both individual and group learning. Including the photos in the evaluation report increased individuals' understanding of the program's context and outcomes, and using the photos to communicate the findings to audience members in a large-group setting created the opportunity for members to collectively interpret the findings and to co-construct new meanings about the program, which ultimately influenced the next year's evaluation plan.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Evaluation Enterprises, Inc.

⇨ *Implementation Tips for Using*
Photography in Communicating and Reporting

■ **Consider the appropriateness of photography for your evaluation participants.**

Photography may be especially useful for communicating and reporting with the following stakeholders and audiences:

- A wide variety of program participants, including youth, those who do not speak the dominant language, and those who have seen or participated in only select parts of a program
- Program administrators and staff, both those widely involved in the program and those in tangential roles
- Program staff and participants in similar programs
- Funders who have limited contact with the program/participants
- Potential funders/donors who have limited knowledge of the program
- General public with an interest in the program's activities and impact

Photographs are widely used in professional reports and documents of all types throughout the world. Nonetheless, it is important that before deciding to use photography, you make sure participants are comfortable having images of themselves and their environments recorded and disseminated. Numerous cultures across the globe (e.g., the Amish in America, many Indian pueblos of the American Southwest, inhabitants of remote areas of Nepal) have prohibitions against photographic or other recordings of visual images.

■ **Plan your use of photography for data collection and reporting.**

As described in Case Example 5.2, photography can serve as both a data collection and reporting method. When using photography, it is important to consider what will be photographed before the first photos are taken. Much like the decisions that guide evaluators in determining whom to interview in qualitative studies, the key factor in deciding whom and what to photograph rests on the desire to represent program participants' and stakeholders' perspectives and realities. Evaluators should consider the following sampling questions (Templin, 1981, 1982): Is this photographic evidence representative, and of what? Whose differing perspectives are represented? Does this sample of photographs represent to others what you had in mind? Another important question to consider is, Which individuals or groups do not appear in the photograph(s), and why?
Sampling techniques include the following:

- Time sampling, where people are photographed at regular intervals
- Blanket sampling, where the photographer attempts to photograph as much of the events and people as possible

- Shadow sampling, where an individual is accompanied by you as evaluator/photographer throughout a day, periodically taking photographs
- Snowball sampling, where participants are asked who or what should be photographed in an attempt to capture issues as they arise

In addition to following a particular sampling plan, be prepared to take photos when unique opportunities present themselves—it is not always easy to predict what will happen in any program or organization being evaluated. You will also want to create a system to track and organize your photographs. Maintaining a log listing the time, place, date, and frame for each photograph makes them easy to locate and identify for later use.

An example of an organized and well-planned approach is Wynne's (1993) book *A Year in the Life of an Excellent Elementary School.* After spending several years studying effective schools, he developed a schema that outlines the characteristics of an effective school. The framework lists general categories or principles, followed by increasingly specific and refined activities and practices. For each category he then identified observable behaviors that are evidence of traits or characteristics. Once he completed the framework, he began taking photographs illustrating the presence or lack of the particular traits identified. Wynne used photography in his book to provide teachers with visual, not just written, evidence that educational reform can work and that teachers do accomplish many reform goals.

■ **Support photography with other forms of data collection.**

Some audiences may feel that photographs are not sufficiently representative. Various writers on photography caution that because photographs represent only one point in time, they reflect "an array of casual fragments—an endlessly alluring, poignantly reductive way of dealing with the world" (Sontag, 1977, p. 80). The observation that photographs "destroy reality and interfere with the accuracy of possible generalizations from the findings" (English, 1988, p. 9) suggests there is a certain truth "out there" that cannot be ascertained from photographs. When used as a data collection method, photography should be supported with other forms of data collection (e.g., interviews, surveys, observations, measures of student achievement) that address your evaluation questions.

■ **Consider using photographs primarily as a reporting method—to facilitate audience understanding of the program, its participants, and/or context.**

Photographs add to the visual appeal of written reports and invite readership. A single photograph, or several, illustrating a program's context and/or participants can be included in an evaluation report, summary, or a newsletter to help the reader accurately visualize the evaluand. In this case, accuracy and

representativeness of the photographs are of concern, but not to the same extent as when photography is used specifically as a data collection method. As will be discussed later, you will want to obtain feedback and consensus from primary stakeholders about the validity of any photographs selected for inclusion in written documents.

Figure 5.1 shows a single-page summary of a study that identified success factors of a downtown revitalization effort in Charlottesville, Virginia. The single color photograph significantly enhances the information provided in the summary by showing readers at least one outcome of the revitalization. Much more text would have been needed to convey the contents of this single photograph. Further, the photo adds to the overall visual appeal of the summary. (To see this figure in color, go to http://www.sagepub.com/escr.)

■ Negotiate permission to photograph.

As the evaluation design is finalized, discuss with key stakeholders why and how photography will be used in the evaluation study. It is important to get written permission for the use of photographs from program participants (or their families in the case of minors). This should be sought and obtained before the first photograph is taken. Many programs and organizations routinely obtain permission from parents for their children to be photographed. Figure 5.2 shows an example of a parental consent form for photographs, videotaping, and publication (including Web site) for use by the organization that administers the program being evaluated.

You should discuss with decision makers two other important issues: who will have access to negatives or digital files, and how you should handle the possibility of particular individuals not wishing to be photographed. It is important to respect different people's cultures and attitudes about being photographed. If groups or individuals decline to be photographed, it is critical that their wishes are respected.

■ Use several photographers to get multiple perspectives.

One criticism of photography has been that photographs ultimately represent what the photographer deems important. This often leads to the question, what photographs were missed or purposely not taken? To address this issue, you may wish to work with a team of evaluators or ask program participants to take photographs during the evaluation study. One option is for participants to use their own cameras or inexpensive, one-time-use cameras. The photographs they take can be used in conjunction with yours to discuss different perspectives represented in the various images.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA: REVITALIZING THE HEART OF THE CITY

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The City of Charlottesville constructed an eight-block pedestrian mall between 1975 and 1985 to provide a catalyst for the revitalization of the central city, to stabilize the downtown retail market and to improve the quality of the physical environment on East Main Street and in the downtown area.

The research has focused on an analysis of the factors surrounding the mall's development and the lessons learned in an effort to explain the success of Charlottesville's downtown revitalization.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Was revitalization of the downtown successful and what were the key indicators? Sales and property values? Soft indicators of use? Opinions?
- What processes and actions led to the success of Charlottesville's downtown revitalization?
- How does one compare and convey the elements of success?

MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS

- Successful downtown revitalization requires a substantive vision and long-term, effective persistence.
- Planning and implementation require a complex interplay among public officials, private investors, private users of facilities and purchasers of goods and services, non-profit organizations, and interested citizens.
- Downtown revitalization depends on creating a place with numerous parts that attracts many people at different times of day and week, month and year.
- Preservation of historic resources is a necessary ingredient to creating or retaining a place where many people choose to be.

IDEAL AUDIENCES FOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Local and regional: government officials, businesses, developers, property owners, citizens
- National: other cities and centers of metropolitan areas, planners and urban designers

World Class City

Figure 5.1   Example of Summary Report With Single Photo Depicting the Evaluand
SOURCE: Used with permission of City of Charlottesville.

Film and Media Permission Form

Dear Parent:

Please complete this form to give consent for [name of program/organization] to take photographs/videos of your child.

I am the parent and/or legal guardian of _____ (first and last name of child), born on __/__/__ (date of birth of child), and am giving [name of program/organization] permission to use:

_____ A photograph/video of my child

_____ A photograph/video taken by my child

_____ My child's first name

[Name of program/organization] has my permission to use the above for evaluation, educational, public relations, publishing, and public awareness purposes (including, but not limited to, the [name of program/organization] Web site). By this authorization I agree that I shall not receive any fee and that all rights, title, and interest to the photographs/videos and use of them belong to [name of program/organization].

_____

Signature of Parent or Guardian

_____

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

Relationship to Child:

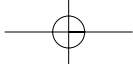_____

Date: _____

Figure 5.2   Example of Parental Consent Form for Photographs, Videotaping, and Publication

■ **Be aware of participant reactivity, as well as the use of photography to establish rapport in the field.**

Reactivity refers to the influence of your presence on the behavior of program participants. It raises issues about whether the participants' actions are part of

their ordinary behavior or are influenced by your presence with the camera. Becker (1979) and Collier (1967) argue that the camera reduces reactivity because it validates the researchers' right to be there. Although the presence of a camera can be obtrusive, we have found that people generally like to be photographed.

The camera can even help establish relationships between you and the participants. When one of the authors first started taking photographs at the Saturn School in St. Paul, Minnesota, some of the students approached her and asked her what she was doing (see Preskill, King, & Hopkins, 1994). This enabled her to begin a conversation about her role and the students' perceptions of how things were going. Eventually, they grew used to her presence in the school, camera and all, and rarely paid attention to her efforts to photograph them, thus reducing the potential for reactivity.

Similarly, Fetterman (1998, 2002) describes the use of digital photography as an icebreaker "to help gain access and familiarity with people in the field" (2002, p. 37). In one instance, "community members could see themselves immediately and if they did not like the picture, it could be erased and reshot moments later. This helped to establish rapport" (p. 31).

■ **Determine how you will analyze photographs used for data collection.**

Analyzing photographs is similar to analyzing qualitative data. Use several analysts, edit analytically, examine random samples, and perform content analyses (Wagner, 1979). As the evaluation progresses, you can work back and forth between the data (photographs) collected, developing more elaborate and complex theories, interpretations, and judgments related to the study's evaluation questions. Ultimately, the photographs can be arranged in categories that relate to emergent evaluation themes, conceptual frameworks, and key evaluation questions. These analyses can then be integrated with the participants' stories and other evaluation data that have been collected.

Photographs can be used in an evaluation to strengthen stakeholder involvement, to focus on group learning, and to stimulate dialogue among program participants. In this case, stakeholders participate in the analysis, guided by your questions. They are asked to view, analyze, interpret, and perhaps judge the images according to themes and patterns they discern in the photographs. The inferences you and the participants make when analyzing the photographs should be included in verbal or written evaluation reports with the photographs.

■ **Solicit stakeholder feedback.**

Whether or not you involve stakeholders in the analysis and selection of photographs to represent the evaluand and/or evaluation findings, it is important to
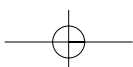
solicit their feedback on your final selections. Even when participants have given permission to be photographed, they may later be surprised (pleasantly or unpleasantly) to see photographs including them in an evaluation document.

■ **Provide details about your sampling and analysis methods.**

Written reports containing photographs should provide documentation, such as contact sheets, sampling plans, photographing protocols, and photo interviewing protocols—as well as details about your analysis methods. Doing so gives readers access to information about the validity of the photographic evidence. When you have used one or several photographs to portray elements of the evaluation context, you may want to include details, such as its date and location, in a caption.

■ **Prepare photographs for discussion with and feedback from program participants.**

To facilitate discussions with stakeholders regarding the evaluation's process and findings, photographs should be produced in 5" × 7" or 8" × 10" sizes. Then they can be mounted on foam core board or other sturdy material available at any art supply store. The number of photographs and how they are mounted depends on the purpose and scope of the discussion desired. It is also possible to mount many images (4" × 6" or larger) on a wall in the school or organization as a gallery display. Alternatively, digital photos can be projected from your computer. When you have program participants view all of the photos at the same time, this can be followed with a discussion about what they saw, as described earlier.

Cartoons _____

Cartoons are another form of visual representation that evaluators can use for communicating and reporting. They draw on the viewer's visual literacy, the ability to look at an image "carefully, critically, and with an eye for the intentions of the image's creator" (Thibault & Walbert, 2003). Traditionally, cartoons are black and white or color drawings, depicting: (1) humorous situations, often accompanied by a caption; (2) current public figures or issues portrayed symbolically and often satirically (political cartoons); and (3) basic information in a simplified format. Despite the fact that cartoons have been a form of communication, entertainment, and social and cultural commentary for over 100 years, they are the least used among the creative formats for evaluation communicating and reporting. Although, evaluators have used cartoons to depict evaluators and aspects of evaluation processes in works primarily written for other evaluators (see Patton, 1997; Stake, 2004).

Modern-day comics began in 1896 when Richard Felton Outcalt created what is recognized as the first comic strip or comic book. His work often appeared in the Sunday supplements of newspapers. Throughout the years, comics have reflected a variety of issues and concerns. For example, in the United States, after the stock market crash in 1929 and during the Great Depression of the 1930s, many of the comics were escapist and hope-oriented. The resulting emphasis on superheroes continued through World War II. Also during this time, *Brenda Starr,* the first cartoon strip written by a woman, appeared in Chicago in 1940. Further reflecting society's concerns in the 1950s, comics often focused on issues of prejudice, juvenile delinquency, and the Cold War. Comics continue today to be a voice for various groups of individuals (e.g., political parties, the underclass, rural communities, young families, the lovelorn).

Cartoons are widely used in public awareness and learning materials to convey information to children and low-level adult readers. For example, meal programs for the homeless in Rhode Island have used place mats depicting information about community services in cartoon form, designed for non-readers and low-level readers (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 1994, p. 39). Another example is seen in an annual report of the adult education and training division of the Grassroots Educare Trust (1993), an organization that helps South African communities provide preschool education and healthcare. The entire section of the report describing its resource center is provided in a cartoon format consisting of 23 drawings presented over four pages. Each depicts a different activity of the center and is accompanied by one or two sentences describing the nature of the activity. This presentation format was consistent with the Trust's goal of adapting its training materials to the needs and literacy levels of the peoples it serves.

Cartoon images can be used by evaluators to provide audiences with an informal, visually oriented understanding of program impact. They can also be used to provide anecdotal scenes of program implementation. As with photographs, cartoons can be particularly useful when language or cultural barriers may inhibit participants' ability to easily assimilate information in written reports. "Cartoons afford evaluators an opportunity to present findings in an illustrative and succinct way to attract the attention and interest of readers to an evaluation report" (Chin, 2005, p. 42). In the 1980s, Phoenix Union High School used a brochure with a cartoon depiction of students in a stalled car; it was aimed at students who might be thinking of dropping out of school. The brochure presented findings from an evaluation study that revealed the experiences and opinions of students who had dropped out and subsequently returned to school (Hathaway, 1982). As a visual form of presentation, cartoons can address simple or complex issues and findings, communicating them in a highly accessible and concise manner. What newspaper write-ups attempt to express in 12 pages, the cartoon does in a pithy

one-liner. Little wonder then that the first thing most of us like to look at when we pick up a newspaper is the cartoons (Austa, 2003).

⇨ *Implementation Tips for Using Cartoons in Communicating and Reporting*

■ **Consider the appropriateness of cartoons for your evaluation stakeholders.**

Cartoons may be especially useful in communicating and reporting to the following stakeholders and other audiences:

- Program administrators and staff involved in the program's design and implementation
- Youth
- Parents, guardians, caregivers, and teachers of participants
- Stakeholders with low-level reading ability
- Funders who have in-depth experience with the context of the program and its participants

Cartoons may not work well for audiences who would view them as detracting from the credibility of the evaluation work. This could include funders, or corporate, government, and other audiences who have almost exclusively received traditional, text-rich evaluation reports. It is also important to be aware of the cultural perspectives of audiences when using cartoons to depict situations that are meant to be humorous. What is acceptable or interpreted as humorous in one culture may not be so in another culture.

■ **Determine how you will select topics or findings for illustration with cartoons.**

As described in Case Example 5.3, Chin used specific interview questions to identify humorous situations experienced by staff and participants in her evaluation of a reading program for an elementary school. She then created four cartoons based on the interview data.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.3

Using Cartoons to Report Evaluation Findings

Chin (2002) used cartoons to communicate and report findings for her evaluation of a reading program in a Florida elementary school. To help her develop this approach, she asked an additional interview question of some teachers, parents, and students to elicit "amusing sidelights or funny incidents" that were experienced in the program. What she found was that while the participants' examples were indeed funny, they also represented the benefits, critical issues, and challenges in implementing the program. From the interview data, her classroom observations, and reflective role-play analysis she used "cartoon transcreation" to develop four cartoons depicting the key evaluation themes. Chin (2003) defines this process as "the creation of cartoons from data and other source(s) pertinent to the study with the purpose of representing findings based on humor, gentle conveyance, and/or elicitation of awareness on matters deemed important to readers" (p. 295).

Illustration 1 Cartoons

SOURCE: © 2002 Chin Mei Chin

CASE EXAMPLE 5.3 (Continued)

Chin drew three of these cartoons and commissioned an artist, Bill Otersen, to draw the fourth cartoon because she felt the complexity of drawing required was beyond her skill level. The fourth cartoon illustrates the repetitive nature of the reading program and the teachers' and students' feelings about the 90-minute classroom sessions. About 40% of teachers found this amount of time to be appropriate, and an equal percentage found it to be too long.

Chin included the four cartoons in her final evaluation report (2002) and subsequently surveyed and interviewed members of the school community about their reactions to them (2003). Out of 15 respondents, only one unfavorable reaction was recorded. Among the respondents' reasons for liking the cartoons were that they provided visual pictures that explained the findings; helped the reader in remembering the findings over time; conveyed the findings even for those who could or would not read the entire report; allowed the reader to "feel the attitudes" of the characters; were accurate depictions of the program; added interest, appeal, and variety; attracted and kept reader attention; and were amusing (2003, pp. 142–143).

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Chin Mei Chin.

An alternative to this approach is to use cartoons to illustrate the main findings or issues identified through routine data collection and analysis in the evaluation. The issues, topics, themes, or findings need not necessarily involve humor. The purpose of the cartoon illustrations could be to provide a visual image with some of the same benefits of photographs—for example, to address different learning styles, to depict context, to communicate with low-level readers, to bridge language barriers, and to stimulate dialogue and reflection among stakeholders about the findings illustrated.

■ **Determine how you will create your cartoons.**

There are three basic alternatives for creating cartoons: (1) draw them yourself; (2) create them on the computer with art/drawing software, or by using or adapting clip art available from software programs or on the Internet; or (3) hire a cartoonist or graphic artist. Drawing skills are often all that is necessary to create simple cartoons. Cartoonists use the three principles of the cartoon code: leveling, sharpening, and assimilation (Harrison, 1981). *Leveling* refers to techniques for simplifying what is seen; for instance, using black and white instead of color, dropping insignificant details, and using as few lines as possible. With *sharpening*, figures in the cartoon stand out from the background. Cartoonists use *assimilation* by exaggerating features or expressions to help the viewer grasp the feelings or circumstances being portrayed. Numerous resources are available on drawing cartoons (see for example, Blitz, 2001; Hart, 2000; Tatchell, 1990).

The principles just discussed can be applied to artwork you draw manually, or on your computer with the appropriate software. Most word-processing programs also include clip art drawings that might be suitable for conveying evaluation findings or themes. With skill in the use of artwork software, these images can be modified to suit your purposes. An endless variety of clip art drawings is also available on the Internet. You should proceed cautiously, however, in using ready-made artwork, which may or may not accurately convey the message you intend.

Finally, you may decide to hire a cartoonist or graphic artist to create your cartoons, providing detailed instructions on the concepts and ideas to be depicted. In this case, you will need to find room in your evaluation budget to cover the cost of hiring an illustrator.

■ **Write simple call-outs and captions for your cartoons.**

Though cartoons are obviously a visual medium, it is the combination of pictures and text that most often conveys the complete message of the cartoon. Most comic strips are written in language suitable for elementary and middle school readers (Lin, 2003). The text that accompanies cartoons for depicting evaluation information and findings should be similarly simple.

■ **Solicit participant feedback.**

There are at least three important reasons to obtain feedback on cartoons from program participants. First, participant feedback provides a validity check on how well the cartoon conveys the intended message, particularly because there is a large interpretive element with cartoons. Second, caricatures of individuals or situations as depicted in cartoons could be deemed offensive, insulting, or inappropriate within the context of any particular culture that participants represent. Finally, whether intended or not, program participants may think they see themselves depicted in a cartoon that you create. If so, they may think that promised confidentiality has been violated. Naturally, if this were the case, it would need to be resolved through revision of the cartoon, and/or clarification and negotiation with the participants.

■ **Use cartoons in combination with other communicating and reporting formats.**

While cartoons can enhance one's understanding of the evaluation's findings, they also require additional information and explanation to ensure that the intended message is being received. Using cartoons in conjunction with formal written reports, newsletters, executive summaries, and other text-based formats increases the reader's understanding by adding a visual

element to the information being presented. The text provided should include methodological details about how the cartoons were created, their intended meaning, and if possible, participants' reactions to them.

Poetry

Qualitative researchers in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and education have sought to present their findings in ways that "make a difference in the lives of those whom they represent and those who are the audiences for the presentation" (Goodyear, 2001). Poetry addresses this goal by creating a sense of the reality of "being there," offering a vicarious experience to the audience and aiding them in understanding the "nuances and subtleties of conflict and agreement in *this place and at this time*" (Lincoln, 1990, p. 73, emphasis in the original).

The use of poetry to communicate evaluation processes and findings is often derived from a practice called "poetic transcription" that "involves word reduction while illuminating the wholeness and interconnectedness of thoughts" (Glesne, 1999, p. 183). That is, a poem is created by using the interviewees' words or phrases. When read, the poem reflects more than the individuals' words—it represents the combination of the evaluator's interpretation and the participants' voices (Glesne, 1997). Figure 5.3 provides a poem created by one of the authors using the words of corporate training and development staff to represent their vision of an ideal evaluation system. It captures both the multitude of participant voices and the complexity of a well-functioning evaluation system.

Poetry provides another way of perceiving meaning from the text, and can be especially effective in communicating the tacit and the implicit. Poetry helps articulate contradictions, sensitive topics, emotional reactions, and challenges in the setting. It can make evaluation results more accessible by using participants' language and avoiding evaluation or other academic jargon. The use of poetry for communicating and reporting may

- Convey meaning about social/organizational complexities of evaluation contexts.
- Educate and promote learning both during an evaluation and in reports or other documentation.
- Create opportunities for dialogue that enhances learning from the evaluation.
- Provide an accessible medium for communicating individual and collective experiences (MacNeil, 2000).

An Ideal Evaluation System for the CEDT Organization

Questions, information, feedback, stakeholders
use, improve, modify, make decisions, and communicate
collaborative, customer focused, teams
values—mine, yours, the organization's
specific, clear, targeted, relevant, consistent, trustworthy
Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4
qualitative, quantitative, multiple methods
reflective, talk, face-to-face, buy-in
technology, analysis, database, user-friendly, accessible, linked
reports, canned, customized, summaries, desktop
summarize, make changes, flexible
integrated, whole, systemic, bridge, connected, continuous
committed, supported, embedded, resources, line of sight
new ideas, suggestions, lessons learned, change, celebration

Figure 5.3   Example of Poem Reflecting Multiple Participant Voices and
                  Evaluator Analysis and Interpretation

SOURCE: Used with permission of Sandia National Laboratories.

Case Example 5.4 details how a poetic transcription of language from focus group interviews promoted dialogue and understanding about program participants' experiences, as well as about evaluation practice.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.4

Using Poetry to Communicate Evaluation Findings

For an evaluation of a government-funded, self-help program, MacNeil (2000) took language from focus group interviews and constructed a poem that was intended to provoke readers of the report "to engage in a process of reflective meaning making about the program" (p. 359). The program hired successful recipients of mental health services to provide peer support to people in psychiatric institutions. Using an open-coding approach to the qualitative data analysis process, she "high-lighted the descriptive, metaphoric, poetic, or emotive clusters . . . embedded in the quotations, and then extrapolated and reassembled these clusters into a poetic narrative that conveyed the particular central theme for the evaluation finding" (p. 361). The resulting 44-verse poem represented seven connected themes found in the data, one of which was related to the employees' role identity (p. 364):

(Continued)

CASE EXAMPLE 5.4 (Continued)

Poetic Representation of "Role Identity"

Which side of the line am I on?

> a psychiatric survivor
> a full-time worker
> running support groups
> getting a paycheck

> > learn to play politics
> > case management
> > covering for staff
> > keeping my distance

> > > mixing oil with water
> > > walking a fine line
> > > a political dance
> > > a dance with the system

> > > > I don't want to sit in staff meetings
> > > > but where is the voice?
> > > > why doesn't anyone ask?
> > > > have your tried this?

The entire poem was included in the final evaluation report. When McNeil shared the report with the client who commissioned the evaluation, her reaction was very positive. "She thought the poetic transcription, 'would be useful in shaping understandings about the inherent challenges and contradictions of the position.' But she also wondered whether others she would be sharing the report with would understand or value the representation" (p. 364). As a result, MacNeil and her client decided to present the evaluation's findings at an annual retreat. Early on the day of the retreat, just prior to its start, she asked some of the employees to read the poem "with a critical eye to see if it held up for them . . . and consider reading it aloud at the end of the day. They were enthusiastic about the offer and snuck away with the piece during the afternoon for a private rehearsal" (p. 364). At the end of the day, the employees read the poem to their colleagues and supervisors. "It was quite a striking performance. The room was deadly quiet while the readers intently focused—smiling, grimacing, and accentuating at all the fitting moments. The audience members nodded in agreement verse after verse and delivered a resounding round of applause upon completion of the reading" (p. 364).

When the reading was over, MacNeil asked the audience to comment on the poem. They responded that "the poem put their work, thoughts, and experiences into an accessible medium." One participant best summed it up in stating, 'It makes people think differently about what we are doing because you have transformed very complicated issues into simple content that illuminate raw realities'" (p. 365). Other stakeholders felt that the poetic transcription "validated their

roles . . . made them view their jobs differently . . . helped to unify them as a group, and built on their courage to continue working in this challenging position" (p. 365). In sum, MacNeil believes that the content of the poem "made readers re-think what it meant to be an employee . . . and influenced the meanings and values held by the different stakeholders about the evaluand, and raised higher moral and political issues for reflection about a dimension of the program" (p. 365).

Finally, "by promoting discussions among readers about processes and products of evaluative inquiry, the poetic transcription provoked reflective dialogue about evaluation practice" (p. 365). Stakeholders "talked a lot about how important the poem was in its ability to communicate in a language different than traditional evaluation reporting" (p. 365). MacNeil reports that the poem stimulated discussions about what is knowledge, what is evaluation, and what are underlying assumptions of various methodologies.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Cheryl MacNeil.

Implementation Tips for Using Poetry in Communicating and Reporting

■ **Consider the appropriateness of poetry for your evaluation stakeholders.**

Poetry may be especially useful for communicating and reporting with the following stakeholders and audiences:

- Program participants, administrators, and staff, especially those who have participated in case studies or provided qualitative data such as interviews
- Stakeholders of programs related to education, social services, arts and culture
- Audiences whose cultural/social traditions value verbal communication

It is important to remember that some audiences may not readily understand or value poetic representation or its role in evaluation. Given that poetic forms of representation are not typical in most evaluations, audiences may be surprised when you use these methods. You will want to consider how poetry might be received by your particular stakeholders and other audiences, and how you will explain why it is being used. There may be better times than others, or with certain groups, that poetry may be more acceptable and appropriate. Some audiences may see poetry as highly aesthetic or elitist and react negatively. Others may consider formal presentations and final reports as the only legitimate venues for evaluation information and dismiss poetry as too informal or "unscientific."

■ **Determine how you will construct poems to represent key findings, themes, or issues in the evaluation data.**

After conducting a thematic or content analysis of the data, using "poetic transcription" a poem can be developed from key words, excerpts, or phrases from the data that stand out—that appear particularly poignant, insightful, or compelling. Case Example 5.5 presents a poem using interviewees' direct words, which was then refined by the interviewees themselves.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.5

*I Want to Help My People: Reflections From Community
Health Representatives Serving a Northern Plains Indian Nation*

What is it like to work as a community health representative on a Northern Plains reservation? To stay up all night listening to unfolding storm reports, making emergency disaster plans for your own family and for your whole community? To know your community's elderly so well you plan your long rural routes around their schedules for getting up in the morning? To stop at the houses where you know the availability of heat is in question when temperatures plunge, and scrounge for electric fans when they soar into the 100s? To often speak in the native language of your people as you advise your elderly neighbors about avoiding frostbite in the winter and heat exhaustion in the summer? To use "drive time" searching your own heart and mind for health, bound in emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental balance? To witness with a heavy heart the rising devastation of "new" illnesses, like diabetes, among your people? To grieve over the loss of young relatives and neighbors from vehicle crashes and suicides? Yet, to feel a warm glow when neighbors you have encouraged to stop smoking, stop drinking, eat healthier foods, start getting out and walking, or start back to school—gradually and with some setbacks—take those steps?

The following poem, *I Want to Help My People,* provides one answer to these questions, reflecting the dedication of community health representatives (CHRs) to their communities' health in all dimensions—mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional. CHRs are American Indians and Alaska Natives specially trained, but employed and supervised by their tribes and communities. They are paraprofessional health care providers who know the dialects and the unique cultural and social aspects of their people's lives (Indian Health Service, 2002). CHRs are deeply engaged in promoting health and preventing disease within their own communities, making possible early intervention and case finding so that patients get the care they need earlier in the course of their illnesses, and helping to prevent chronic illnesses as they encourage physical activity and healthy eating. CHRs often work long hours and serve their communities on a 24-hour basis (Indian Health Service, 2002). Today approximately 1,400 CHRs serve in about 400 tribally managed programs.

I Want to Help My People

A Poem by Lakota & Dakota Sioux Community Health Representatives

John Eagle Shield, Gerald Iron Shield,
Elaine Keeps Eagle, Virginia Leaf, Dawn Satterfield,
Sally Taken Alive, Jolene White Bull Codotte

"I am a representative of my
community."
"I am a representative for health."
"I believe in my Creator."
"I see it as a calling."
"This is what I'm supposed to do."
   "I want to help my people."

"My own life has to have balance or
nobody will believe me."
"I'm not better than anybody else."
"I ask for forgiveness."
"I have to have a clean frame of mind."
"I pray to say the right things."
   "I want to help my people."

"It's this idea of helping people."
"People trust me."
"They come to me in need."
"I'm there for everyone."
"We're the 'in-between' people."
   "I want to help my people."

"The eagle sees everything that's
going on."
"Our ears are always open."
"Like bees, we're busy, trying to make
things right."
"Sometimes we see things that
make us sad."
"I can be fierce like a bear . . . trying
to protect."
   "I want to help my people."

"We have feelings, too."
"I wish they knew how much we care."
"I say, 'We're here for you but please
meet us halfway'."
"Some people thank us from the heart."
"Our elders—they understand."
   "I want to help my people."

"From the job came a concern
for my people."
"I didn't know my people were so sickly
with diabetes."
"People on dialysis talk to me—'If I had
only known. . . .'"
"We've got to think about our children and
grandchildren."
"We need prevention here."
   "I want to help my people."

"We try again and again—then there's
a little change."
"She gets outside and starts moving
around."
"Just yesterday, he got off insulin and onto
a pill."
"We did it! She switched to diet pop!"
"That's rewarding . . . rewarding. . .
rewarding. . . ."
   "I want to help my people."

"We should tell our youth, "No, diabetes
doesn't have to happen to you."
We know how to prevent these long-term
illnesses.
Let's commit again to our traditional ways
of living,
A life of balance, of people walking
together on the same path.
Coming together in a good way.
   "I want to help my people."

"I think of all the things I want for my
community."
"I think of the animals that fly, swim—that
survive . . ."
"I want our people to stand and be proud
like the eagle."
"I think of the patience of the turtle."
"I remember the strength of the buffalo."
   "I want to help my people."

NOTE: Dedicated to Eugene Parker, a veteran CHR who put the needs of his community before his own. Used with permission. Contact: John Eagle Shield, 701-854-3856, Standing Rock Lakota Sioux Nation.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.5 (Continued)

The poem was written using the direct words of CHRs from two sources: (1) focus group interviews where they described the most important aspects of their roles as CHRs, what they wished people to know about their work, and the effect diabetes has had on their people; and (2) refrains from other area CHRs heard by the interviewer in her role as their instructor for courses about diabetes. A group of five CHRs then refined the poem and dedicated it to a colleague before his death in 2001.

Evidence for the poem's validity was seen in 1999 when over 700 participants closed a national conference on diabetes among American Indians, standing on their feet repeating, "I want to help my people." During the conference, John Eagle Shield had read the poem, and described the dedication of the Standing Rock Nation's CHRs and their program's collaboration with diverse partners to improve diabetes outcomes.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Diabetes Translation, National Diabetes Prevention Center.

Another approach is to create the poem based on your own understanding of the program and analyses of the data. Case Example 5.6 describes this approach and audience members' positive responses about the utility of the poetry.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.6

Positive Audience Reaction to Poetry Based on Evaluator Interpretation

Goodyear (2001) created poems to represent the findings of two large-scale surveys of risk behaviors regarding HIV/AIDS among youth. She generated poems based on her understanding of the prevention program and the findings from the studies' data. The poems are not poetic transcriptions, but rather they are interpretations that were grounded in the survey responses and informed by five years of observations and multiple methods of data collection related to the specific HIV/AIDS prevention program.

In order to create the poems, Goodyear exposed herself to many forms of poetry, mostly the type that is informed by issues of class and race and is part of a new movement to make poetry more performative and politically relevant.[1] To understand the performative aspect of poetry, she attended multiple live poetry readings—also known as poetry slams—and watched videotaped performances of poems.

The poems were presented to audiences in combination with other traditional presentations of data (graphs, narrative text, etc.), and depicted the emotionally

compelling human aspects of participants' experiences alongside the more neutral, general descriptions of program issues, trends, and outcomes. The following is one of the poems. Its topic is parent-child communication, from the perspective of a parent:

III.
Every time she comes home, I feel the gap.
I don't ask; she won't tell.
Is it a generation gap? A communication gap?
No, the gap is that space between.
Not between my child and me,
Not between her age and mine,
her values and mine, her goals and mine.
It's the space between silence and understanding
Between fear of telling and fear of knowing
A wide gaping hole, with no bridge, just depth.
An outstretched hand or a turned back.

Today I asked what she did in school.
She said, "We talked about AIDS."
Did my surprised look come from her answer
or because she answered?
A pause, then, "What did you learn?"
My response, an outstretched hand,
begins the construction of a bridge.

After hearing the poems, audience members were asked to discuss their understandings of the information presented, what action they might take based on that information, and what they thought of the poetry as a means of communicating the studies' findings. Their responses validated this use of poetry. They thought the poems could be used to: (1) highlight cultural perspectives within the program; (2) convince a skeptical audience to participate in the program; (3) inform future research and generate new hypotheses; (4) energize audiences in ways they thought conventional presentations do not; and (5) take action on behalf of the program. Audience members also said that the poems added contextual, emotional, and personal information about the program. For example, one person reflected that the poem's message about the importance of parents using different modes of communication when talking with their kids about HIV/AIDS role-modeled that challenge for him. He believes that the poem communicated how to do this more effectively than a more traditional reporting format would have been able to do.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Leslie Goodyear.

NOTE: 1. See for example, *Poemcrazy* by Wooldridge,1996; *Joker, Joker, Deuce* by Paul Beatty, 1994; the Nuyorican Poets Café anthology *Aloud,* 1994; *The United States of Poetry,* a Washington Square Films production for ITVS, 1996.

■ **Share poems with a sample of evaluation participants for feedback prior to dissemination or publication.**

Participant feedback is necessary to make sure that poems used in evaluations capture issues and findings with validity. You will want to ask a variety of stakeholders to read and comment on the poetry as you develop and refine it.

■ **If poems are being presented in a working session or verbal presentation, consider asking stakeholders to read the poems aloud.**

Having stakeholders read the poems aloud to others can be quite compelling as a form of communicating and reporting. Those listening may be more inclined to believe the findings when they are delivered by those inside the program, especially if they know them personally. An evaluator reading the same poems might not have the same impact. In addition, those who read the poems may come away with a greater commitment to using the findings, since they have been so intimately involved in communicating the evaluation's results.

■ **Facilitate discussion about the poetry by asking for participant reactions.**

Like photography and artwork for the viewer, the meaning and value of poetry varies by the listener or reader. To explore the variety of meanings stakeholders may derive, you can facilitate a discussion based on questions like the following:

- What about the program is this poem revealing to me? Is it anything I had not known before?
- What does my reaction/response to this poem reveal about me in relationship to the program?
- From hearing (or reading) this poem, what has become more real?

■ **Use poetry in combination with other communicating and reporting formats.**

While poetry may add important insights into the evaluation's findings, it is not a stand-alone strategy for communicating and reporting. Goodyear (2001) found that evaluation audiences were interested in presentations of evaluation findings that combined representational forms—e.g., graphical representations of trends, presented in conjunction with poetry that highlighted the perspectives of program participants (see Case Example 5.6).

Poetry should always be accompanied by additional text detailing important contextual information to assist audiences in understanding the role and

value of poetic representation. Written reports should include methodological details about how the poems were created so that audiences can judge their credibility and representativeness. And, as with cartoons, information about the meaning of the poems should also be included. If using poetry in a verbal presentation, it is also important that the evaluator either provide some interpretation as part of this presentation, or that he or she facilitate a dialogue with audience members about possible interpretations.

Drama

Dramatic performances provide evaluators with an innovative method for promoting dialogue, increasing interaction among and across stakeholder groups, and creating opportunities for informed decision making through the presentation of research and evaluation findings. Similar to verbal presentations, working sessions, and synchronous electronic communications, dramatic presentations provide participants opportunities to discuss and reflect on evaluative information in a group setting.

Dramatic presentations can synthesize a broad collection of research and evaluation findings; respond to the emergent needs and concerns of specific audiences; and address issues that shape organizational dynamics and individual behavior (Boal, 1992, 1998; Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, 2002; Kardia, Miller, & Steiger, 2004). Presenting evaluation findings through interactive formats enhances audiences' access to and understanding of a program's context and impact "by providing a deep sense of the lived experience of program participants using literary and dramatic devices" (Patton, 2002, pp. 102–103). As an interactive communication format, drama addresses visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

Dramatic performances are flexible in their design and provide evaluators with a visually and inter- and intrapersonally evocative approach to presenting evaluation information, including communicating to the audience the important aspects of a program's context and activities; evaluation data summaries and quotes from participants; or recommendations and evidence of program impact. Dramatic presentations may be combined with working sessions or verbal presentations to set the context for the performance and provide a structured format for group discussion of evaluative information. Case Example 5.7 describes three formats for dramatic performances that have particular utility for evaluators: (1) traditional sketch, (2) interactive sketch, and (3) forum theater workshop (Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, 2002; Kardia, Miller, & Steiger, 2004). Each involves some degree of audience participation. In particular, the interactive sketch and forum theatre formats provide a means for evaluation use and action planning.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.7

Using Research-Based Dramatic Performances to Spark Dialogue, Promote Inclusivity, and Effect Positive Change

The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at the University of Michigan offers, as part of its programs and services to the university community, the CRLT Theatre Program and the CRLT Players, a theater troupe of local professional, staff, and student actors. Using research and evaluation information on the experiences of instructors and students in higher education, the CRLT Players develop and present sketches that engage audience members in discussions about issues of pedagogy, diversity, and inclusion.

The CRLT Theatre Program

- Disseminates research about teaching and learning issues to faculty and graduate students.
- Engages audiences in an interactive format.
- Focuses more on solutions than problems.
- Adapts to the particular needs and concerns of the audience.
- Addresses issues that shape classroom dynamics and student behavior.

The CRLT Theatre Program uses three theatrical formats for its CRLT Players productions: (1) the traditional sketch, (2) the interactive sketch, and (3) the forum theatre workshop.

Traditional Sketch

A traditional theatrical sketch performance evokes assumptions, motivations, feelings, experiences, themes, or metaphors related to a specific topic. The sketch is usually developed from original research or evaluation data (especially interviews and focus groups) but may also reflect findings in research, evaluation, or academic literature. The actors may be characters or may represent abstract themes or metaphors. A trained facilitator guides the discussion between audience members after the traditional performance of the sketch (the audience may be arranged as one, larger group or subdivided into multiple, smaller groups). The actors do not engage in the post-performance discussion. Examples of CRLT Players traditional sketches include inspirations and challenges about teaching and learning based on interviews with award-winning professors at the University of Michigan (UM); and perspectives on diversity from students, faculty, and administrators at UM.

Interactive Sketch

Using a solid foundation of research and evaluation findings on the experiences of instructors and students in the classroom, the CRLT Players develop and present provocative vignettes in order to engage audience members in thinking

and talking about issues of pedagogy, diversity, and inclusion in the classroom. Each sketch reflects theory and practice about a given topic. The number of actors varies by sketch.

Sketches draw the audience into the scene with a mix of comedy and drama and are designed to portray the complexities and challenges of everyday classroom situations. Following each sketch, the audience dialogues with the actors, who stay in character. A trained facilitator guides this discussion and provides professional expertise and research-based information about the topic at hand. The facilitator also poses questions to and solicits questions from the audience. After the facilitated discussion, the actors repeat the sketch, incorporating audience members' suggestions and examples of "good practice" into the scenario.

Examples of CRLT Players interactive sketches include gender and the climate that women students experience in science classrooms, disability in the classroom and the many issues surrounding visible and hidden disabilities, and anxiety in a clinical setting and how instructors can help students learn and succeed in the complex clinical environment.

Forum Theater Workshop

In a forum theater workshop a facilitator presents a general topic for discussion. The topic may include presentation of research/evaluation findings or just open solicitation of issues of concern from the participants. The topic of discussion may be predetermined or decided as part of the facilitated conversation during the meeting.

In this format each participant serves as both an actor and an audience member. Participants create mini-scenes of situations, contexts, or scenarios about the specific topic based on their own experiences. They may do this in pairs or in small groups of up to six to eight people who will act out the mini-scenes. The participants who are the audience for each mini-scene then step into different roles to try a variety of approaches and strategies related to the topic of the scene or to expand the topic to reflect their experiences/perspectives. Each audience member can step into any actor's role at any point in a scene, and a scene may be repeated any number of times to enable the maximum number of participants and strategies to emerge.

While the interchange of actors and audience members occurs, the facilitator elicits discussion and reflection about each mini-scene. Forum theater technique creates opportunities to discuss the pros and cons of the approaches and strategies, how the theater technique has influenced participants' understanding of the topic and their emergent insights, and to develop plans for implementing and evaluating future changes. The forum theater technique has been used by the CRLT Theatre Program to promote discussions among faculty, administrators, and graduate students about issues related to quality pedagogy, increasing student engagement, and creating supportive classroom environments.

SOURCE: Case described with permission of the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

A *traditional sketch* format lends itself to the presentation of complex programmatic issues and impacts on stakeholders, organizations, and communities. Case Example 5.8 provides an example of how a traditional dramatic performance was used to report findings from a program evaluation conducted for a science department in a higher education setting (Greene, et al., 2003). The performance script was crafted from data collected in interviews, observations, and documents.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.8

*Using a Dramatic Performance to
Report Evaluation Findings Within a University Context*

A team of evaluators that included graduate students and faculty was commissioned to design and conduct a program evaluation for a university science department. The science department had received a multiyear grant to increase the diversity of its science majors, and to revise the curriculum to involve more active student learning and be more inclusive of all students. The evaluation focused on describing the nature of diversity, equity, and justice in the program; the educational experiences and perspectives of the program participants; and the connection of the program to the overall campus community.

As part of the evaluation reporting process, the evaluation team developed a performance script crafted from data collected in interviews, observations, and documents. It was developed to accompany more traditional forms of communication, i.e., the standard technical report. The team wanted to communicate not only the substantive findings, but also the emotions, nuances, and lives of the participants through the performance format.

The script consists of a narrator that sets the context for the performance and six composite characters representing students and faculty, male and female gender, and a variety of racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. During the performance, the characters speak to each other in interactive dialogue about issues related to diversity and science education, meant to convey the complexity of diversity in the higher education context. Some characters have brief monologues, but most of the script is interactive between two or more characters. Typically, two characters react to each other and other characters join in the conversation, adding their perspectives and experiences to the conversation. For example, two students discuss how they like to learn and whether their science courses support how they best learn. A faculty member interjects issues related to curriculum change and the difficulty in getting faculty to expand their teaching pedagogy, while another faculty member focuses on teaching content as the primary concern in science education. The performance has been done in various settings as described below. Members of the evaluation team have served as the actors for some presentations; at other presentations the evaluation team has recruited audience members to perform as actors.

The performance was presented to members of the science department grant team during the second year of the evaluation implementation. The performance was also designed for use in public forums on the college's campus to promote ongoing discussion of the evaluation issues and findings. The performance format was chosen by the evaluators to make the public forums engaging and to promote dialogue among the audience about their interpretations and experiences related to diversity.

SOURCE: Adapted from Greene, Chandler, Constantino, & Walker (2003).

Evaluators might use the *interactive sketch* format to present a program's context from a variety of stakeholder perspectives, each perspective represented by a different character (actor) in the sketch. The actors may be professional actors, members of the evaluation team, program staff, or other stakeholders in the evaluation. Following the sketch the audience interacts with the actors, who stay in character. A facilitator guides the discussion, responding to questions from the audience and interjecting further information about the evaluation findings as appropriate.

The *forum theater* technique, combined with a working session, fosters stakeholder analysis of and reflection on evaluation data, and serves as a mechanism for participants to try out strategies for change in a dynamic and synergetic process, as described in Case Example 5.8. It can also be used as a method of inquiry. Case Example 5.9 describes the use of forum theater to explore perspectives about student assessment in a school setting in Denmark. Through audience participation and interaction, this technique allowed the social construction of realities in a school setting to emerge.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.9

*Using Forum Theatre to Explore
Perspectives on School Assessment in Denmark*

A faculty member at the University of Southern Denmark, working with the Dacapo Theatre Company, used dramatic performance—in particular forum theatre—as a means of inquiry into assessment practices in school settings (Dahler-Larsen, 2003). (The Dacapo Theatre Company consults with public and

(Continued)

CASE EXAMPLE 5.9 (Continued)

private organizations to better understand the processes of change.) In this case the purpose of using a forum theater technique was to promote interactive, improvisational, nonthreatening discussion as individual members of the audience took over performance roles or added new ones to try out alternative strategies related to the issue of assessment. Audience members shared their individual experiences and ideas about the topic, and saw firsthand how their strategies and advice play out in a dynamic, ever-changing context.

The faculty member and Dacapo Theatre members wrote and performed three short plays for a mixed audience of principals, teachers, pupils, and parents. The plays focused on: (1) a principal discussing with teachers how to assess social competence among pupils; (2) a teacher reporting back to a pupil and parent about the outcome of an assessment of the pupil; and (3) a principal and group of teachers discussing the use of assessments at a parents' meeting. In the third play the audience acted as the parents participating in the meeting.

The performance was videotaped, and the faculty member used the videotape to analyze the nature of the audience participation and their perceptions of the use of assessment in the school setting. In this dramatic setting, issues of power, interest, self-image, emotional commitment, frustration, and fear were surfaced in the audience's participation and comments during the performances. The forum theater drew out a variety of assessment issues including criteria for judging social competence; individuals adapting assessments in ways that were not anticipated; pupils, parents, and teachers using assessment findings to define the pupils' educational present and future; and misuse of assessment data to further individuals' personal agendas.

While the faculty member had originally conceived the purpose of the forum theater event as a mechanism for the audience to discuss the effects of assessment in the school setting, the audience often drew the conversation to issues of hidden political agendas, and to conflicting beliefs about appropriate behaviors and decision-making processes in the school. The audience was highly engaged in the performances; participants raised issues and improvised strategies related to their perceptions of the motivations and impact of assessment in their school. The balance of improvisation of the audience and preparation of the performance allowed particular issues to be raised by the script of the plays (e.g., assessment of students and the use of those assessments by administrators and teachers) while allowing other contextual issues to emerge from the audience members' interaction with the plays (e.g., disagreement about who makes decisions related to school policies and procedures).

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Peter Dahler-Larsen.

Implementation Tips for Drama

■ **Consider the appropriateness of drama for your evaluation stakeholders.**

Drama may be especially useful for communicating and reporting with the following audiences:

- Program administrators and staff involved in the program's design and implementation
- Other stakeholders who have experiences related to the program's focus/purposes
- Youth
- Stakeholders of evaluands related to education, social services, arts, and culture
- Stakeholders and other audiences who are available to attend a performance

While drama can be a particularly engaging format for presenting evaluation findings, some audiences may negatively dismiss it as "child's play." Others could feel alienated by theater because of prior experiences with highly aesthetic, abstract drama that distances the audience from the actors and the events on the stage. Humor in the theatrical performance can enhance audience interest by releasing tension around controversial issues and allowing audience members to ask questions or offer suggestions without fear of saying the "wrong thing." However, humor can also cause audience members to view the performers as broad caricatures removed from their daily experiences and informational needs.

■ **Consider your options for creating the script for the theater performance.**

In developing the text (or script) for the theater performance, the evaluator should consider the following questions:

- Should the performance be a verbatim conversation from interview or focus group transcripts or a dialogue created by arranging excerpted quotes?
- How many of the participants in the data collection/evaluation should be represented in the performance?
- What criteria will I use to choose whom to represent in the performance? By stakeholder group? By level of involvement in the program? To show a variety of impacts of the program? To represent positive and negative aspects of the program?
- If the script will be a dialogue created from excerpted quotes, should those quotes only be attributed to the individual who said them, or should I create composite characters?

- Should the performance highlight the most significant or dramatic aspects of participants' experiences, or should it cover the range of experiences during the entire time frame of the data collection?
- Should I develop the sketch as a typical conversation that took place during the interviews or focus groups, or should I include information gathered through observations, surveys, and document review (including quantitative statistics and demographic information)?
- Should I include myself as a character in the performance? If so, should I fictionalize my dialogue or take it verbatim from transcripts?

■ **Select those who will perform the theatrical piece and make sure they are thoroughly familiar with the evaluation study.**

The actors for a dramatic performance depicting evaluation findings could be professionals, members of the evaluation team, program staff, or stakeholders. Case 5.10 describes the work of an evaluator who developed and performed a traditional dramatic piece to depict the evolving experiences of the program's participants (Goodyear, 1997, 2001).

Whoever participates in the performance needs to have a solid grounding in the evaluation. When audience members ask questions or provide suggestions, having a thorough knowledge of the evaluation context, the evaluation design, the data collection processes, and the findings and recommendations enables the actors and facilitators to provide informed and reliable responses, especially when improvising. Training sessions where the actors and facilitators review the evaluation data and discuss the implications of the data are vital preparation for any theatrical performance.

■ **Set the context for the performance.**

A primary responsibility of the facilitator of the performance is to provide the audience with an overview of the evaluation's purpose and methods, and in particular the methods used for creating the performance script (see Case Example 5.10). The overview might also highlight issues and findings reflected in the performance or, alternatively, might generally define the primary evaluation issues, without presenting actual findings. In this case a fuller treatment of the findings might be incorporated into a discussion with audience members following the performance.

CASE EXAMPLE 5.10

A Dramatic Piece on the Experiences of Project Participants Performed by the Evaluator

Goodyear (1997, 2001) created a dramatic performance by choosing excerpts from the transcripts of individual and group interviews that were part of her evaluation of an HIV/AIDS prevention program. She arranged the excerpts in the form of a hypothetical conversation among three of the participants, and chose to perform all the characters in the performance herself, forcing the audience to imagine the participants. An important goal of the performance was to create a piece that drew the audience into a discussion of the evaluation's issues, while also providing key information about the evaluation design, data, and findings to frame that discussion.

The dramatic performance was meant to portray the experiences of the project participants as they discussed them during the program's volunteer training and subsequent interviews, representing the movement within the participants' discussion from their initial ignorance and fear regarding HIV/AIDS to their articulation of the understanding of which roles within their lives can contribute to the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Through the presentation of the performance, the audience was brought along on this journey.

The performance began by distributing a written description of the program and an overview of the evaluation design (case study) and the performance. Goodyear read a scripted introduction that reiterated the description of the performance, the data collection process, and how the transcribed data informed the script development. She then read quotes from the women, moving back and forth across three chairs to represent different participants. At the end of the 15-minute performance, Goodyear facilitated a discussion with audience members about the evaluation findings and the performance itself. In response to the performance, audience members stated that they thought the performance conveyed a lot about the women, but nothing about the program; stories about the participants, but nothing evaluative. Other audience members suggested that such a performance conveyed the women's struggle to come to grips with difficult issues and the development of these individuals as they shared their interactions with others, "the living example of how the program works" (Goodyear, 2001, p. 177). Speaking to the form, an audience participant reflected that "performance is not only a vehicle to communicate findings, its artistic beauty has intrinsic value" (Goodyear, 2001, p. 182).

SOURCE: Case described with permission of Leslie Goodyear.

While it is important to provide a context for the theatrical performance, avoid distributing lengthy written documents at a performance (or having the facilitator recite lengthy lists of findings or recommendations). Audience members may be distracted with "reading," rather than viewing the performance if given written documents just prior to the dramatic event.

■ **Create a physical space for the theater performance that maximizes audience and actor interaction.**

A raised, well-lighted stage, surrounded by rows of chairs, and use of remote or handheld microphones enhances the implementation of any theatrical performance. Renting stage time and equipment at a local theater, reception hall, or school auditorium is an efficient way to provide a theater setting for the performance for large or small audiences. If the theatrical performance is to take place at the organization being evaluated or at a funder's office, audio equipment (microphones, speakers) can be rented from private suppliers (or purchased at relatively reasonable rates if an organization or evaluation team expects to use theatrical performance as a regular communication and reporting strategy). For small audiences, using staggered circular configurations of chairs eliminates the need for a raised stage.

■ **Use dramatic performances in combination with other communicating and reporting formats.**

As part of the same work cited earlier, Goodyear (2001) asked various audiences (the program's stakeholder audiences, including local and regional program staff; program evaluators at a national evaluation conference; and other audiences at academic conferences) to react to two different forms of representation of the same evaluation findings (dramatic performance and written text). Most of the audiences were interested in a combination of dramatic performance and more conventional formats in order to understand the human and emotional aspects of participants' experiences alongside a traditional representation of evaluation findings that addressed the generalizability of the findings, the methods by which data were collected, and the overall evaluation findings.

The information different audience members take away from a dramatic performance related to evaluation issues and/or findings is likely to vary greatly, based on their: (1) role in the evaluand and the evaluation process, (2) level of interest in the data being presented, (3) level of engagement in and the extensiveness of the discussion, and (4) level of involvement in decisions related to the evaluation's findings and recommendations. Providing all audience members with a written document summarizing the evaluation, for example an executive summary, will ensure that all participants have consistent and reliable information on which to draw at a later date.

- ■ **Consider using technology-based formats to increase audience access to dramatic performances.**

Video recordings of dramatic performances can be made and disseminated or transmitted live through videoconferencing, allowing audiences to view the dramatic performances remotely, at their convenience, or in coordination with other evaluation meetings or events at a variety of locations. Video recordings can also be disseminated via Web-based technology where audiences connect to a Web site and view the dramatic presentations through the Internet.

CAUTION FOR CREATIVE FORMS OF COMMUNICATING AND REPORTING

- ■ **Creative forms of communicating and reporting can be time- and resource-intensive.**

Although we mentioned this point at the beginning of this chapter, it bears further consideration. For many evaluators the creative and intriguing formats presented here are a new approach to communicating and reporting. Although the implementation tips we offer are designed to support you, incorporating most any of these formats into your regular practices will require additional time, and in many cases, money! Taking photographs requires an investment in equipment, film, and processing that may not be part of the typical evaluation budget— nor would the costs for hiring an illustrator to create cartoons. While poetry may add little in direct expenses, hiring actors for dramatic performances to depict evaluation findings could be especially expensive.

Another consideration is that, just as these may be new formats for evaluators, they will be new to most evaluation stakeholders and audiences—requiring additional time to explain the approach, request permission for photographs, solicit participation in the development and performance of poetry and dramatic pieces, and obtain feedback.

S U M M A R Y

In this chapter we have explored a variety of creative forms of communicating and reporting evaluation information. Photography, cartoons, poetry, and drama are particularly useful for representing participants' multiple perspectives and experiences in ways other forms of communicating and
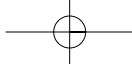
reporting may not. Through these formats, evaluation audiences are given the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of complexities and nuances in the evaluation's findings. Finally, these creative approaches are well suited for involving stakeholders in the co-interpretation of findings, which supports learning and the greater possibility of evaluation use.