

# DESIGN

How can we find out?  
What do others think?

When we decide to do something about trying to understand things better (in order to overcome the problems, or realise our values in improved practice), we can explicitly and consciously "name the problem" or discrepancy, and set out to systematically answer the questions arising (eg. "What is the nature or value of this?" or "Why is this so?"). At this point we must ask "Whose questions?", "What do we need to find out?", "Who has the problem?", "Who is to benefit?", "Who is to participate and when and where?", "Who else will need to share our journey of "finding out"?". 4 conceptual parties to the evaluation should be identified in relation to this: (1) Who or what is to be the "researched", (2) Who is or are to be the researcher/s, (3) Who is it all for (to help to solve their problem or improve their lives - *the critical reference group*), (4) Who is it "for" (in the sense who needs to know or believe or understand what, in order for them to assist [or not act against] the critical reference group eg. funders, administrators, professionals, consumer advocates, other staff, authorities, etc.). Identify initial *common ground* around the interests of the critical reference group.

# NOTICING

It's going well/not going well. WHY? Well it's x..... and we'd prefer y ..... or We're not doing what was planned. Why is it so?

Every now and then, because our store of previously-held values are discrepant with what we are seeing or experiencing, we stop (or can plan to stop) and observe our actions-in-the-world (or those of others). We stand back and *notice* some things. We can then think about the nature of *the discrepancy* between what we are observing or experiencing and what we expected (whether we expected something better or worse). The discrepancy may range between small (eg. mere unease) and large (eg. a Problem everyone's noticed).

Previously-held store of over-arching or guiding values and valued practices, principles, images, ideas, or ones to which some value (high or low) has already been attached. Often not consciously articulated. Operates as an orienting "compass".

Are we noticing "discrepancies"? Have we got a problem?

**START HERE!!**  
...and follow the arrows!

**OUR CURRENT ACTIONS-IN-THE-WORLD**

**OUR NEW ACTIONS-IN-THE-WORLD**

Are we doing what we said we would?  
 Yes or  No

What would we need to do to put this into practice?

# PLANNING

Finally, because the whole cycle of inquiry was driven by clear over-arching or guiding values, principles, or purposes, it is now possible to consider options for change and improved practices. Some of this material will have emerged from fieldwork. Now *imaginative* but realistic, practical and achievable 'recommendations' can be prioritised, agreed, finalised, planned and put into practice. These are now well "grounded" in past practice, and the experience of learning from it.

What can we decide would be the best way to go next? What would it look like?

# FIELDWORK

This is a stage when all relevant parties need to participate in, and receive information from the "finding out". Especially "touch base" with the critical reference group. In order to find out what people think and value, what things mean, to them, we need to engage fully in a process of immersion in their/our worlds. We become anthropologists of each others' worlds - and observe, read, listen, interact, participate, question, and listen again, exploring meanings of feedback until we reach effective *understanding*. We can ask very open questions at first, gradually refining them as our hunches get challenged or confirmed. (Hunch-development starts right back at the outset when we check on all parties' views when we first invite their participation, and even earlier, in previous cycles of learning.) Hunches are challenged and checked as *sceptically* as possible. We are rigorous about not jumping to conclusions until lots of evidence and observations have accrued. We need to have grasped fully the range of historical and current contexts that make the material *meaningful*. What other possible ideas or explanations are there? Work these through with all parties in a collaborative process. Keep good *records*.

Regarding what we're doing:  
Why is it like this? How did it come to be like this? Why are we doing these things in these ways? What would we prefer to be doing? Why?  
Regarding what we wanted to do/valued:  
What led us to think that this would be good? Are we right?

Touch base with critical reference groups' views on their needs etc.

Now we understand better why things are the way they are.

Now we understand better what people want.

What could or should we do next? What are the possibilities?

# ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

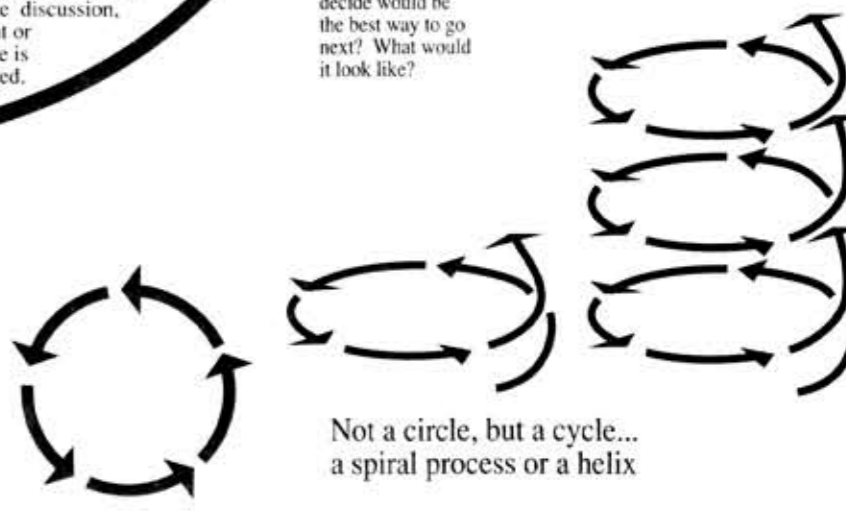
The fieldwork process allows the generation of observations and insights that can be indicative of themes or trends or understandings not previously thought of. New or better theories can be synthesized from the "ah ha" experiences ("Oh now I can see what we've been doing", or "Aha - so that's why we felt uneasy", or "Oh I see how that came about"). When we stand back and reflect on the fieldwork and the material gathered, we can begin to come to conclusions, explanations and theories.

# REFLECTION & FEEDBACK

Three important forms of feedback are necessary: (1) throughout the fieldwork or at this stage we need to check with the "researched" or "evaluated" that we "got right" what they said, and that we understood their perceptions. (2) secondly, we need to run past the critical reference group, our theories, conclusions and explanations, to check that they make sense of the original problem, or cast light on its resolution. Having grasped where the problem has "come from", informed discussion can then take place about what to do about it.

What do people think of all this? Did we get it right?

# THE ACTION EVALUATION RESEARCH PROCESS



This WALL CHART accompanies *Everyday Evaluation on the Run* by Yoland Wadsworth, Allen & Unwin, Sydney © 2011