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Evaluating & Researching University Participation Interventions

Using Qualitative Data

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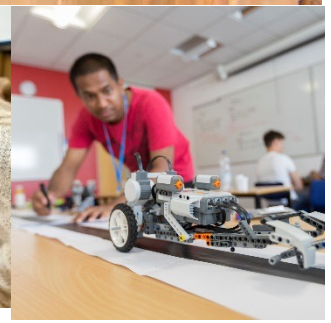

Straw Poll

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Which of these methods have you used in your evaluations:

- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Observation
- Reflective accounts
- Creative expression
- Qualitative case studies
- Other

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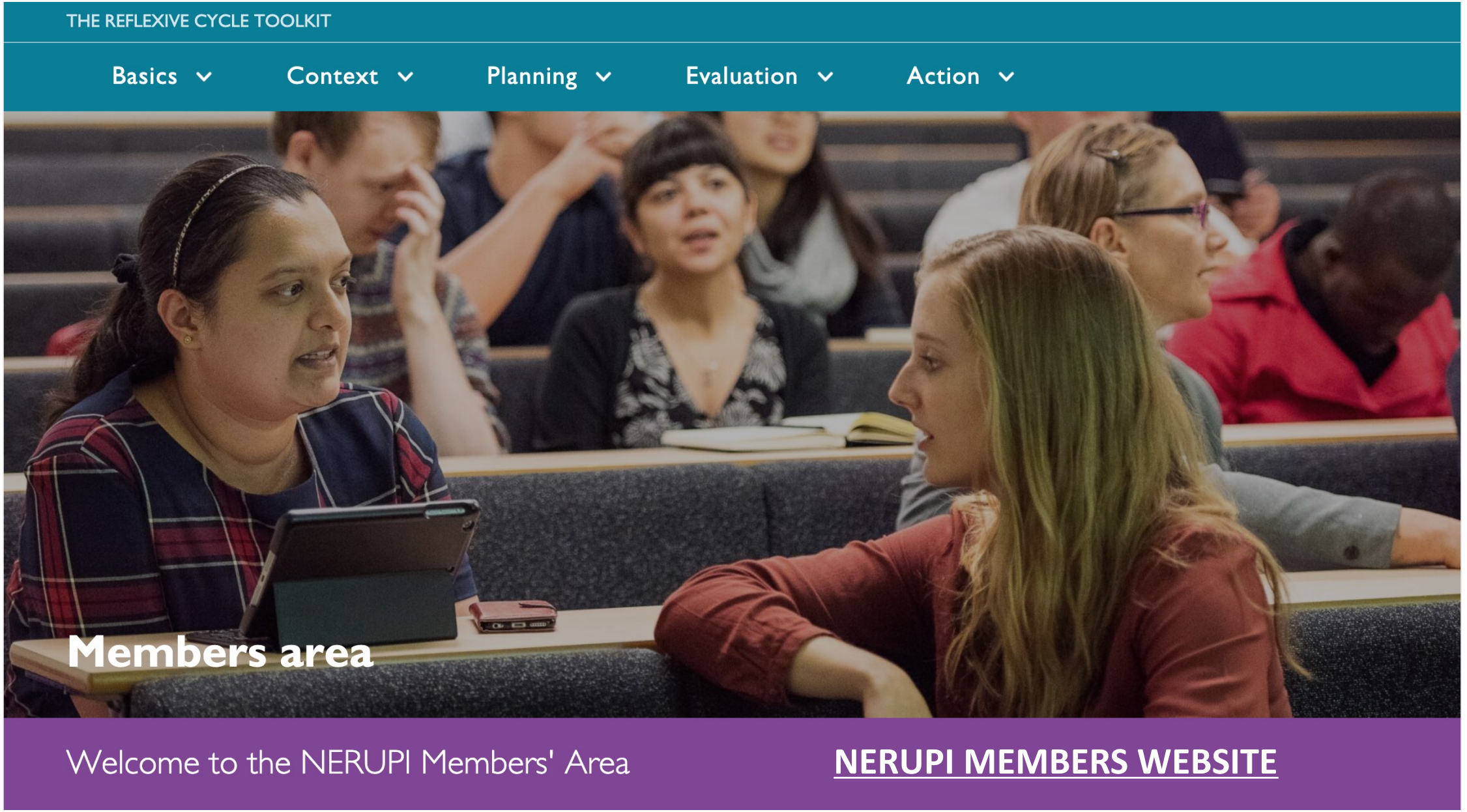

NERUPI Evaluation

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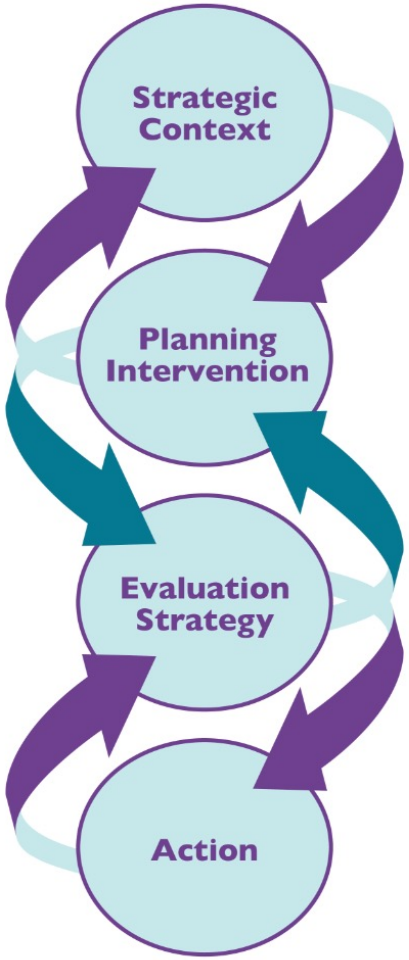

moves away from the **medical model**

diagnose
treatment

Focus on **inequalities** not individual needs

EVALUATION

Critical Participatory Action Research

Focus: Perspective:	The individual	The social	Both: a reflexive-dialectical view of individual-social relations and connections
Objective	(1) *Practice as individual behaviour:* Quantitative, correlational-experimental methods. Psychometric and observational techniques, tests, interaction schedules.	(2) *Practice as social and systems behaviour:* Quantitative, correlational-experimental methods. Observational techniques, sociometrics, systems analysis.	
Subjective	(3) *Practice as intentional action:* Qualitative, interpretive methods. Clinical analysis, interview, questionnaire, diaries, journals, self-report, introspection	(4) *Practice as socially-structured, shaped by discourses and tradition:* Qualitative, interpretive, historical methods. Discourse analysis, document analysis.	
Both: **a reflexive dialectical view of subjective-objective relations and connections**		(5) *Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and as reconstituted by human agency and social action by participants:* Critical methods. Critical participatory action research that reflexively combines multiple methods —.	

Kemmis et al., 2014 p.74

Different types of questions

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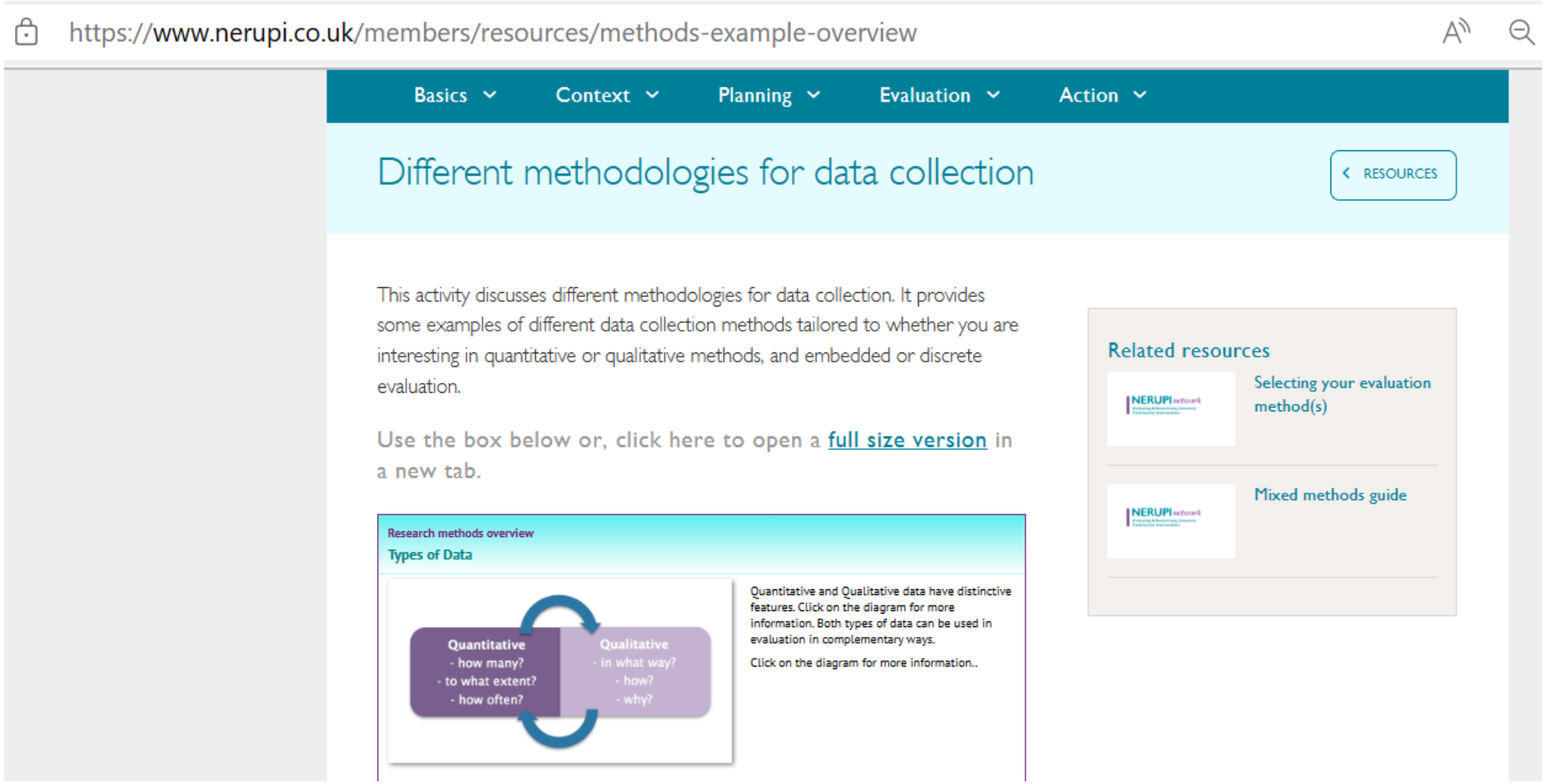
Question Types

- Exploratory
- Predictive
- Evaluative (pre- and post-)
- Process

Exploratory: Learn more about a topic, probe on the main factors involved	How does participation in our activity affect students' attitudes?	E.g. Do you feel that x (e.g. the summer school) has positively or negatively affected you and if so how?	Open ended questions in surveys, Interviews and focus groups, Creative methods, Photo elicitation, Observational research
Predictive: Thinking about the potential future outcome of taking part in an activity	What difference does our intervention make to intention to progress in education?	E.g. As a result of x (e.g. the summer school) are you more likely to y (e.g. apply to university). What do you feel you achieved by taking part in this activity?	Post activity questionnaires and surveys, tests of knowledge and understanding
Evaluative (pre/post): Documenting impact against a measure	Does attendance at our activity increase students' HE confidence a measurable way?	E.g. How confident do you feel… (e.g. in your ability to progress to university) - repeated before and after participation in an activity	Pre and post questions, tests or surveys or other methods which use rating scales to quantify pre and post intervention changes (e.g. evaluation wheel)
Process: Understand the mechanisms at play in successful programmes	What are we doing that is working?	E.g. What's the best thing about this activity? How would you rate x,y,z?	Feedback forms, post activity surveys, interviews, focus groups

Member resources



Methods Guides available on:
Using symbols; Interviews; Focus groups; Feedback from stakeholders and interested parties; Creative expression; Reflective accounts; Evaluation wheel; Photo elicitation; Questionnaire surveys; Structured observation; Tracking; Voting; Use of Validated tools; Experimental and Quasi-experimental methods; Case studies; Comparative case study analysis; Process tracing; Qualitative Comparative Analysis; Contribution Analysis.

Qualitative methods pros and cons

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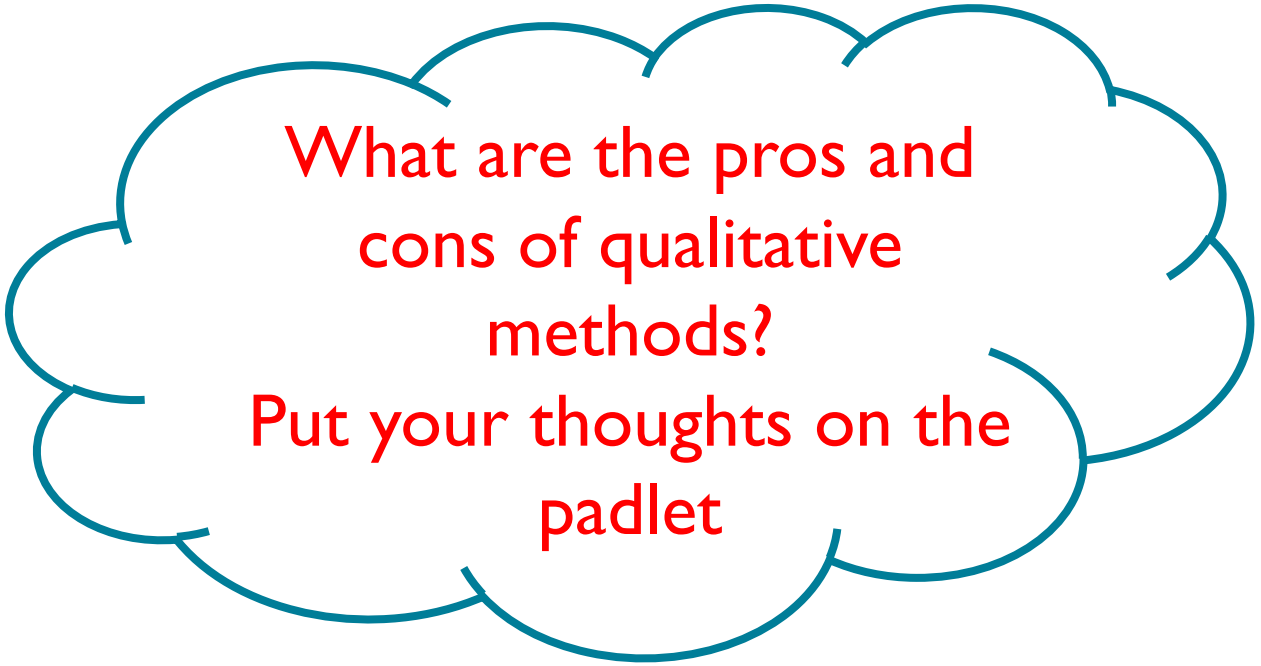

Qualitative methods pros and cons

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- Good for exploring how people make sense of their lives, why things happened and the meaning
- Bridges the gap between scientific evidence and practice by examining people's attitudes, beliefs, preferences
- Can be used to test hypotheses about the mechanisms underpinning your theory of change
- Able to convey richness, detail and nuance and to look at how individuals react or respond differently to situations and each other
- Opportunities for embedding data collection into programme delivery

- Qualitative methods tend to be time consuming and therefore more costly to implement
- Data analysis may require a lot of input (e.g. transcription, coding, thematic analysis) and usually more than one round of iteration
- Greater need to control for subjectivity (e.g. danger of interviewer bias)
- Quantitative methods may have higher credibility with some people (e.g. funders)

Using qualitative data examples: Interviews

- Researchers at the Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute (LHERI) used biographical life-grid interviews with students as part of research to understand the impact of University of Lincoln's Access Covenant (AC).
- This research project also included interviews with staff delivering AC services, a survey of university students including those who have accessed AC support.

Using qualitative data examples: Focus Groups

- The WP team at Oxford Brookes has included use of focus groups with students as part of the evaluation of their student ambassador training activities.
- As well as student ambassador training, the recruits also take part in employability training where ambassadors reflect on what skills they have gained form with working on programme.
- Running focus groups at the mid point in the programme, and various points in the student ambassadors student journey, is designed to help with the medium and long term evaluation (along with a pre and post survey, interviews and use of reflective diaries).
- Tracking is being put in place to assess success at university and graduate prospects.

Using qualitative data examples: Photo Elicitation

- A small scale study conducted with a sample of estranged students at the University of Lincoln (UoL) used photo elicitation to explore the experiences of estranged students and provide the institution with recommendations on how to better support its estranged students.
- The students were asked to take a series of images over the Easter holiday period - which represented their student experience.
- The students' comments about, and reactions to, these images were audio-recorded with their consent.

Methods Guides Now Available

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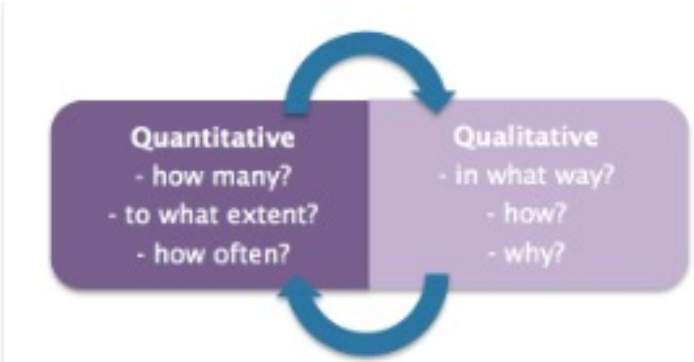
	Quantitative	Qualitative
Using symbols	✓	✓
Interviews	✓	✓
Focus groups		✓
Feedback from stakeholders and interested parties	✓	✓
Creative expression		✓
Reflective accounts	✓	✓
Evaluation wheel	✓	
Photo elicitation		✓
Questionnaire surveys	✓	✓
Structured observation	✓	✓
Tracking	✓	
Voting	✓	
Use of Validated tools	✓	
Experimental and Quasi-experimental methods	✓	
Case studies	✓	✓



- Triangulation of sources
- Mixed methods approaches

Questions to explore in groups

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1. What types of qualitative data have you used?
2. What worked well and why?
3. What were the potential limitations and how would you address these?
4. What did this type of evaluation tell you about your activity?

Debrief:

What did you discuss?

Did any methods seem better/worse than others?

How do you decide which method to use for your own evaluation?

Considerations for qualitative research

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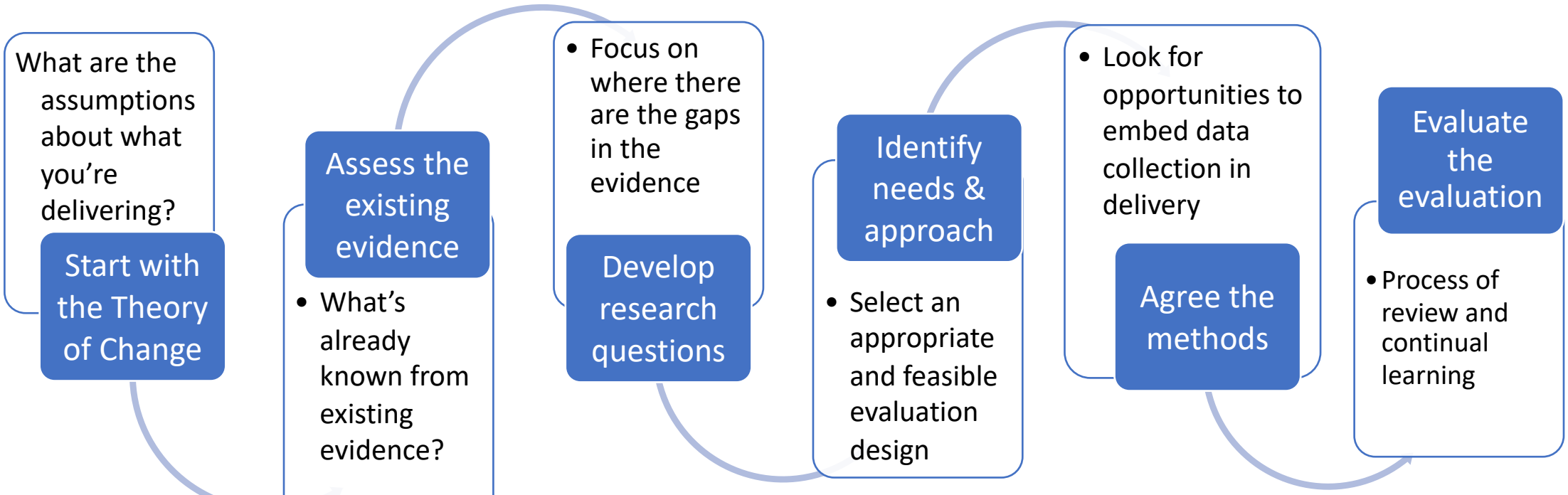
Issue	Considerations
Access to participants	Relies on having the time and access to the participants in order to collect their reflections – may depend on relationships e.g. with partners
Expertise	Requires expertise in undertaking research, data analysis and reporting
Sampling	May not be possible to involve all participants to same depth, therefore need justifiable Sampling Methods (e.g. Purposeful sampling)
Ethical issues	Informed consent, Confidentiality, Avoiding harm

Issue	Considerations
Drawing conclusions	Need to consider how judgements will be made (e.g. comparative analysis)
Data analysis	Danger of generating a lot of evidence that needs to be synthesised
Software?	Thematic analysis could involve using specialist software packages (e.g. MAXQDA) QCA software
Other	


What are the assumptions about what you're delivering?
Start with the Theory of Change
Assess the existing evidence
• What's already known from existing evidence?
• Focus on where there are the gaps in the evidence
Develop research questions
Identify needs & approach
• Select an appropriate and feasible evaluation design
• Look for opportunities to embed data collection in delivery
Agree the methods
Evaluate the evaluation
• Process of review and continual learning

Approaches to impact evaluation (The OfS Standards of Evidence)

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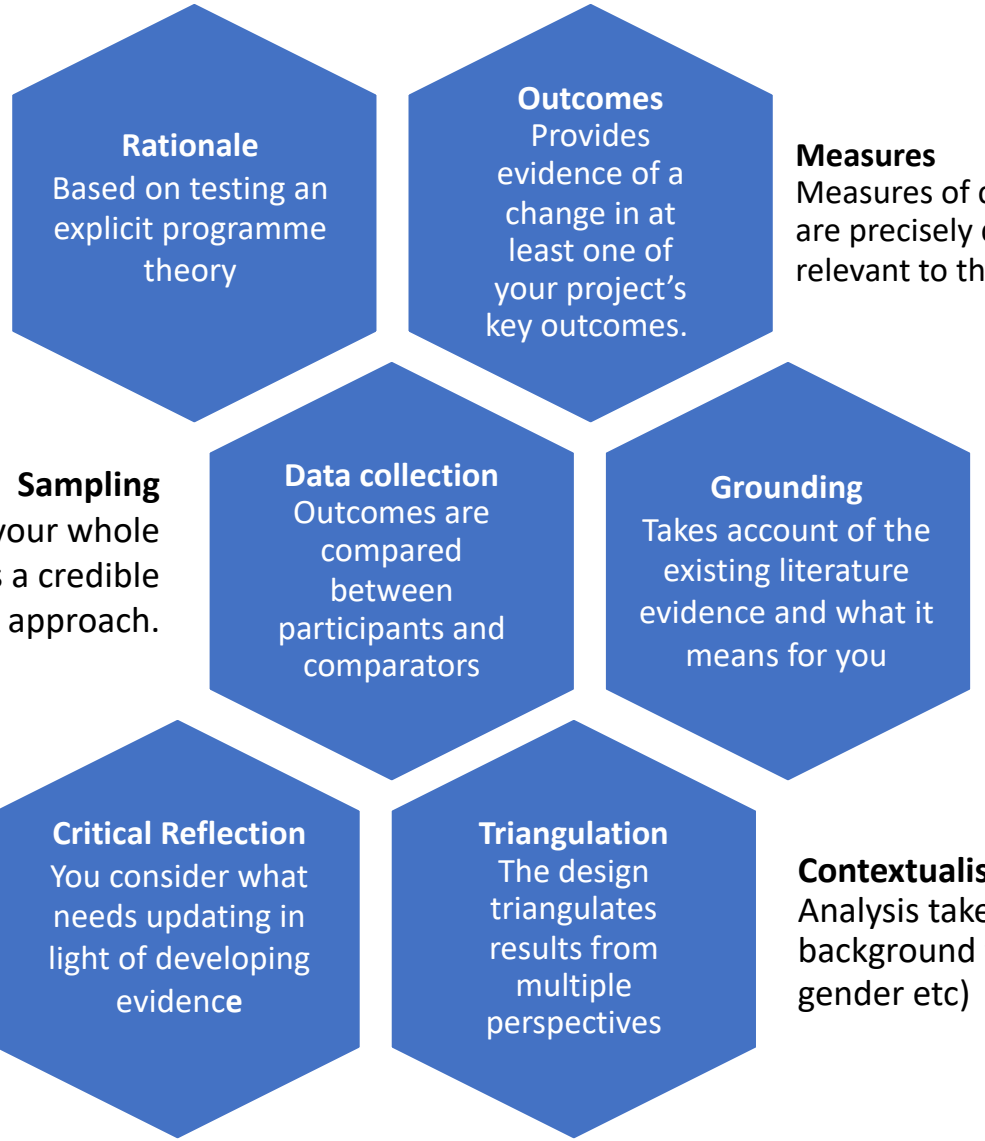
	Description	Evidence used	Claims you can make
Type 1: Narrative	The evaluation provides a narrative and a coherent theory of change to motivate its selection of outreach activities in the context of a coherent outreach strategy	Evidence of impact elsewhere and/or in the research literature on outreach effectiveness or from your existing evaluation results	We have a coherent explanation of what we do and why Our claims are research-based
Type 2: Empirical Research	The evaluation collects data on outcomes and impact and reports evidence that those receiving an intervention have better results, though this does not establish any direct causal effect	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post treatment change or a treatment/non-treatment difference	We can demonstrate that our interventions are associated with beneficial results.
Type 3: Causality	The evaluation methodology provides evidence of a causal effect of an intervention	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post treatment change on a treated group relative to an appropriate control or comparison group using an appropriate and robust research design	We believe our intervention causes improvement and can demonstrate the difference using a control or comparison group

Tips for using qualitative methods for evaluating outcomes

- The method you choose should be based on what you are researching:
  - Qualitative research is best for What? Why? And How? Type questions
- Rationale for why you have chosen a qualitative approach could be:
  - To test assumptions of how programmes work in practice;
  - To capture detailed and nuanced data about a particular issue to understanding what aspects have/haven't worked and why;
  - To identify or explore unintended outcomes.
- The resources you have will make a difference, but being rigorous and transparent is the key to good qualitative research.
  - The study should be supported by a series of logical and justifiable steps.
    - Identify the key perspective that need to be captured
    - Identify suitable data collection methods (interviews, focus groups, observations, open-ended surveys etc.).
    - Consider what techniques or concepts will guide the data analysis and interpretation stage.
    - Consider what quality checks you can put in place to justify your interpretations.
- Being clear about the methodological process will help to strengthen the credibility of your findings.

Qualitative methods and impact evaluation

Ideas for strengthening the evidence base



Analysis for small 'N' populations

Designs that can be used to test and refine the programme theory:

- **Comparative case studies**
  - Analysis of similarities and differences/patterns
- **Qualitative comparative analysis**
  - Pair-wise comparisons of case to compare the configurations of different cases in order to identify the components that result in specific outcomes (i.e. the combinations of causes and effects)
- **Realist evaluation**
  - Finding out what works, for whom under what conditions
- **Contribution analysis**
  - Mapping all the factors that contributed to the outcomes
- **Process tracing**
  - Making judgements about the weight of the evidence about all the different possible explanations for how an outcome came about

Mixed methods designs

Design	Description	Rationale
Exploratory sequential design	Firstly qualitative research is undertaken to investigate the phenomenon and afterwards quantitative data is gathered to explain the qualitative findings	Helps to generate hypotheses that can then be tested quantitatively; qualitative research in the first phase helps to inform quantitative research in the second phase (e.g. to develop survey questionnaires); the qualitative findings are prioritised and the quantitative research helps with conclusions about the generalizability of the qualitative findings
Explanatory sequential design	Quantitative data is gathered first and then qualitative research is undertaken to enhance and expand on the quantitative findings	Quantitative data is prioritised and qualitative data is used to shed further light on and contextualise the quantitative findings
Embedded design	Quantitative and qualitative data are gathered separately (could be concurrent parallel design, sequential or multi-phase) but then the findings are integrated from both strands	Offsets weaknesses of either method; allows for findings to be compared; can help to triangulate the evidence. The purpose is to support the findings based on both strands (i.e. each on its own is not sufficient to answer the research questions).
Transformative design	Uses any of the above designs but in an evolving context	This is essentially an iterative approach with the intention of being open to possible changes in perspective as the research progresses

Tips for Qualitative Data Analysis

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- **How many themes?**

➢ Depends on the evidence collected. Keep going until you reach saturation. But make sure only to report themes you have enough data to support, if the evidence is 'thin' then you may need to do more research to justify it.

- **Software packages?**

➢ Range from using a spreadsheet/matrix to keep track of themes and variables, to thematic analysis packages and tools for QCA

Tips for reporting

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- **Communicating the results**

➢ It can be useful to think of the themes as the basic headings in an outline. Start each section with a brief description of that theme. Follow that with relevant quotes and illustrations.

- **Drawing conclusions and making recommendations**

➢ Does the intervention theory and related practices need updating in light of developing evidence?

- **Demonstrating quality**

➢ Show how the evaluation was done in a rigorous and systematic way following a series of justifiable steps.

NERUPI Links & Further Reading

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NERUPI EVALUATION SECTION

NERUPI THEORY OF CHANGE

NERUPI MIXED METHODS

NERUPI METHODS GUIDES

NERUPI ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA.

NERUPI QUESTION BANK

TASO Evaluation with small cohorts

Miller, E & Daly, E. (2013). *Understanding and measuring outcomes: The role of qualitative data*. Glasgow, Scotland: Institute of Research and Innovation in Social Services.

Rogers, P. & Goodrick, D. (2010). Qualitative data analysis. In Wholey, J., Hatry, H., & Newcomer, K., (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (3rd ed., pp. 429–53). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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