

JMDE—Five Years in Review

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2008 marks the fifth year of publication for JMDE. The growth of JMDE, whether measured in terms of readership or in the evolution of ideas, reflects the increasing importance of evaluation, not as a separate process, but more as the development of an evaluative state of mind. Just in terms of readership, at the milestone 5th issue, JMDE had over 1750 “committed readers”—those who requested notification of publication of new issues, the website had over 19,000 hits according to our own measure, but up to 30,000 per day according to independent estimates by Lars Balzar.

More important is the vision of JMDE as a hotbed for evaluative thought in a different way, a different format. In the first issue, founder Michael Scriven answered an essential question—why another evaluation journal, at this time and in this format?—and in answering laid out the vision and mission for JMDE. This vision has guided the selection of material for publication, and reciprocally, the contributors helped hone the direction as well. From inception, the mission of the journal has been:

- Reduction of cost and increased access to professional evaluation: “If professional evaluation is going to help improve the world, as many of us strongly believe it can, it must take seriously the task of communicating current developments and skills to the evaluators, evaluation users, and would-be evaluators amongst those people in the world who can’t afford to subscribe to the traditional journals or attend the

traditional workshops and courses of study.”

- Expanding the scope of evaluation coverage to the global community
- Publication of ideas in forms other than peer-reviewed journal articles, including book reviews, letters, and memos. Ideas beyond research were encouraged, and include reactions to one’s own experiences or the experiences of others, or reaction to other published material. In other words, the goal is the dissemination of good ideas, and is not limited to certain vehicles for communicating good ideas.
- Dialectic forum for book reviews and articles to allow “serious discussion of major emerging movements or themes in evaluation to be supported in this journal.”
- Communicating evaluation ideas to a diverse readership, including researchers, students, and practitioners. JMDE was not intended to be only a research journal, but instructional as well—including overviews of material by experts for outsiders or students in the field.

So what has the journey from then to now been like? Certainly an expanse of territory covered in these five years, both following the vein of the original mission as well as changes in perspective after a little self-reflection and evaluation of the process! On one end of the spectrum, sound applied evaluation advice has been offered, from experts in (e.g.,

development, education, and social evaluation settings, etc.), while still staying true to the provision of a forum for dialectic exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of evaluation theory.

Improving On-line Accessibility Through Technology

Since inception, accessibility has been a primary value of the editorial staff. Sound evaluation discourse feeds improved evaluation practice, and infusion of fresh ideas from all reaches improves the discourse. Availability to our readership has been key, and has been facilitated through notices of the publication of new issues. By the 3rd issue, operations had been switched to a format supplied by the Canadian government, as a continuing effort for to improve for the readership. By the 7th issue, JMDE adopted the use of the Public Knowledge Project's (PKP) Open Journal System (OJS). Previous issues were being transformed to the new format. Chris Coryn highlighted other changes as "the move to a new and more easily recognizable and recallable domain name—the journal's new URL is <http://www.jmde.com>—as well indexing of the journal in ERIC and several other scholarly databases." Dr. Coryn also noted that citations to papers appearing in JMDE were emerging in other scholarly journals, such as the *American Journal of Evaluation*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, and *Evaluation and Program Planning*, as well as many government Web sites.

Addressing the Global Evaluation Community

The journal has offered a glimpse into evaluation settings in all corners of the world, showing the ingenuity and flexibility of evaluators to meet the needs of the indigenous

stakeholders. Two evaluators shared poignant stories of abject conditions in Afghanistan, while a valiant evaluator from within the jungles of the Amazon gave a bird's eye perspective of the benefits of empowerment evaluation as sometimes the only vehicle for success with suspicious stakeholders in a dangerous environment. Cultural competence in evaluation has been explored from different perspectives, including evaluations of aboriginal communities. Global reviews became quickly became standard in JMDE. Evaluation publications and evaluations conducted in various regions of the world are addressed in each issue.

Finally, specific solutions were put forth in the 9th issue for improvement of evaluation in international development, augmenting and expanding JMDE's commitment to international evaluation.

Forum for Evaluation Dialectic

Nothing exemplifies the idea of evaluation forum for debate provided in JMDE better than the deliberation over the "causal wars." Dr. Scriven has challenged the hefty value placed on RCTs in evaluation, while (others) uphold their value in causal relationships. The 6th issue offered a balanced and important work by Dr. Tom Cook to elaborate on the special role that experiments can play in evaluation. The debate continued in the 7th issue with the concern for subjects in RTCs who are not happy with control-group status. By the 8th issue, a commentary on Dr. Scriven's "Predictive Evaluation" was published, all in the desire to allow in-depth exploration of this timely topic. In the 9th issue, Dr. Scriven offers a summative evaluation of RCT methodology, and offers the General Elimination Model as an alternative.

JMDE has never shied from taking a hard look at ourselves, the collective community of evaluators, and E. Jane Davidson continued this trend with her editorial in the 8th issue. Dr. Davidson noted that our own habits inhibit good evaluative practice and thinking. She

focused on social science barriers specifically, such as: including our theories in our evaluations, but not using them evaluatively; leaping too quickly to measurement; errors in reporting by data type or source; and the affinity for APA style evaluations, when we really should just get to the point. JMDE serves to foster contemplation on ourselves and our practice through these editorial commentaries.

The Needs of Diverse Readership

Meeting the needs of the readership is consistently primary for any journal, but made more challenging with JMDE as the journal speaks to both neophytes and veterans, academia and practitioners. Standards of “naturalistic editing” have been followed to preserve the natural flavor of contributions sometimes to the detriment of grammatically correct Standard English—especially important in sharing cross-cultural perspectives.

JMDE continued throughout the five years to offer basic uses of evaluation tools for practice, offering sound practical advice for neophytes and firming the foundation for more experienced evaluators. Offering practical evaluation advice continues the commitment to a broad readership, with varying levels of experience expertise. Following in this vein are the “Top Ten Things Evaluation Needs,” a noble effort indeed. Methodological issues were explored by Chris Coryn in the 7th issue, discussing the need for methodological rigor and the use of hierarchical linear modeling in evaluation. Combining logic modeling with organizational planning was tackled in the same issue.

Many issues have been thematically focused, such as the 5th issue’s focus on evaluation of research and technology programs, noting that evaluation of the program and the funding of the program are two very different things. The 8th issue gave special focus to the evaluation of research. Other, specific issues are explored for practice, such as identifying comparison groups

for difficult populations and to strengthen the rigor of evaluation design.

Twists in the Road, Pruning and Growth, and the Idea of Transdisciplinarity

Although not explicitly delineated in the original vision of the journal, transdisciplinarity has become a philosophical theme woven through the first ten issues. The perpetual challenge to the evaluation status quo—moving from the duality of disciplinary thinking while simultaneously upholding evaluation as a unique discipline—has become integral in evaluation practice and definitive in evaluation theory. This guiding editorial principle along with other novel evaluative thoughts are encouraged, and were subsequently more solidly given home in the journal through the Ideas to Consider section.

Ideas to Consider

This section of JMDE developed from the need for a forum for idea exchange—the musings, lessons learned, and views portending the zeitgeist of evaluation, all in short memo-style and serving to provoke critical thought and the pondering of “what if...?” In just the 2nd issue, the elephant in the room, evaluation anxiety, was addressed, as well as the conundrum facing evaluators when success of a program relies on subject motivation—does attrition then suggest program failure or subject failure? Ongoing concerns with the lack of focus on cost analysis issues are presented, and in the 9th issue, Dr. Scriven christens the term “Economist’s Fallacy” to highlight this evaluation problem. Topics that aren’t research-based or theory driven, but are ideas thrown out for intellectual feeding, such as Michael Scriven’s consideration of evaluation as a higher cognitive process inherent in the human capacity, and he ponders this in the 8th issue.

Commitment to Disaster Planning

Following the formation of the AEA topical interest group on evaluation of disaster planning, which resulted from strong effort by The Evaluation Center, JMDE made a commitment to raise the level of awareness of this branch of evaluation. The first article in JMDE to evaluate an administrative disaster, offers a guide to preconditions of evaluation on this front.

Vision for the Future

As a journal by evaluators about evaluation, critique is not only encouraged, is a necessary part of a continual process of self-reflection. As the field of evaluation has changed in the last five years, so has JMDE. Continuing the process of reflecting the direction of evaluation and influencing it as well is the hope for the next five years and beyond. Thanks to our readership and our contributors for joining us on this journey.