

A Primer on Evaluation

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Overview

- Defining Evaluation
- Formal vs. Informal Evaluation
- Programs, Policies, Products
- Evaluation vs. Research
- Reasons for Conducting an Evaluation
- Areas of Evaluation
- Formative vs. Summative Evaluation
- Popular Evaluation Models
- Design, Data Collection and Analyses
- Politics of Evaluation
- Limitations of Evaluation



Evaluation Defined

- There is not a universally agreed upon definition...
 - terms merit/quality and worth/value are universal
- ...to determine or fix the value of; to examine and judge.
- ...the systematic determination of the value or quality of something (Scriven, 1973).
- ...the identification, clarification, and application of defensible *criteria* to determine an evaluation object's value in relation to those *criteria*.
- Often considered a dynamic process...



Encyclopedia of Evaluation

- Defines as:
 - ...an applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, *value*, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, product, person, policy, proposal, or plan. Conclusions made in evaluations encompass both an empirical aspect (that something is the case) and a normative aspect (judgment about the *value* of something). It is the *value* feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology, investigative journalism, or public polling. (Fournier 2005a: 140)



Formal vs. Informal Evaluation

- Formal Evaluation
 - Thorough, structured, systematic procedure in making judgements
 - Critical intelligence
- Informal Evaluation
 - Systematic process is absent
 - Basic form of human behavior occurring on a daily basis
 - You judged the usefulness of this presentation prior to attending



What is Evaluated?

- Programs
 - After school programming (ASP), Head Start, Teacher Training
- Policies
 - Health Care Reform, NCLB, Concealed Firearms in the Classroom
- Products
 - Textbook, curricula, student work
- Other
 - Personnel
 - Processes
 - Proposals



Identifying Stakeholders

- Stakeholders are those with a vested interest in the evaluation
 - Upstream Impactees
 - Taxpayers, political supporters, funders, policy makers
 - Midstream Impactees (Primary Stakeholders)
 - Program Managers, Staff, Teachers, Administrators
 - Downstream Impactees
 - Those receiving services or products
- Important role for evaluator to help stakeholders articulate their criteria



What is Evaluation?

- Primary purpose is to help stakeholders make a judgement and/or decision on what is being evaluated
 - Generalizability to other settings not necessarily important
 - Lead to judgements
 - e.g., This particular after school program is valuable.
- Evaluator helps set the agenda
 - Various stakeholders are decision makers
- Intended to have a relatively immediate impact
- Judging Adequacy
 - accuracy/utility/feasibility/propriety
- Evaluators broadly trained
 - *Transdisciplinary*



What is Research?

- Primary purpose is to add to knowledge in a field
 - Intended to advance knowledge
 - Seeks conclusions
 - After school programs with component X are effective
- Researcher sets the agenda
- Maximize generalizability to many settings
- Results may or may not be used immediately
- Judging Adequacy
 - Internal/External Validity
- Researchers narrowly focused in a specific area



Reasons to Conduct an Evaluation

- Traditionally...
 - to determine the worth or merit of whatever is evaluated.
- More recently...
 - To inform decision making
 - Public policy, education, etc...
- Improve Programs
- Bring about social betterment
 - ...alleviate social problems and meet human needs...
- Contribute to extending knowledge



Formative vs. Summative Evaluation

Formative	Summative
Primary purpose is improvement	Primary purpose is accountability
Used by primary stakeholders	Used by upstream stakeholders
Summary of what is occurring	Summary of what has occurred
Decisions as a result of recommendations based on what is occurring	Decisions as a result of what has been completed
“Chef tastes the soup”	“Customer tastes the soup”



General Areas of Evaluation

- Context/Needs Assessment
- Theory Assessment
- Process
- Impact
 - Product/Outcomes
- Cost/Benefit

- A single evaluation could contain all or one of these areas!



Context/Needs Assessment

- What is the need...
 - Does a program need to be developed?
 - Is it necessary to continue a program?
- What are the contextual conditions surrounding the program?
 - Social
 - Political
- Fill gaps between present and desired state of affairs
 - What type or changes are necessary in ASP?
 - Academic/Social behavioral components
 - Parental Involvement



Theory Assessment

- Conceptualization/Design of what is being evaluated
- As an evaluator, should gain an understanding of why the program is designed the way it is
 - Sound conceptualization/logic
 - Fit ‘best practices’ and theory (social science theory)
- Is the design of the ASP consistent with theory about what works in ASP’ s?



Process Assessment

- Proper implementation of program
 - Process evaluation at a single point in time
 - Program implementation if tracked across points in time
 - Implementation or theory failure?
 - Is implementation ethical?
 - Legal statutes or standards guiding implementation?
- Do implementation records match standards for implementing ASPs?
 - Hours students are provided academic support?
 - Hours staff are working?



Impact Assessment

- What is the impact of the program?
 - Were desired outcomes achieved?
 - Does the program change what would have occurred without the program?
- Design an issue here
 - Experimental/quasi-experimental designs
 - Pre-post test designs
- Does the ASP impact student achievement in classroom?
Behavior?
 - Homework completion?
 - Grades?
 - Classroom behavior?



Benefit/Cost Assessment

- What is the ‘bang for the buck’ ?
 - How does that compare to other, similar programs?
 - How do benefits compare to costs?
 - What if costs outweigh benefits?



Popular Evaluation Models

- Goals Oriented Evaluation
 - Goal Free Evaluation
- CIPP Model of Evaluation (Stufflebeam, 1971)
- Utilization Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2004)



Goals Oriented Evaluation Model

- Specific objectives identified
 - Evaluation designed around these objectives
- Goal free evaluation does not identify specific objectives
 - Evaluation is a ‘learned’ process
 - Evaluator learns about program and results inductively...not aware of specific objectives
- Goal free often supplements goal oriented evaluation
 - Separate evaluator collecting data to supplement goal-oriented data



CIPP Model of Evaluation

- Context
 - What needs to be done?
- Input
 - How should it be done?
- Process
 - Is it being done?
- Product
 - Did it succeed?
- CIPP checklist exists
 - Evaluator/Client/Stakeholder activities
 - Evaluation Center Resources
 - <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/>



CIPP Model in Use

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers program
 - Context
 - ASP integrated with day program
 - Promote student achievement/increase protective factors for at risk students
 - Structured interviews collected provided formative data
 - Input
 - Primary stakeholders complete surveys
 - Satisfaction/level of involvement
 - Process
 - Documentation of attendance/activity patterns of all involved
 - Product
 - Data collected on academic performance, behavioral outcomes, reduction of risk factors



Utilization Focused Evaluation

- Provide information to primary intended users
- Facilitate use as much as possible
- “Focus on intended use by intended users”
- Insure needs of primary intended users are met
- Focus on stakeholders’ key questions, issues and intended uses
- Involving intended users in the interpretation of findings
- Judge evaluations by their intended utility and actual use



Data Gathering in Evaluation

- Focus Groups
- Questionnaires/Surveys
- Direct Observation
- Participant Observation
- Interviews



Data Analyses in Evaluation

- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Mixed Methods

- Finding a balance between the two...



Politics of Evaluation

- Sometimes stakeholder interests limit what can/can't be said about evaluation
 - Information in the wrong hands can be detrimental to a program
- Stakeholder agenda should not create desired results



Limitations of Evaluation

- Political
- Inaccurate view of the evaluation
 - A systematic process rather than a series of discrete studies
- Characteristics of what is being evaluated
 - Context of the evaluation
- Fiscal limitations
- Evaluator competencies
- Timeframe
- Limitations of measurement instruments



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Thank You!



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