Chapter 2
Culturally Responsive Program Evaluations

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ABSTRACT

Program evaluations in education programs are conducted to address the outcomes, experiences, and phenomena that occur from programs. Program evaluation models are plentiful, and commonly used models include objectives, summative, formative, process, and outcome approaches. The strength of the model relies on the competencies and confidence of the evaluators. When used properly models are a reliable method for judging programs and their outcomes. Absent from these models is the intentional inclusion of culture. Culture is multidimensional and intersectional and holistically affects programs. Therefore, as the cultural makeup of the education systems continues to grow in diversity, program evaluation models must consider the impacts and influences that multi-dimensional culture has on programs at all stages of planning, delivery, and evaluation. This chapter provides specific areas of cultural identity to address with explicit steps for infusing deliberate emphasis into the program evaluation models.

INTRODUCTION

Educators continuously strive to develop curriculum and implement education programs that support students' holistic growth and development (academic, career, social and emotional learning). Students' demographics increasingly reflect a spectrum of cultural diversity. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported that between 2000 and 2015, the percentages of White students decreased from 61 to 49 and Black decreased from 17 to 15 percent. At the same time Hispanic student percentages increased from 16 to 26 and Asian/ Pacific Islander increased from 4 to 5 percent. Therefore, educators are called upon to enhance and transform the curricular and educational practices employed, as an inclusive and integral strategy to meet complex needs. As educators are delivering new programs

with new methods, evaluation is critical when addressing efficacy and outcomes. Program evaluation practices, in general, lack strength in the education system because educators often do not feel confident, competent, or prepared to conduct them. Additionally, culture in program evaluations, from a singular and multidimensional perspective, is often ignored all together (Hood, 2014).

The exclusion of cultural responsiveness in program evaluations produces inaccurate and misguided outcome reports. This in-turn stagnates refinement and growth of programs and impedes stakeholders' abilities to produce successful outcomes. Evaluation framework methods must reflect a deliberate emphasis on cultural responsiveness in order to provide valid and reliable evaluation and outcome reports (Fournier, 2005). That specific emphasis considers the unique makeup of teachers, staff, students, and community within which the education system is situated. While each education system differs in uniqueness, an overarching framework, containing specific cultural elements to be addressed, can provide educators and evaluators with a deliberate approach that increases the efficacy in evaluation methods and outcome reports.

BACKGROUND

Programs are defined as "a temporary set of activities brought together as a possible solution to an existing issue or problem," (Spaulding, 2014, p.3).Programs in an education system encompass a vast array of activities inclusive of, but not limited to, core curriculum delivered in classes and in-class, before, during, and after school programs that are designed to prevent, intervene, or provide ongoing support for topics on social-emotional, academic, and career matters. Evaluation is a process by which judgments are made about programs and the subsequent decisions are formed from the judgments (Spaulding, 2014). Evaluation is rarely a one-time act, rather it is an ongoing process of gathering information, assessing and judging information, and making informed decisions for further and future action. When combined, program evaluations are processes by which an individual, or a group of people, collect information from activities conducted in order to assess and judge specific targets, comprehensive materials and evidence to make decisions about further actions needed (Patton, 2010; Spaulding, 2014).

Conducting program evaluations is a vital job in education systems to better understand the effectiveness and impact of the curriculum and programs that are developed and used (Chatterji, Welner, Bridglall, Caines, & Chatterji, 2014). Program evaluations aid educators in continued refinement and transformation of education content, in order to increase the likelihood of successful intervention outcomes. Program funding (grants, annual stipends, etc.) is often contingent upon schools reporting successful program outcomes. Outcome reports utilize program evaluation findings, which schools heavily rely upon to report programs are evidence-based and yield successful outcomes. Therefore, program evaluation reports have high levels of significance and importance in the day-to day functions of many programs being delivered in K-12 schools.

Evaluation approaches in education vary from formalized, quantitative, and systematic methods to qualitative and informal methods; observations, interviews, team meetings, overviews of materials (Patton, 2010). Educators and paraprofessionals utilize tests, quizzes, essays, and projects to evaluate learning, capacity, and growth. Additionally, they consider assignment completion rates, grade averages, and performance scores as evaluative data points. School staff, such as school counselors and school psychologists utilize behavioral assessments, social-emotional assessments, school climate needs assessments, and narrative feedback to evaluate the efficacy and impact of programs that they deliver.

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