

# Preface

## **ANOTHER BOOK ON EVALUATION! WHY?**

Because we care about education adding value for our learners and for our educational partners, evaluation is worth doing. But it must be done well. And that is where this book comes in. Only by using a sensible and sensitive approach to evaluation will we be able to know what is working, what is not, and what to change as well as what to keep. We can do educational evaluation to create a positive and productive learning environment that delivers worthy results and avoids the *wrong things*. We want evaluation data that lead to good decisions. As professionals, we know that good evaluation helps us take responsibility for what we do and for the consequences of our actions.

Educational evaluation is so important that it has become a discipline that has expanded—some might say “exploded”—over the past several decades. With growth have come diverse concepts, arguments, and strong opinions. There is even a bit of nonsense! A flood of writing on the subject has yielded some major advances in thinking and a fair share of controversy on both peripheral and core issues. Educational evaluation as a field has been served by the advances and the arguments, but at the same time has lost the straightforward, if basic, nature that once stood as viable evaluation practice. Educational evaluators now face a daunting array of confusing choices, terminology, and agendas for planning and conducting evaluative inquiry. It does not have to be thus, and should not be. This book is designed to meet this challenge and to help all of us through the barbed wire of confusing jargon in this field.

## **WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?**

To get beyond the clatter in the field, we define evaluation in clear terms that meet educational requirements for adding measurable value and for knowing what works and what does not. Evaluation is comparing our results with our intentions. Educational evaluation may look at individual

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learning programs, improvement initiatives, school and district organization and reorganization, and community contributions. In particular, we have designed this book for the following people:

Decision makers or anyone concerned with making sure that education adds value for learners, educators, parents, and citizens.

Principals and assistant principals, to help guide progress toward success; they can find out what is working and what isn't and what to change and what to keep.

Superintendents and assistant superintendents, to help them determine progress and recommend to boards what is working, what isn't, what to keep, and what to change—all on the basis of results and solid data.

Curriculum consultants, to make sense of what is getting presented, what should be presented, and what might be eliminated or revised.

School improvement teams who are charged with helping education to continuously improve. . . . They must ask and answer the right educational questions so their recommendations will deliver measurable results.

Evaluation teams and specialists, to help them ask and answer the "right" educational questions and know what data to collect, why it should be collected, and how it should be presented to those responsible for educational accomplishments.

Teachers, to help them find out what works and what doesn't for their learners in terms of what was mastered that was worth learning and what was not successful.

Concerned citizens, so that they can become contributing partners in improving educational results and contributions.

This book on evaluation fits snugly with new initiatives in education—both federal and state—where results based on solid data must be collected and reported. Funding will increasingly be based on solid evidence of the value educators add for learners, faculty, administrators, parents, communities, and school boards: solid data. Important results.

**WHAT IS OUR APPROACH, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

Education is about learners: their success in school and in later life. Useful education goes beyond texts, courses, teachers, and activities. Education

must add value for all stakeholders and should do it in a way that results and value can be proven. No fuzzy words, no glittering generalizations. Just facts and the measurable value added to all stakeholders.

Money no longer flows for simply stated good intentions. *No Child Left Behind* and other initiatives are increasingly concerned with what useful results are delivered. Being responsive to that kind of *results-based* planning, doing, developing, implementing, and results—and this will accelerate in the future—provides the key role for evaluation: finding what works and what doesn't. And using that results-based and value-added base for responsive and responsible education is what this book, if followed, will provide.

Useful evaluation will tell educators and the community alike what should be kept and what should be improved. Without asking and answering the right evaluation questions, there can be no rational defense of what we are doing, nor can there be any rational response to possible arbitrary and capricious demands on us. Without sensible and sensitive evaluation, we have no sound basis for deciding what to change and what to continue.

## **GOOD EVALUATION IS THE SAFETY TOOL WE CAN USE**

We believe there is logic to useful educational evaluation, which leads to well-grounded professional practice for individuals, organizations, and our shared society. This logic is based on the purpose of educational systems to serve the needs of society to add value to all stakeholders. Our approach to evaluation requires a wide view that embraces the fabric of societal and organizational context, not just teaching and learning alone.

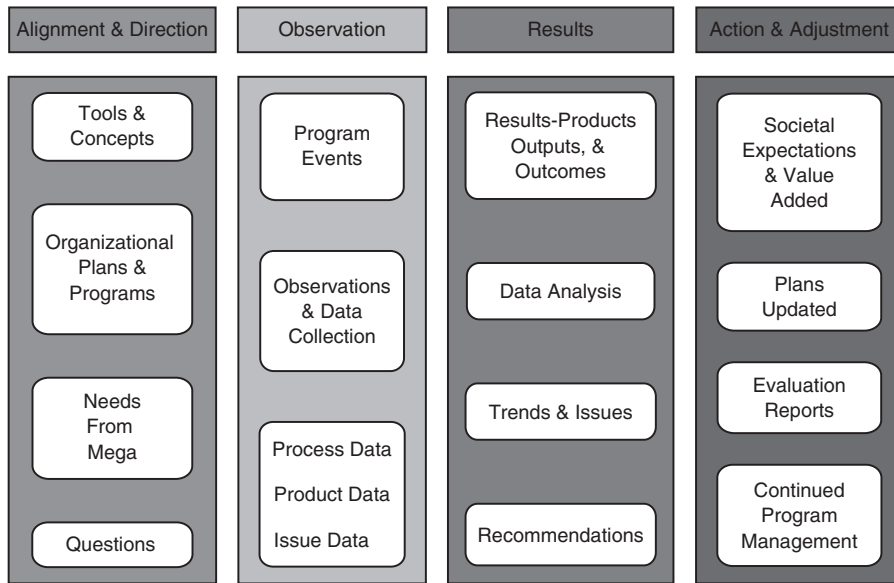
Practical evaluation is interrelated to other organizational activities, which include: Needs Assessment, Strategic Thinking and Planning, Program Development, Program Execution and Management, and Continuous Improvement.

Our conception of program evaluation is simplified into four clear phases as a “phased action plan” (PAP). We emphasize the importance of asking the right questions to structure evaluation inquiry. To this end, each phase of the plan has a prime question that sets the stage for that phase. We will use this action plan to structure the topics in this book in the sequence in which they are relevant to conducting an evaluation study. We also provide background on several models of evaluation and the historical context of the emerging field so you can make some sense of it and do evaluation that is useful to all.

*Clear thinking and clear evaluation:* Rigor and discipline are key elements to our conception of useful educational evaluation. We also maintain that evaluation makes the most sense when it is used to assess educational

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**Figure FM.1** Phased Action Plan for Evaluation



results and the appropriateness of educational processes as a function of the results they are to deliver: to get means and ends properly related. Results may be good or inappropriate depending on the effectiveness of the programs. And programs may be good or bad depending on how well the program is responsive to meeting the needs of society. Education systems that do add value to meeting the needs of society link effective teaching and learning methodologies with valid goals and objectives to generate desirable results. Evaluation can be the vehicle by which educators show the value they add to the enterprise and to our shared world. Showing results trumps endless discourse about our intentions and processes.

**WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?**

Why should you bother? Evaluation can be troublesome, tiring, and time-consuming. There are lots of books on evaluation—why use this one? This book is different. It is based on the solid definition of the context of education in our shared society, and it requires us to plan and deliver in ensuring that our learners will be successful both in school and in life. Both! This book gets very explicit about defining educational results and consequences in and for our shared society, defining this in measurable terms so that planning and delivery will be successful. And the evaluation that

follows this societal focus ensures that we successfully align everything we use, do, produce, and deliver in terms of measurable success in school and in life.

Doing this is the safest approach you can take, an approach that is supported by data, results, facts, and clear reporting to yourself and others about what worked and what did not. Well-grounded evaluation findings will provide all stakeholders a reasonable basis for their actions and decisions. Lack of such information opens the way for irrational argument and wrong choices. Our approach to evaluation will clearly define the value added by each component of the school system. When you use this approach, you will see just how important it can and will be in meeting the needs of learners, educators, parents, and the community. *Evaluation will never be arbitrary* when evaluation criteria are tied to valid goals and objectives of both the school and society.

## WHAT ARE THE CONTENTS?

This book integrates the tools, concepts, and methods for practical educational evaluation. We provide practical examples, scenarios from believable educational realities, and some rules of the road and guides for educational evaluation so you can discover what works and what doesn't.

- The structure of the book is based on the actions that are required to implement a real and useful evaluation study.
- The logic of the book starts with the valid educational—related needs of society—and shows how evaluation can support decision making based on the goals and objectives that flow from valid needs.
- A four-phased approach is provided: Alignment and Direction, Observation, Analysis, and Action.
- Methodological descriptions provide criteria for use and examples of typical settings in which each method is appropriate.
- Practical examples are provided in the scenarios.
- Evaluation traps and errors are exposed.
- Rules of the road for doing evaluation are provided.
- Guidance on management and decision making is provided.
- Guidance on contracting for evaluation services is provided.

What don't we do: *We don't repeat all of the statistical concepts and tools that are so well covered in other educational books. These are easy to find and are written by credible authors. We don't provide an educational evaluation cookbook, because we are convinced that "one size fits all" doesn't work very well with*

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*clothes and won't work with evaluation either. Every educational evaluation opportunity is different, and we want to provide you with the basic concepts and tools to "custom fit" what you use and do to that specific reality.*

*Why the scenarios?* In this book, moving from chapter to chapter as we provide more evaluation concepts and tools, we develop "scenarios" so you can relate the concepts and tools in the book to a simulated educational example. While these cases in point might not be exactly like your immediate situation, you should see how "it all works in real educational life." Why don't you use your actual situation to apply the concepts and tools to your realities? The scenarios at the end of each part section show you how.