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ABSTRACT

Despite attention to cultural considerations in teacher education, curriculum development, and educational policy making and analysis, evaluation remains the last bastion of ethnocentrism in educational evaluation. Evaluators should accept the challenge of finding new ways to explore educational successes within various cultural contexts. More democratic and culturally appropriate parameters for evaluation can result if the following policy recommendations are implemented: (1) participants in a democratic evaluation (parents, students, and teachers) should use their language of choice in providing input; (2) perceptions of those affected by the educational process should be incorporated into evaluation goals; (3) cultural values should receive high priority; (4) studies to establish cultural taxonomies should be incorporated; (5) evaluation methods and instruments should be developed in conjunction with participants in the educational process; (6) evaluation design and methods should parallel group processes being evaluated; (7) results of educational evaluations should not be published as a negative reflection on the communities involved; (8) shared group ideals should identify enlightened self-interest procedures for community education; and (9) evaluations that contribute to open futures for multiple cultures should set parameters for new educational evaluation and research paradigms. Only community participation can make educational evaluation part of the democratic process. (SLD)

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EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION IN A PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY:
SOME POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Educational Evaluation in a Pluralistic Democracy: Some Policy Recommendations

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Introduction

We need a future in which people can find parity, a chance for the unrepresented majority of minorities to be heard and given a chance to participate in any decisions that affect them. Educators, politicians, and under-(or mis-)represented non-majority citizens are rallying for the 1990's under the banner of "DIVERSITY." Despite attention to cultural considerations in teacher education, curriculum development, and educational policy making/analysis, evaluation remains a last bastion of ethnocentrism in public education.

A Scenario

Consider the following illustrative scenario. Identities have been altered to protect the innocent and guilty.

A group of Southwestern educators are meeting to plan collaborative efforts for children "at risk" and their families. There are representatives from various educational programs, federally sponsored preschool, state and federally sponsored bilingual education, school districts, and more. The Southwest's multiple cultures are also well represented. There is an atmosphere of cooperation among the educators and genuine concern for the communities, the children and families being served.

A representative of a federally sponsored compensatory education program arrives later in the session. The group is eager to hear from this colleague. As that presentation begins, the entire climate of the meeting changes. This

educational evaluator presents his program's federal directive as an ultimate educational goal. Standardized achievement test scores are primary. (Some reference to criterion referenced and newly emerging test formats is made, but the evaluator warns that such trends are often passing.) The rapport, communication and interaction in the room disintegrate.

To illustrate the point, the evaluation representative likens public educators' accountability to their federal funding sources to the accountability of weapons manufacturers to the Department of Defense.

This scenario painfully illustrates a major gap in the professional preparation of evaluators. The style of presentation for a collaborative effort was not only egregious; it was culturally inappropriate. The evaluator (who did represent the "dominant" culture) committed a cross-culture blunder. Not only was the analogy between educators and weapons manufacturers false; it was culturally insensitive. Several Native American cultures represented in the meeting place great value on peace and peaceful resolutions of conflict.

The Challenge

||| We can accept the challenge to seek out new ways to explore educational "successes" within various cultural contexts. |||

State and federally supported educational evaluation can proceed as it has in the past and legislate what has come to be known as the "hard" science or educational psychology paradigm as the method for multicultural education. Or, we can accept the challenge to seek out new ways to explore educational "successes" within various cultural contexts. That challenge to those with technical and humanistic expertise is to find a way to collect and collate culturally appropriate material in a design that gives participants the dignity and even prestige of contributing to their own futures.

As educators, we speak of human rights and human dignity, democratic participation in those judgments that affect us and the quality of life we project for ourselves and our children. Yet, as we deal with fellow citizens of America's multicultural communities, the families and their children, we as researchers and/or evaluators usually presume too much. We pursue our own agendas and neglect the needs and desires of the people for whom our efforts should be intended. A review of two federal evaluation publications showed the only mention of any "cultural" consideration to be a data analysis illustration demonstrating how to report ethnicity for participants. (Hawkins, J. & B. Netherhood, 1987; Ralph, J. & M.C. Dwyer, 1988)

||| The advantage of this kind of evaluation is to help establish a kind of paradigm in which the use of data collected empowers the primary participants. |||

The purpose of this presentation is to suggest more democratic, culturally appropriate parameters for evaluation by incorporating community and parental input into their children's educational futures. We must disabuse ourselves of the traditional hard science paradigm in research and formulate a more qualitative collection and collation of information designed to feed-back to communities - families and educators- rather than to continue to co-opt their primary rights to the education of their children. We must maintain an integrity in data collation; yet, underlay the information with new considerations as to the implications for families from varying cultural backgrounds. The advantage of this kind of evaluation is to help establish a kind of paradigm in which the use of data collected empowers the primary participants.

Policy Recommendations

It is beyond the scope of this article to present the full model for democratic educational evaluation. (Schlessman-Frost, 1991) Instead, let us consider the following set of policy recommendations to operationalize our shared goal of education as a democratic process.

- Participants (parents, students, teachers) in a democratic evaluation process should use their language of choice when providing input.
- The perceptions (value criteria) of those affected by the educational process should be incorporated into the evaluation goals.
- Cultural values should be given high priority and not be violated by the evaluation procedure. The worth of these values does not have to be "proven" nor justified to some funding agency or to the dominant educational research (evaluation) elite.
- Ethnoscintific studies to establish cultural taxonomies for education goals should be incorporated into the evaluation categories.
- The methods and instruments of the evaluation should be developed by or in conjunction with those participating in the educational process.
- The design of the evaluation, its goals, methods, instruments, should be formulated in and run analogical parallels to the group processes being evaluated.
- Results of educational evaluation, which are generated by culturally biased paradigms and instruments specifically standardized test scores, should not be published as negative reflections on those communities involved. There should be a community privacy of information rule.
- Shared, cherished ideals for a group should be used to identify the enlightened self interest procedures for community education. Modifications and corrective measures should always be established within the cultural framework of those being evaluated.

- Evaluations, which open options and contribute to shared futures for multiple cultures, set parameters for "new" educational evaluation/ research paradigms.

Summary

Again, the purpose of this type of evaluation is to reeducate the participants in the process and not to reach "conclusions" derived from statistical machinations of data collected from inappropriate instruments or in the traditional anthropological method to "objectively" describe the dichotomies of native and western school cultures. The bottom line for this type of evaluation is not the usual descriptive information gained from standardized, normed instruments. Rather the intent is to prescriptively reinform the participants of their own perceptions of their children's school environment, instruction, and values transmitted. This reflexive use of their own information empowers parents and the community by encouraging them to participate knowledgeably in the schooling of their children.

The exciting possibilities for everyone involved (evaluator, educator, parent, child) is to turn the evaluation process into a contributing part of the growth for the community. Our purpose is not evaluation for evaluation's sake, but to contribute directly back to the community. Unfortunately, community reinformation has been rare.

Only through community participation will educational evaluation become a part of the democratic process as means, end and method.

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