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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews evaluations of social programs and major approaches to program evaluation. Its purpose is to examine the roles that philosophy, ideology, key audiences, preferred methods, and typical evaluation questions can play in the practices of contemporary evaluators. The report describes the Learning Connections Projects, a program that can provide a context for the philosophical framework of the pragmatist and developmental approaches to evaluation. Next, a broad discussion explores how evaluation approaches can serve particular sets of social and political values. The school-reform movement is summarized to show how it has done little to provide an accurate analysis of the production of inequality in the public schools or the larger social order. The paper then suggests how evaluators can earn a seat at the decision-making table of public-school reform by first facing their ideologies and then reflecting on the situational and generalized ethics that apply to any given research act. Lastly, consequences and benefits of using a critical normative framework are explored as a way to negotiate and to communicate the social and political meanings of evaluation questions and ideological and value orientations with high-level policy makers, program beneficiaries, potential clients, and reformers. (Author)

Voices of Power, Equity, and Justice in the Evaluation of Education Reform

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Abstract

This paper reviews evaluation of social programs and major approaches to program evaluation in order to examine the roles that philosophy, ideology, key audiences, preferred methods, and typical evaluation questions can play in the practices of contemporary evaluators. The Learning Connections Project is described as a context for the philosophical framework of the pragmatist and developmental approaches to evaluation. Next, a broad discussion explores how evaluation approaches can serve particulars set of social and political values. Following this discussion, the school reform movement is summarized to show how it has done little to provide an accurate analysis of the production of inequality in the public schools or the larger social order. This paper then suggests how evaluators can earn a seat at the decision making table of public school reform by first facing their ideologies and reflecting on the situational and generalized ethics that apply to any given research act. Lastly, consequences and benefits of using a critical normative framework is explored as a way to explicitly negotiate and communicate the social and political meanings of evaluation questions and ideological and value orientations with high level policy makers, program beneficiaries, potential clients, and reformers.

Voices of Power, Equity, and Justice in the Evaluation of Education Reform

Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state that evaluations are conducted on social programs, most importantly, on social programs in the public domain. Social programs such as public education are manifest responses to priority individual and community needs (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The work of social program evaluators is framed by the concerns and interests of selected members of the setting being evaluated. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) also argue that evaluation questions about the significance of program goals or about the quality and effectiveness of program strategies do not reflect objective inquiry or theoretical predictions, but rather a politicized process of priority setting. In all evaluation contexts, there are multiple, often competing, potential audiences, groups and individuals who have vested interests in the program being evaluated, called *stakeholders* in evaluation jargon. These stakeholders range from policy makers and funders, to program administrators and staff, to intended beneficiaries such as teachers, students, parents, and the citizenry at large. Therefore, unlike most other social scientists who assume an audience of peers or scholars, evaluators must negotiate whose questions will be addressed and whose interests will be served by their work.

Jennifer Greene (1998) argues that neither the diverse criteria for program effectiveness nor the different stakeholders' widely divergent evaluation questions can be equally well addressed by the same evaluation methods or approaches. In this respect, it is the fundamentally political nature of program evaluation contexts, intertwined with the predispositions and beliefs of the evaluator, that shape the contours of evaluation methodologies and guide the selection of a specific evaluation approach for a given context. Different evaluation methodologies are

expressly oriented around the information needs of the different audiences in social programs, from the macro-level program and cost effectiveness questions of policy makers and funders, to the micro-level questions of meaning for individual participants (Greene, 1998). These varied audience orientations further represent, explicitly or implicitly, the promotion of different socio-political values and stances. Evaluation approaches hence constitute coordinated frameworks of philosophical assumptions (about the world, human nature, knowledge, ethics), integrated with ideological views about the role and purpose of social inquiry in policy and program decision making. Value judgments regarding the desired ends of programs accompany those philosophical assumptions and ideological views, which then shape evaluation methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

A Review of Program Evaluation Approaches

The following section describes two categorizations of major evaluation approaches, one proposed by Greene (1998) and the other by Chelimsky & Shadish (1997). Greene (1998) creates four categories: postpositivist, pragmatist, interpretivist, and critical normative science. She bases her formulation on the philosophical frameworks, ideologies, key audiences, preferred methods, and typical evaluation questions characteristic of each approach. Chelimsky and Shadish (1997) classify evaluation approaches into three categories — knowledge, accountability, development — based upon the purposes and questions that guide them

In Greene's (1998) classification, the postpositivist philosophical framework represents the historically dominant tradition in program evaluation. This approach is ideologically oriented around the macro-level policy issues of program effectiveness and cost efficiency. These evaluations focus on technical outcomes and on the social values of efficiency, accountability, and theoretical causal knowledge. The key audiences include high level policy makers and

funders. The preferred methods of a postpositivist evaluator are quantitative experiments and quasi-experiments, including systems analysis, causal modeling, and cost-benefit analyses. Some typical questions answered by this approach would be, "Are desired outcomes attained and attributable to the program?", or "Is this program the most efficient alternative?" (Greene, 1998, p. 376). Postpositivist evaluators retain a strong position among evaluation practice and, perhaps most notably, evaluation audiences, despite their well documented failure to meet the demands of social programs (Patton, 1997).

The second approach Greene (1998) describes is the pragmatist philosophical framework and represents a "response to the failure of experimental science to provide timely and useful information for program decision making" (p. 377). This approach is ideologically oriented around management and quality control, and is focused on the values of practicality and utility. The key audiences are mid-level program managers, administrators, and other decision makers. The preferred methods of a pragmatist evaluator are a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, including structured and unstructured surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Typical questions answered by this approach would be, "Which parts of the program work well and which need improvement?" and "How effective is the program with respect to the organization's goals? With respect to the beneficiaries' needs?"(Greene, 1998, p. 376). Evaluators of this approach select their methods to match the practical problem at hand, rather than as explicitly dictated by some abstract set of philosophical tenets (Green,1998).

Qualitative approaches in evaluation can mostly be found in the third cluster of evaluation frameworks (Green, 1998). The interpretivist approach shares a common grounding in a basically interpretive philosophy of science, one that supports the notion that "in the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself. Confronted with a mountain of impressions,

documents, behaviors, and actions, the interpretivist scientist acknowledges the challenge of making sense of what has been learned" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.313). The core of this sensibility is doubt that any discourse, research, or inquiry has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim, to authoritative knowledge (Richardson, 1991). The ideological and value orientations of this approach characteristically promote pluralism, understanding, diversity, and solidarity in evaluation contexts. A qualitative case study is the preferred method with an accompanying reliance on interviews, observations, and document review. The key audiences that are best served by this type of an approach are social program directors, staff, and beneficiaries, such as principals, parents, teachers. A typical evaluation question under this framework could be, "How is the program experienced by various stakeholders?" (Greene, 1998, p. 376). The focus on stakeholders' understanding of the impacts of their efforts provided impetus for the interpretivist approach, as opposed to postpositivist evaluations that respond to a different audience.

Finally, the fourth approach -- critical normative science -- represents a fairly recent development in evaluation. The feminist, neo-Marxist, critical, and other theorists in this framework "promote openly ideological forms of inquiry that seek to illuminate historical, structural, and value bases of social phenomenon and, in doing so, to catalyze political and social change toward greater justice, equity, power, and democracy" (Greene, 1998, p. 313). This approach to evaluation of educational programs seeks to provide information about the systemic and situational factors that limit opportunity and create or maintain inequity. The goal is to foster action by stakeholders that is focused on increasing educational opportunity and equity for disadvantaged students. Other key audiences could be the communities in which the students live

or other marginalized groups. The explicit ideological and value orientations that this approach emphasizes are emancipation, empowerment, and social change.

According to Denzin (1998), "the age of putative value-free social science appears to be over" (p. 315). He also believes that the criteria for evaluation will move toward "articulat[ing] emancipatory, participative perspectives on the human condition and its betterment" (p.315), especially as further social crisis envelope our advanced pluralistic capitalistic society with increasing disparate value systems. This kind of approach is similar to Guba and Lincoln's (1989) fourth generation evaluation which promotes an activist philosophy. The preferred methods of a critical normative evaluator are to include stakeholders in all aspects of the evaluation, including design, data collection and analysis, and reporting (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Those designs typically involve structured and unstructured quantitative and qualitative methods, historical analyses, and social criticism. Questions addressed by this type of an approach could be, "In what ways are the premises, goals, or activities of the program serving to maintain power and resource inequities in society?, and "In what ways are the goals and objectives of the program serving to promote personal, social, and political gains?"(Greene, 1998, p. 376). For a variety of reasons, including the youth of the approach and the difficulties of gaining access to programs which desire such critical scrutiny, most work in this approach is rhetorical, although some normative evaluation has been done (Fine, 1988; Greene, 1991; McTaggart, 1990; Sirotnik & Oakes, 1990).

As stated earlier, Chelimsky and Shadish (1997) classify evaluation approaches into three categories; their formulation represents a broader, more general mainstream perspective found in current evaluation literature. These three categories are those of accountability, knowledge, and development. By looking at these three perspectives and their positions along a spectrum, one

can begin to understand how different approaches and frameworks provide diverse backgrounds for evaluation methods.

Chelimsky and Shadish (1997) offer a lengthy list of possible purposes for evaluation. These purposes include the following: (a) to measure and account for the results of public policy and programs, (b) to determine the efficiency of programs and their component processes, (c) to gain explanatory insight into social and other public problems, (d) to understand how organizations learn, (e) to strengthen institutions and improve managerial performance, (f) to increase agency responsiveness to the public, (g) to reform governments through the free flow of evaluative information, and (h) to expand results or efficiency measurement from that of local or national interventions to that of global interventions such as reducing poverty and hunger or reversing patterns of environmental degradation (p. 11). All of these purposes are, of course, worthwhile and legitimate reasons for conducting evaluations, but they differ with regard to the questions they address and the kinds of methods needed to answer the questions.

Chelimsky and Shadish (1997) propose that these different purposes, along with the questions they seek to answer, seem to fall naturally into three general perspectives:

*evaluation for accountability (e.g., the measurement of results or efficiency);

*evaluation for knowledge (e.g., the acquisition of a more profound understanding in some specific area or field); and

*evaluation for development (e.g., the provision of evaluative help in order to strengthen institutions).

The methods of these three perspective are not mutually exclusive, and each of these three approaches may be needed at particular times or policy points and not at others (e.g., evaluation for knowledge may need to precede accountability). Chelimsky and Shadish (1997) write that

their formulation appears to have considerable explanatory power with regard to the current tension in the evaluation field.

The Accountability Perspective

From the standpoints of auditors, government sponsors of evaluation studies, donors to international organizations, and many others, evaluation is done to establish accountability. This involves the provision of information to decision makers, whether they are in the public or private sector. Specific cause and effect questions about the results in an accountability perspective might be: What happened to poverty levels among the very poor as a result of development assistance provided? Did an educational intervention or program produce more "effective" learning for all learners? Has teacher training increased student achievement?

Sometimes, questions about the results from an accountability perspective may involve merely documentation of whether or not anything has changed after something new has been tried Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997). Normally, however, the ability to say that something is in fact a result of an intervention or program hinges on the ability to establish that it did not come about because of something else. Many methods are used to answer these kinds of accountability questions including: randomized designs, quasi-experimental designs, mixed multi-level designs, mixed qualitative/quantitative designs, case studies, process studies, and research synthesis designs.

The Knowledge Perspective

In the view of many researchers working independently in universities and other evaluators in scientific institutions, evaluation is done to generate understanding and explanation. Chelimsky and Shadish (1997) do not provide examples of the specific questions posed in this approach, given that it is the evaluator who decides what will be asked and answered, and the

topic generally follows from the researcher's prior work. They explain that the evaluations associated with individual academic researchers, or those of research teams, will be more likely to continue in depth cumulative inquiry into particular areas or sectors of research rather than being concerned with applying systematic research methods to a variety of sectors, as with accountability and developmental evaluations.

The larger purpose of the knowledge perspective is to increase understanding about the factors underlying public problems, about the match between these factors and the policy or program solutions proposed, and about the theory and logic (or lack thereof) that lie behind an implemented intervention. "These evaluations may employ any of the methods discussed above, separately or in conjunction with each other, but the purpose of knowledge gain leads logically to the use of the strongest designs as well as the greatest clarity possible in explication and documentation of methods to facilitate replication or later use in research synthesis and policy formulation" (Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997, p.14).

The Developmental Perspective

For government reformers, public managers, and others, evaluation is done to improve institutional performance. It serves as a flexible tool that works: (a) to improve the design of projects, (b) to measure and recommend changes in organization activities, c) to develop the indicators and performance targets needed to improve institutional effectiveness and responsiveness, (d) to monitor, in an ongoing way, how projects are being implemented across a number of different sites, and/or (e) to find out how beneficiaries feel about an agency and its programs (Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997, p. 17). To some accountability or knowledge perspective evaluators, developmental evaluators may seem more like evaluation consultants than evaluators, but those who do developmental work are convinced that building evaluation capability is as

important an evaluation function as evaluation itself and that, in some cases, evaluation cannot be done without capacity building.

Specific questions asked of evaluators in a developmental perspective might include the following: What is the best research evidence with respect to formulating a new program or modifying an old one? How can projects be structured so that they produce evidence of the value of the intervention being tested? What is the most appropriate agenda for the agency? (Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997, p. 18). Both process and outcome designs may be used in a developmental perspective, depending on the evaluation question posed. In addition to the methods mentioned earlier, the formative methods used in the developmental perspective include the following: monitoring, empowerment evaluation, cluster evaluation, performance measurement, and research synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997). A developmental evaluator becomes part of the design team, helping to shape both processes and outcomes in an evolving, rapidly changing environment of constant interaction, feedback, and change. Using mixed methods and multiple criteria is characteristic of evaluations in this perspective.

Classifying the Learning Connections Project Evaluation

The Social Program

Learning Connections is a three year, multi-level, integrated professional development and school improvement program being piloted in 5 middle schools in New Orleans, Louisiana. "It is designed to help teachers, administrators, students, parents and stakeholders as they build authentic learning communities where all learners are challenged to grow and develop"(CDL, 1998). Learning Connections is directed by the Center for Development and Learning (CDL) in Covington, Louisiana. Funding for the Learning Connections Project is provided by the non-

profit foundation Baptist Community Ministries (BCM) in New Orleans. Funding for the Evaluation study, an external study being completed by the Auburn University Evaluation team, is also provided by the Baptist Community Ministries. The Center for Development and Learning describes Learning Connections Project as follows:

> The central goal of Learning Connections is to help each school community evolve into a happy, productive, and successful place where all students can learn and develop every day. Learning Connections is an intervention and change model worthy of replication in public and nonpublic schools serving all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Learning Connections is based on the premise that all students want to learn, can learn, and deserve to learn by being taught in ways that improve their chances for success. Learning Connections will help school communities examine, model, and incorporate relevant research in the following areas: (1) building positive school and classroom climates, (2) interactive elements of learning as a process, (3) authentic, learner-centered teaching practices, and (4) building school communities that foster learning" (CDL, 1998, p.1).

The Founder/Executive Director and the Clinical Director for the Center for Development and Learning are responsible for making high and mid-level decisions for the Learning Connections Project and they work closely with the Auburn University Evaluation team on many aspects of the evaluation, including formulating the objectives to be addressed, collaborating in data collection, and soliciting formative feedback from the evaluators, and negotiating the format of reports.

The Auburn University Evaluation Study

The plan of research and evaluation for Learning Connections involves a multi-level, multi-method approach designed to address each of the outcomes expected from the Projects. The outcome evaluation comprises a mixed qualitative/quantitative design. Various forms of data are collected for this study: school, teacher, and student survey data, individual and focus group interview data, classroom observation data, standardized test scores, and school grades. Data collection and organization is a group effort between the Auburn University research team and the Clinical Director with other CDL staff in Louisiana. Descriptive and multivariate statistical procedures are completed on quantitative data to determine how the various project components

influence school improvement. Content analysis is conducted using the classroom observations and interview transcripts to provide qualitative descriptions of the impacts and effectiveness of the Project. In combination with quantitative data, the observations and interview data can yield rich, deep data about the effects of the reform effort. Particular outcomes that we investigated in the first year of the Project are participants' perceptions of changes in instructional practices, in staff development activities, in students' engagement in learning, and in parents' involvement in schools.

Learning Connections as a Pragmatist, Developmental Evaluation Approach

For the most part, the outcome evaluation study of Learning Connections characterizes the pragmatist and developmental approaches to program evaluation, mainly because of the kinds of questions that are asked about the program's effectiveness and because of its influences on the administrators and mid-level decision makers. Some components and project outcomes reflect the typical concerns of a more postpositivist or accountability approach (e.g., attributing outcomes to Project activities) and their key audiences such as high level policy decision makers and funders (e.g., Executive Director, Clinical Director, and the funders). On the other hand, some aspects of the data collection and analysis reflect the key audiences (teachers, principals, parents & students) and preferred methods of the interpretivist approach (semi-structured interviews, theme analysis of classroom observations).

In addition, in order to decide what action to take in the face of the effects of the Learning Connections Project, the Clinical Director and other learning specialists are likely to need a variety of qualitative and quantitative information related to the experiences and contexts of the school and classroom environment, as was delineated in the evaluation study. This decision making process of using a variety of information reflects the preferred methods of a pragmatist

approach. Also the ideological and value orientations of the evaluation study promote understanding and solidarity in the evaluation context. Some of the Auburn University evaluation questions asked are, "How are different parts of the program working and which ones need improvement?" and "How effective is the program with respect to the organization's goals? These questions are similar to the examples of questions given under the framework of the pragmatist approach. In other words, the evaluation study designers pragmatically selected their methods to match the practical problem at hand of determining whether outcomes and influences were being attained.

Finally, the relationship the evaluation team has developed with the Learning Connections staff over the first year of the project places our approach in the developmental category. Our involvement in the early phases of the Project included participating in the formulation of objectives, based on the stated goals of Learning Connections. We have given ongoing feedback to Project staff throughout the year as our analyses of data shaped our understanding of the impact of their activities in the schools. Thus, we have taken on the role of consultant, providing formative information as the Project has evolved.

Inherent in our approach to evaluating the Learning Connections Project are political, social, and philosophical stances. Those stances are not stated explicitly in our plan, but are implied in our methods, questions, and communications with the staff and with the teachers, principals, students, and parents involved. There are certainly some fundamental questions that go unasked in our approach in that we are not explicitly addressing the political, social, and historical inequities in the schools involved. What follows is a critique of mainstream evaluation efforts as they have transpired over recent years and an exploration of the consequences and benefits of explicitly addressing issues of power and equity in evaluation designs.

Serving a Particular Set of Social and Political Values

Over the years, evaluation has come to be seen as a political undertaking. Michael Quinn Patton (1998) summarized 12 recent trends in evaluation; one of them was increasing political sophistication and acknowledgment of the role of values and morals in evaluation practice. There can be no doubt that evaluation is influenced partly by political forces and, in turn, that is has political effects. Whose interests are served and how interests are represented in any evaluation approach are now very critical concerns in a society with increasing disparate value systems, growing socioeconomic gaps, and multiplying linguistic and cultural diversity.

In earlier days, evaluators assumed that the interests of all parties were properly reflected in the traditional outcome measures (postpositivist approach), but this assumption came to be questioned, and it was recognized that different groups might have different interests and might be differentially affected by the educational program and its evaluation (House, 1993). *Stakeholders* (those who had a stake in the program under review) became a common concept, and representing stakeholder views in the evaluation became an accepted practice.

The stakeholder concept is based on the prevailing pluralist-elitist-equilibrium theory of democracy, which disclaims any normative judgements and which holds that the current system of competing parties and pressure groups performs the democratic function of equalizing the diverse and shifting political demands (MacPherson, 1987). It is perceived that describing what others value is the stance best suited to the political context in which evaluators operate, because decision making depends on the values held by relevant policy makers and stakeholders (House, 1993). Presumably, these parties will use the findings to make informed decisions (pragmatist approach). Neither the government nor the evaluator is supposed to intervene to support any particular interests, but rather only to provide information that is value-neutral and interest-

neutral. The interests of various groups somehow dissolve into the values of decision makers and stakeholders.

In two highly visible stakeholder evaluations funded by the federal government, those of Cities-in-Schools and Jesse Jackson's PUSH/Excel program, the evaluations worked against the interests of the program participants and the inner-city students which the programs were supposed to serve, thus calling into question the justice of these evaluations (House, 1988; Stake, 1986). The results of the PUSH/Excel evaluation were used not only to discredit the program but also to question Jesse Jackson's ability to manage large enterprises during ensuing presidential campaigns. In truth, the stakeholder model was never implemented (House, 1988; Stake, 1986). Charles Murray, the evaluator in both cases, substituted a technocratic (postpositivist) approach to evaluation and expressed his disdain for the stakeholder concept in his article, Stakeholders as Deck Chairs (1983). Although the stakeholder approach seems firmly entrenched, there is disagreement about how to implement it. In reality, stakeholders do not have equal power to influence and utilize the evaluation, nor do they have equal protection from the evaluation (House, 1976, 1988, 1993).

The problem of addressing multiple values and interests and how they should be represented in an equitable evaluation can take one directly into the realm of issues such as diversity, power, and equity. The consideration of these issues should be combined with the recognition of the assumptions, character, and consequences of conventional forms of educational evaluation. The problem of evaluation representing a particular set of social and political values (i.e., a broadly conservative set) also raises some serious questions about evaluation in general. Although the socio-political reality of multiple stakeholders and evaluators who have legitimate values and sometimes conflicting interests is recognized, how these values

and interests are legitimized will become one of the most important challenges for educational evaluation in the future (House, 1993). How to synthesize, resolve, and adjudicate all these multiple multiples in our increasing multicultural and amorphous society remains a formidable question, as indeed it does for the larger society.

One thing we do know is that the socio-political reality in evaluation of public programs, both in education and health, often works in favor of higher income groups and against equity despite the stated goals and objectives of the social programs (Birdsall & Hecht, 1995; Paul, 1991; Fine, 1983). When we look at the political structures and the broad organization of society, resource allocation and subsequent delivery of services and programs tend to be skewed in favor of those who have more voice (Fine, 1983; Fine & Weis, 1993). In many cases, powerful stakeholders or groups which are able to effectively demonstrate their interest in receiving social services and "effective" or "successful" social programs, manage to get the lion's share of the resources and the funds.

For purposes of elaboration, we will briefly touch upon the notion that the United States of America is one of the last Western industrialized nations to base their educational financing system on the taxation of largely differentiated property values (Berliner & Biddle, 1997). This financial arrangement alone should illuminate some of the deeper issues at stake in the evaluation of public education environments. American public school law and its case history has demonstrated time and again that there are very few instances where citizens have been able to prove that state school finance systems result in revenue disparities which violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Alexander & Alexander, 1992). In 1973, in the case of San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, Mr. Justice Powell, delivered the opinion of the United States Supreme Court. He wrote, "to the extent that the Texas system of

school financing results in unequal expenditures between children who happen to reside in different districts, we cannot say that such disparities are the product of a system that is so irrational as to be invidiously discriminatory..."(Alexander & Alexander, 1992, p.779).

If disparate allocation of governmental benefits can be justified on the basis of reasonable classification or the interests involved are not fundamental, then statutes will be regarded as constitutional (Alexander & Alexander, 1992). The court in the Rodriguez case basically ruled that a state legislature can heap benefits on some wealthy school districts and deprive others of fiscal resources and not offend the federal Equal Protection Clause. Thus, representing the educational interests of disenfranchised stakeholders, even within the American public school law domain, can be confounded with many inherently unequal and conflicting value systems.

In other instances, our social service promoters, and social program managers in education and health, are able to shape the systems to serve their own personal and professional goals at the expense of equitable delivery (Paul, 1991). Problems created by the limited voice of politically weak or disenfranchised stakeholders are exacerbated in educational evaluation, when combined with direct provision of services in virtual public monopolies of the "best teachers", the allocation of "best practices" in education, and the provision of high quality curriculum and professional development training which are centralized in higher socio-economic communities (Fine, 1983b, 1994; Oakes, 1986; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Shapiro & Purpel, 1998). Ultimately, citizens have limited capacity to improve the public education they are provided through participating, informing, and making recommendations. This is especially true of lower socio-economic community stakeholders who have traditionally been limited in their capacity to have their voices heard without legal representation (Fine & Weis, 1993; Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

Historically, when interests have been ignored and educational procedures have been violated, lower socio-economic communities, minorities, exceptional populations, and limited English proficient citizenry have had to turn to the legal system for any kind of adjudication (Paul, 1991; McCormick, Haring, & Haring, 1990; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Similarly, in terms of fighting for diversity, power, and equity in education, evaluation of education reform efforts could benefit from addressing some of the principals in American public school law (Alexander & Alexander, 1992). Regardless, it is clear that contemporary evaluation approaches, which were invented to solve social problems, can be afflicted with many of the problems they were meant to solve.

One must also note carefully that today's professional evaluators sometimes become evaluators by default. We represent an eclectic and diverse combination of various professional, academic, and research areas. Shadish and Epstein (1987) found that 31% of the respondents in their survey described their primary professional identity as that of "evaluator" (p. 560). Others thought of themselves first as a psychologist, sociologist, economist, educator, and so on, with identity of evaluator secondary. When both Charles Murray (1983, 1984) and Michele Fine (1983b, 1988) have been successful evaluators representing particular, divergent sets of social and political values and interests, one has to acknowledge the diverse socio-political reality in which evaluators actually find themselves in practice.

The socio-political reality in which one can survive as an professional evaluator of education reform becomes integrated into a world with those individuals that agree with your views on the nature of evaluation research and its influence on decision making processes. As evaluators conduct their research to address their prospective typical questions and key audiences with their preferred methods, they will demonstrate either explicitly or implicitly their particular

set of ideological, philosophical, and value orientations. Surely, society expects evaluation to be based on scientific authority. However, the notion of what is scientific has been the subject of much debate (e.g., Harding, 1991; Toulmin, 1960). The concepts of objectivity, scientific methodology, and validity will be recast to continue to accommodate different philosophical and political stances and varying evaluation approaches (House, 1993).

Evaluation research of education reform efforts can contribute to informed decision making, but the manner in which this is done needs to be reformulated. We are well past the time when it is possible to argue that good research will, because it is good and rigorous, influence the decision making process. Rist (1998), the Evaluation Advisor to the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank, argues succinctly that this kind of linear relation of research to action simply is not a viable way in which to think about how knowledge can inform program managers, reformers, or policy makers. The relation is both more subtle and more tenuous.

Consequences and Benefits of a Critical Normative Evaluation Approach

Schools are inextricably linked to the communities they serve through social, political, economic, and cultural interests. To better comprehend public education, the socio-cultural, political, and hierarchical relationships that transpire within the school as well as within the community must be linked to the broader political and economic issues of society at large (Ogbu, & Matute-Bianchi, in press). To begin to realize the possibilities for reforming public education, and to begin fighting for diversity, power, and equity in education, especially for those children who are disadvantaged, we must first re-examine the historical nature of the problems of education and the communities in which these schools exist (Noll, 1997).

Education Reform

School reform remains at the center of the public agenda even after many years of discussion, legislation, and state and local action. After years of work to improve public education, student achievement for many populations still remains below acceptable levels. This is particularly true for populations who traditionally have been poorly served by our schools. For example, on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment, 20% of white fourth graders scored below the basic level in reading, but 69% of African American students and 64% of Hispanic students scored poorly (NWREL, 1998).

The statement "All men are created equal" is one that resounds throughout American history. The words are found in the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; they are also paraphrased and applied in numerous settings. For educators and educational evaluators, it has meant that American schools are charged with offering every child equality of educational opportunity. This concept of equality is one that has been implicit in most educational practices throughout the period of public education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Coleman, 1981). However, few Whites in suburban America would long tolerate the low academic achievement taken for granted in the urban or rural public schools attended largely by African Americans, Hispanics, and impoverished children.

In big cities all over the U.S., minority students by the tens of thousands leave school each year, some as dropouts, some as graduates, utterly unprepared to participate in and contribute to a democratic society (Oakes & Sirotnik, 1986). They lack the skills that will allow them to obtain gainful employment, and they are devoid of the preparation that will lead to success in further education. Freire (1985) would characterize this lack of skills and preparation as the "inability to act upon and transform one's world" (cited in Hamnett, Kumar, Porter & Singh, 1984, p. 68). Consequently he would say that the democratic society failed to move this

person toward the ever-new possibilities of a fuller and richer life individually and collectively through the hospices of public education (Hamnett et al., 1984).

Reform reports in the 1980s and early 1990s served to spotlight the nature and the function of public schooling and attempted to delineate a specific relationship between broader social, economic, political, and cultural interests. Kretovics, Farber, and Armaline (1991) state that many of the reports argued in favor of a wide range of additive reforms such as increased testing, more homework, a longer school year, a longer school day, and the internalization of an extensive list of cultural facts. Others suggested a plethora of technical solutions for the challenges facing public schools, ranging from the addition or reduction of certain educational requirements for teachers to the addition of specific course requirements to the public school curriculum (Noll, 1997). For the most part, the reform efforts have been driven by a persistence of list logic and an obsession with the quick fix (Barth, 1986; Giroux, 1983).

Berliner and Biddle (1997) suggest that there are data that illuminate the untenable assumptions on which much of the school reform movement is based. Similar to Kozol (1991), they also suggest that some of these reform efforts are thinly disguised elitist attempts to get rid of public education, to protect the privilege such individuals have already bestowed upon their children. Kozol (1991) also suggests that much of the school reform movement is wrongheaded or ineffective. Coming from a radical social theorist perspective, these claims might be completely dismissed, but Berliner is identified by the scientific community as a respected, traditional educational psychologist. Some proposals for education reform reflect only the personal experiences or prejudices of legislators, sponsors, and local humanitarians, and some are based on misunderstandings about schools and the problems of education (Barth, 1986; Oakes, 1986; Shapiro & Purpel, 1998). For these reasons, many programs intended to improve our

schools turn out to have little detectable effect or, worse, end up creating serious problems for educators and students.

For more than 20 years, a variety of educational and social theorists have presented compelling arguments that illustrated the reproduction of social, economic, political, and cultural inequalities through the organization and structure of the schooling process (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994). They summarize some of the past characters that entered the debate on controversial issues in education and social theory. Kretovics and Nussel (1994) state that educators from diverse cultural and ideological backgrounds (i.e., Coleman, Anyon, Giroux, Arnot, Clark, McRobbie, Illich, Bowles, Gintis, and Apple), drawing on the earlier works of other scholars (i.e., Dewey & Baldwin), have pointed to the political and ideological nature of schooling and the ways in which schools often under serve the nonmajority students and, through hegemonic practices, reproduce the status quo. These authors say that the arguments have often been ignored, dismissed, or co-opted, resulting in a blaming of the victims of educational inequalities. As a result, schools in general are blamed for the broader social and economic problems that inform and structure their existence.

Through the recent school reform movement, the problems of American education and the general purposes of public schooling have been systematically removed from the terrain of public debate (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994). Kretovics and Nussel go on to say that "most of the widely publicized school reform efforts have created an educational climate antithetical to moral referents such as social justice and initiatives of equity that are valued in a democratic society" (1994, p.4). Giroux (1983) and Freire (1985) believe that the schooling process is always structured on the norms and values that embody specific social, political, economic, cultural, and ideologic interests. Therefore, as evaluators of educational programs, we should critically

examine the context, both present and past, in which education takes place in order to illuminate both the problems and the possibilities for change in the future. Evaluators of education reform must have a vision for change and the ability and conviction to act on that vision. Evaluators are inevitably linked to one of the most crucial of social processes, education, and must develop a framework that takes seriously issues of diversity, power, equity, as well as educational structures and practice, in the difficult process of reforming American public education (Shapiro & Purpel, 1998).

Facing our Ideologies and Reflecting on our Situational Ethics

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state that explicit recognition of the ideological contours of program evaluation did not always exist. Rather, both inside and outside the field, a methods orientation has predominated. One continuing legacy of this orientation is the naming of the different evaluation approaches by their primary methods and their key audiences. Yet what importantly distinguishes one evaluation methodology from another is not the methods, but rather whose questions are addressed and which values are promoted (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Program evaluators continue to try and distance themselves from the political dimensions of their work, intentionally seeking the objective stance of politically neutral and scientific rationality.

Weiss (1987) has most influentially critiqued this distanced stance, arguing that it substantially underestimates the potency of evaluation in this era. She has maintained, for approximately three decades, that social policy and program decision making are not rational processes to which data-based enterprises such as program evaluation could contribute the definitive piece of information. Rather, "politics of program survival and the politics of higher policymaking accord evaluative evidence relatively minor weight in the decisional calculus"

(Weiss, 1987, p.62). In short, neither distanced objectivity nor neutral rationality is going to earn program evaluators a seat at the decision making table.

American evaluators are renowned globally for their trend-setting potential in evaluation theory, practice, methods, and policies. Jan Eric Furubo, Secretary General of the European Evaluation Society, characterizes our evaluation development in the following terms:

> Evaluation is not a rigorous clinical science; rather it is part of the art and craft of public decision making. To be doing evaluations is seen as a badge of modernity and rationality, much of its value is symbolic. So if evaluation is to put down roots it has to demonstrate that it can serve other purposes as well as the symbolic. That other value surely has to be that of assisting decision makers, often assisting them in making painful decisions in difficult circumstances (http://www.europeanevaluation.org/no2_97.htm).

In sharing this quote from the Secretary General, we hope to remind American evaluators of their own genesis and context in a global society. This reflection and reminder can help reveal our situational and generalized ethics that are bound by the relationships and ideological orientations we share with our clientele. Maintaining distanced objectivity and neutral rationality under the guise of a rigorous and good science for program evaluation fails because it focuses on the truth aspect of validity to the exclusion of the credibility and normative aspects of social programs. By the essence of his or her social function, "the evaluator is engaged with the world and *can* directly affect who gets what" (House, 1980, p. 254). Further, as an inherently political activity, evaluation "is intimately implicated in the distribution of basic goods in society...so evaluation should not only be true; it should also be just" (p.121).

Using Critical Normative Evaluation in Education Reform

Understanding what role our own ideologies and situational ethics play in program evaluation of education reform is only the first step to learning how to reflect and communicate issues of power in evaluation. The second step is in knowing that there is a space for many kinds of science, logical analysis, and truth seeking research, that one kind of evaluation research that

can be just as rigorous as the next. The critical normative science approach to evaluation provides a framework for making explicit the political and philosophical meanings of the evaluation questions, and the meanings of our ideological and value orientations. These meanings can and should be communicated and negotiated to high level and mid-level policy makers, to program managers, program beneficiaries, their communities, and other less powerful groups before an evaluation relationship with potential clients is formalized.

For purposes of illustration only, we will explore how the nature and function of the evaluation for Learning Connections would change under the auspices of a critical normative evaluation framework. In order to place the evaluation study within this framework, one must first focus on the issue of evaluation questions. As argued before, whose questions are addressed as the evaluation plan is formulated and which particular values and interests are promoted are what differentiates one evaluation methodology from another. Thus, in order to reflect the typical evaluation questions of a critical normative approach, one of the questions about the project could be, "In what ways are the assumptions and/or activities of the program serving to maintain the inequities in educational opportunity?" and "In what ways are the premises and goals of Learning Connections serving to maintain the power and resource inequities in the community?" The implications for answering these questions are especially relevant to the purpose of public schooling: to provide equal and excellent education for all children in a democratic society. These types of questions are very familiar to the feminist, neo-Marxist, critical social theories that form both the philosophical and epistemological foundations for the critical normative approach to social program evaluation in the public domain.

In addition to changing the questions, other components of the research design would be augmented. A representative sample of program beneficiaries such as the African American and

impoverished students, their parents, and other community members would be a priority to include in the research sample and in the research design, by actively recruiting them for activities such as formulating goals and objectives, as well as participating in varied structured and unstructured interviews. Also, an in-depth analysis of student demographic data from schools would be conducted to determine the nature and extent of the classroom and campus pedagogical challenges to instructional organization. For instance, teachers face many challenges in their daily practice with students in regular, special, gifted, and compensatory education (e.g., Chapter I, Title I, and 504). Investigating the individual and group variation in these educational services would prove beneficial in developing a classroom and campus image of how teachers experience exceptional and at risk students before, during, and after the social program implementation. In addition, some case studies involving a thorough document (content) analyses of the enacted curriculum in particular classrooms across a school day, week, and 9-week grading period could prove informative for more long-term determinations of instructional change and improvement. These types of data collection would be pursue in order to establish baseline information about instructional and curriculum practices within classrooms and among schools.

The above evaluation would seek to illuminate the historical, structural, and value bases of the social phenomenon in local schooling practices and, in doing so, would aim to foster greater justice, diversity, equity, and power in educational opportunity. In such a case, the Learning Connections Project, its premises, goals and objectives, and its implementation would be evaluated using the lens of a critical normative eye. Such an approach to evaluation would be designed to provide information to disadvantaged students, many of whom possess nontraditional learning profiles (Gross, 1993), to their parents, and to other stakeholders (e.g., teachers, principals) in the interest of their taking action to ensure their students' opportunity to learn and,

eventually, to participate fully in a democratic society. Hence, in the endeavor of opening spaces for a different kind of logical analysis, this approach would capitalize on an "openly ideological" form of inquiry (Greene, 1998, p. 377). In this form of inquiry and investigation, the political aspects of the voices in the evaluation would be explicitly brought into the discourse of the Learning Connections Project.

Clearly, the communication to possible reformers of the explicit questions, orientations, and paradigms that this approach emphasizes is essential for negotiating the social and political values of emancipation, empowerment, and social change within the instructional context of public education. National policymakers, educational leaders, education reformers, and children in disadvantaged situations can benefit from critical normative evaluation, but not in the same ways and not with the same evaluator roles as in other evaluation frameworks. The consideration of an evaluation's questions and the evaluator's own ideology and value orientations all need to be made explicit before a formal evaluator-client relationship is in place. The challenge will be to create appreciation and space for such diversity among both those within and outside the profession who have a single and narrow view of evaluation and its practice (Worthen, Sanders & Fitzpatrick, 1997). The debate will and should go on so that we can discover implications and ramifications of diverse approaches. We foresee no desire to turn back the clock to a single dominant perspective.

Conclusion

Irrespective of the many social, economic, technological, cultural, and political problems that face our American communities, the public schools exist for the purpose of educating all children. Teachers are a part of the never-ending struggle to create conditions in which meaningful learning takes place and to provide the best educational opportunities in a given

situation. As evaluators rendering judgement on educational programs, and giving merit or not giving merit to the educational repertoires and learning outcomes of teachers, we also become inextricably linked to the process of either perpetuating a disconnected reality of education or critically examining and observing a wide range of crucial issues, structures, and problems in contemporary education. As evaluators of education programs and teaching, we cannot ignore that we become a part of the never-ending struggle to make judgments about a social activity which creates the conditions for or obstacles to social mobility.

The central task of the current reform movement in education is nothing less than building and transforming schools that are struggling to achieve democratic ideals (Fine, 1994). While schools can be described as potentially a site of extraordinary democracy, the processes and outcomes of schools deeply reproduce and promote the very social inequities they are said to equalize (Fine, 1983). This circumstance imposes onto the roles of educational leaders and evaluators a social responsibility, one that demands sincere conscience and deliberate action. Evaluators and researchers, who in the past have been content to describe dispassionately what schools are doing and how they are functioning, are actually involved in and should be committed to a collaborative view of knowledge creation. When evaluators of education reform gain the conscience and purposefulness of their critical role, no relationship is left untouched or unchanged.

> In conclusion, evaluation is a powerful social force that has evolved only recently in advanced capitalistic societies, a new institution that promises to be a major influence over the long term. Its influence can be both good and bad. In either case, society before formal evaluation is not the same as society afterward. Exactly what shape the practice, institution, profession, and discipline will take in the future is impossible to predict. What is clear is that its fate will be bound to the government and the economic structure and determined in part by its own history and traditions. Some of its destiny lies within the control of the evaluators themselves; some does not (House, 1993, p.172).

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