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Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Aspects of Evaluation

BACKGROUND

This section includes activities that address

- Understanding the importance of recognizing the cultural contexts of evaluation
- Defining cultural competency within an evaluation context
- Understanding how one's culture and history potentially affect evaluation practice

The following information is provided as a brief introduction to the topics covered in these activities.

When conducting evaluations in any community or organizational context, it is critical that evaluators understand what it means to be culturally aware and sensitive and to have some level of cultural competence. The first step toward achieving this goal is for evaluators to know themselves—their roots, histories, biases, prejudices, and assumptions about race, culture, and ethnicity. Only then can they begin to understand, and possibly confront, long-held beliefs that may support or impede their working within a multicultural environment.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are useful when discussing different aspects of culture with regard to evaluation practice.

Cultural Knowledge. Familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group (Adams, 1995).

Cultural Awareness. Developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group and involving changes in attitudes and values. It also reflects an openness and flexibility in working with others of another culture (Adams, 1995).

Cultural Sensitivity. Knowing that there are differences and similarities among cultures without making value judgments of good or bad, better or worse, right or wrong (Texas Department of Health, National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center on Cultural Competency, 1997).

Cultural Competence. A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Cultural competency is the ability to effectively operate in different cultural contexts.

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Activity 10

Understanding the Influence of Culture in Evaluation Practice

Overview

This activity asks participants to consider how their own cultural heritage and background may influence the ways in which they design and implement evaluation studies.

Instructional Objectives

Participants will

- Identify or recognize their own cultural heritage or background
- Understand other individuals' hopes, dreams, disappointments, and tragedies as they relate to one's culture
- Consider how one's background may influence his or her evaluation practice

Number of Participants

- Minimum number of participants: 8
- Maximum number of participants: 15 *or* unlimited when participants are in groups of 8 to 10

Time Estimate: 40 to 75 minutes

This activity requires approximately 5 minutes per person. Thus, if there were 15 participants, this activity would require approximately 75 minutes.

SOURCE: This activity is adapted from Brookfield and Preskill (2001), who adapted it from an exercise developed by the Fetzer Institute as part of its work on diversity dialogues (Harbour, 1996).

Materials Needed

- Personal objects brought by participants

Instructional Method

Storytelling

Procedures

Facilitator's tasks:

Prior to Class

- Ask participants to bring an object that reflects something of their ancestry. Tell participants that they will be asked to talk briefly about the object they bring.

During the Class

- Emphasize the importance of silence when listening to each other's presentations and between presentations, when participants volunteer to describe their object.
- Present your own object first to model the behavior of self-disclosure. Spend only 2 to 3 minutes describing the object.
- Invite participants to volunteer to talk about their objects for up to 5 minutes. They are to speak without interruption. Explain that when they speak, they are to rise and put their objects on a table and then talk about their objects and how it links to their culture and family histories.
- Debrief the activity with the following questions:
 - What did you learn about each other from this activity?
 - What did you learn about someone else's culture?
 - When were you most uncomfortable? Why do you think you were uncomfortable?
 - How might your own background influence the way you approach an evaluation?
 - How might you design and implement an evaluation with cultural sensitivity and awareness?

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Activity 11

Defining Evaluation Within a Cultural Context

Overview

This activity asks participants to consider various definitions of evaluation and how they relate to working with culturally diverse audiences.

Instructional Objectives

Participants will

- Describe the distinguishing characteristics of various definitions of evaluation
- Determine the ways in which these evaluation definitions relate to power
- Discuss the importance of the definitions in relation to working in culturally diverse communities and the advantages and disadvantages of using the various definitions

Number of Participants

- Minimum number of participants: 3
- Maximum number of participants: unlimited when participants are in groups of 3 to 5

Time Estimate: 45 to 60 minutes

This activity requires approximately 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the number of participants (or groups) and the time available for discussion.

Materials Needed

- Pens/pencils
- Handout “Definitions of Evaluation Within a Cultural Context”

SOURCE: This activity was contributed by Donna M. Mertens, Gallaudet University.

Instructional Method

Small-group work

Procedures

Facilitator's tasks:

- Ask participants to get into groups of three to five people.
- Distribute the handout "Definitions of Evaluation Within a Cultural Context."
- Ask participants to individually read the definitions on the handout and then, as a group, discuss each of the questions.
- Ask each group to share the results of its discussion.
- Debrief the activity with the following questions:
 - What are your reactions to this activity?
 - What are the implications of the various definitions for working in culturally diverse communities?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of adopting each definition in a culturally complex setting?
 - To what extent, or in what ways, has your definition of evaluation shifted or changed?

Definitions of Evaluation Within a Cultural Context

Handout for Activity 11

Commonly Used Definition

Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming (Patton, 2001, p. 10).

World Bank Definition

Monitoring is defined as “the continuous assessment of project implementation in relation to agreed schedules and of the use of inputs, infrastructure, and services by project beneficiaries” (World Bank, 1989).

Evaluation is defined as “periodic assessment of the relevance, performance, efficiency, and impact (both expected and unexpected) of the project in relation to stated objectives” (Fort, Martínez, & Mukhopadhyay, 2001).

Developmental Evaluation

Developmental evaluation consists of evaluation processes and activities that support program, project, product, personnel, or organizational development, usually all five. The evaluator is part of a team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design, and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of improvement, adaptation, and intentional change. The evaluator’s primary function on the team is to elucidate team discussions with evaluative data and logic and to facilitate data-based decision making in the developmental process (Patton, 1994, p. 317).

Inclusive Evaluation

Inclusive evaluation involves a systematic investigation of the merit or worth of a program or system for the purpose of reducing uncertainty in decision making and for facilitating positive social change for the least advantaged. Thus, inclusive evaluation is data based, but the data are generated from an inclusive list of stakeholders, with special efforts to include those who have been traditionally underrepresented.

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It does not exclude those who have been traditionally included in evaluations (Mertens, 1999, p. 5).

Feminist Evaluation

Feminist evaluation includes judgments of merit and worth, application of social science methods to determine effectiveness, and achievement of program goals as well as tools related to social justice for the oppressed, especially, although not exclusively, for women. Its central focus is on gender inequities that lead to social injustice. It uses a collaborative, inclusive process and captures multiple perspectives to bring about social change (Seigart & Brisolaro, 2002).

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Discussion Questions

1. What is the essence of each definition?
2. What similarities and differences do you see among the definitions? What distinguishes one definition from the other?
3. What kinds of power rest in these definitions, and how might such definitions affect the design and implementation of an evaluation?

Activity 12

Cultural Sensitivity in Evaluation

Overview

This activity asks participants to consider how various aspects of culture affect an evaluation's design and implementation.

Instructional Objectives

Participants will

- Reflect on their own values, assumptions, and experiences as they relate to working with different cultures
- Develop greater awareness of how ignoring the topic of cultural differences may affect an evaluation's design and implementation
- Determine ways in which various data collection methods can reflect cultural considerations

Number of Participants

- Minimum number of participants: 3
- Maximum number of participants: unlimited when participants are in groups of 3 to 5

Time Estimate: 60 to 90 minutes

In addition to providing the necessary background information on cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, and cultural competence, this activity requires approximately 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of participants (or groups) and the time available for discussion.

Materials Needed

- Pens/pencils
- Flipchart, markers, tape

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- Handout “Cultural Influences”
- Handout “Strategies for Making Evaluation More Culturally Sensitive”

Instructional Method

Small-group work

Procedures

Facilitator’s tasks:

- Ask participants to get into groups of three to five people.
- Distribute the handout “Cultural Influences.”
- Instruct participants to discuss their responses to the questions on the handout.
- Ask groups to share the highlights of their discussions and to write key themes on a piece of flipchart paper. If possible, sort responses into thematic categories. A variation would be to list all of the responses and have the large group develop thematic categories.
- Distribute the handout “Strategies for Making Evaluation More Culturally Sensitive” and discuss each strategy. Invite participants to add other strategies to this list.
- Debrief the activity with the following questions:
 - What have you learned from this exercise that will influence future evaluations on which you work?
 - What else do you need to do to build cultural sensitivity in your evaluation work?
 - What are the implications of not being culturally aware, sensitive, or competent?
 - How do you think evaluators can develop these competencies?

Cultural Influences

Handout for Activity 12

1. How might each of the following influence or affect an evaluation's design and implementation?
 - The language of the participants (how and what language is used in an evaluation study)
 - The role of food and eating
 - How evaluators dress when interacting with a culture(s)
 - The concept of time
 - Communication styles
 - Importance of relationships, family, friends
 - Values and norms regarding individualism, independence, and conflict
 - Work habits and practices (e.g., task emphasis vs. emphasis on relationships)
 - Mental processes and learning styles (e.g., linear, logical, sequential vs. lateral, holistic, simultaneous)

2. How might you ensure that the following data collection activities are culturally sensitive and appropriate?
 - Observations
 - Interviews
 - Mailed surveys

Strategies for Making Evaluation More Culturally Sensitive

Handout for Activity 12

- Assess your own attitudes, beliefs, and values; be aware of your own biases.
- During the initial stages of the evaluation, explore any cultural issues that could affect the evaluation's design and implementation.
- Learn all you can about the cultural group(s) involved in the evaluation.
- Incorporate culturally diverse groups and perspectives throughout the evaluation process (e.g., obtain feedback on the evaluation's design, methods, and draft reports).
- Recognize that the evaluation may take more time to conduct if you are negotiating access and building trust in working with community groups and organizations.
- Use as little jargon as possible.
- Demystify evaluation for program staff and clients. Build buy-in.
- Include representatives of culturally diverse groups on evaluation advisory committees.
- Be flexible in your choices of methods and activities.
- Use multiple data collection sources and methods.

SOURCE: Adapted from a presentation by Valerie S. Nelkin, Bear Enterprises, Ltd.

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Activity 13

Defining Cultural Competence: Evaluation in Multicultural Settings

Overview

This activity asks participants to consider the concept of cultural competence and how it relates to evaluation practice in diverse settings.

Instructional Objectives

Participants will

- Understand various definitions of cultural competency
- Determine why it is important for evaluators to consider definitions of cultural competence
- Understand the relationship between cultural competence and issues of social justice in evaluation

Number of Participants

- Minimum number of participants: 3
- Maximum number of participants: unlimited when participants are in groups of 3 to 5

Time Estimate: 60 to 75 minutes

In addition to providing any necessary background on the cultural context of evaluation, this activity requires approximately 60 to 75 minutes, depending on the number of participants (or groups) and the time available for discussion.

SOURCE: This activity was contributed by Donna M. Mertens, Gallaudet University.

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- Pens/pencils
- Handout “Constructing a Definition of Cultural Competence in an Evaluation Context”

Instructional Method

Small-group work

Procedures

Facilitator’s tasks:

- Ask participants to get into groups of three to five people.
- Distribute the handout “Constructing a Definition of Cultural Competence in the Evaluation Context.”
- Ask participants to first read the definitions and then, in their groups, respond to the questions on the handout.
- Ask groups to share highlights from their discussions.
- Debrief the activity with the following questions:
 - To what extent, or in what ways, has your view of cultural competence shifted?
 - What does cultural competency look like? In other words, what would you see evaluators doing that exemplified cultural competence?
 - What will you do to increase your own cultural competency?

Constructing a Definition of Cultural Competence in an Evaluation Context

Handout for Activity 13

Within an evaluation context, the concept of culture includes shared behaviors, values, beliefs, attitudes, and languages and is broadly construed to be multidimensional in nature, based on such characteristics as race/ethnicity, gender, disability, economic class, and sexual orientation.

- Based on your experiences, how would you define cultural competence in an evaluation context?
- Now, consider the following definitions of cultural competence as they relate to evaluation practice:
 - *Cultural competence* refers to an ability to provide services that are perceived as legitimate for problems experienced by culturally diverse populations. “This definition denotes the ability to transform knowledge and cultural awareness into interventions that support and sustain healthy participant-system functioning within the appropriate cultural context” (Guzman, 2003, p. 171).
 - “As an agent of prosocial change, the culturally competent psychologist carries the responsibility of combating the damaging effects of racism, prejudice, bias, and oppression in all their forms, including all of the methods we use to understand the populations we serve. . . . A consistent theme . . . relates to the interpretation and dissemination of research findings that are meaningful and relevant to each of the four populations and that reflect an inherent understanding of the racial, cultural, and sociopolitical context within which they exist” (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 1).
 - “A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross cultural situations” (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989, cited in Edno, John, & Yu, 2003, p. 5).
 - Many health and evaluation leaders are careful to point out that a simple checklist cannot determine cultural competence, but rather it is an attribute that develops over time. The root of cultural competency in evaluation is a genuine respect for communities being studied and openness to seek

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depth in understanding different cultural contexts, practices, and paradigms of thinking. This includes being creative and flexible to capture different cultural contexts, and a heightened awareness of power differentials that exist in an evaluation context. Important skills include the ability to build rapport across difference, gain the trust of community members, and self-reflect and recognize one's own biases. (Edno, Joh, & Yu, 2003, pp. 6-7).

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- American Psychological Association. (2002). *Guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists*. Washington, DC: Author.
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Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the cultural context in which you work?
2. Why is it important to consider the concept of cultural competence in evaluation?
3. What are the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for evaluators to be considered culturally competent?
4. How can improved understandings of cultural competence be linked to furthering the goals of social justice?
5. In what ways are social justice goals important in the context of evaluating programs and processes in organizations and communities?

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Activity 14

Exploring the Role of Assumptions in Evaluation Practice

Overview

This activity provides an opportunity for participants to think about the assumptions we make about other people based on how they look or act and how these might influence the ways in which we design and implement evaluations.

Instructional Objectives

Participants will

- Discover how one's assumptions influence how he or she perceives other individuals
- Reflect on how their own assumptions influence the design and implementation of an evaluation
- Discuss the ways in which their own assumptions can be tested and corrected within an evaluation context

Number of Participants

- Minimum number of participants: 4
- Maximum group size: 25

Time Estimate: 30 to 45 minutes

This activity requires approximately 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the number of participants (or groups) and the time available for discussion.

Materials Needed

- Flipchart, markers, tape

SOURCE: This activity was contributed by Joan E. Slick, Program Manager, Extended University, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM.

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Round robin

Procedures

Facilitator's tasks:

- Write one of the following statements at the top of each of four flipchart pages:
 - I can't write my name.
 - I want my father to come to the interview with me.
 - I'm afraid to drive a car.
 - I want my paycheck cashed in quarters.
- Post the flipchart pages on the walls around the room and place markers near each page.
- Explain that this activity is about understanding how our assumptions influence our thinking and behavior.
- Go to the flipchart page that says, "I can't write my name."
- Say, "If you asked someone to write his or her name and the person told you he or she could not write, you might get irritated and think the person was just trying to make you work harder or was just being difficult. However, stop and think about the reasons why a person might not be able to write his or her name. What are some reasons?" (Let participants suggest one or two ideas and write one of them on the flipchart—e.g., he might be paralyzed, she might not know English, he might be blind, she might not know how to write.)
- Refer to the statements on the other flipchart pages (but do not ask for examples at this time).
- Ask participants to get into groups of three to five people (if possible, have participants get into groups where they don't know each other).
- Instruct each of the groups to go to one of the flipchart pages and to write the reasons people might make the statement (spend 5 minutes per chart or until the group runs out of ideas).
- Call time and ask the groups to rotate so that each group has a chance to write ideas on another chart. Each group keeps the same color marker for all charts. Call time again after 5 minutes and ask participants to go to the next flipchart. Continue this process until all groups have written on each of the four flipchart pages.

- Ask the groups to go back to their seats. Read each flipchart to the class (or asks for volunteers to read each chart). Possible responses might include
 - I want my father to come to the interview with me (first job, a female from another culture).
 - I'm afraid to drive a car (may have epilepsy, may not be able to afford a car, may have been in bad car wreck).
 - I want my paycheck cashed in quarters (laundry, gambling, parking, bus).
- Debrief the activity with the following questions:
 - In two words or less, describe your experience with this activity.
 - What kinds of assumptions might we make about evaluation and those whom we evaluate?
 - What are the implications of conducting an evaluation with a certain set of assumptions about a group of people, a program, or a geographic area?
 - How can evaluators learn to test and correct these assumptions in their practice?

