
Preface

Although this book provides practical guidelines that personnel in an individual school can follow in evaluating programs, it is fundamentally a book about winning. This perspective is consistent with a need identified by Sergiovanni (1984) for students and staff to “experience success [and] think of themselves as winners” (p. 13).

The current emphasis on test results as the single most important indicator of a school’s effectiveness heightens the need for students, administrators, and staff to feel the pride that accompanies winning. Carrying out program evaluations can help meet this need since their ultimate aim is to determine how school outcomes can be improved. Even for those schools considered exemplary, assessing programs has the potential for taking student performance to still higher levels.

The previous paragraphs opened this book when the first edition was published in 2003. Since then, the pressures educators face to raise student achievement still continue. In responding to this effort, many recent books and journal articles written from classroom and leadership perspectives have added to the literature by providing worthwhile advice to improve student outcomes. You are now looking at another work that seeks to do the same thing. What contribution can it make to help practitioners do what is expected of them? I would like to answer by stating that this book is designed to serve as a practical reference for school personnel to conduct their own assessments of the curriculums they have in place. Why should they want to do this? Because when a school makes provision for regularly performing program evaluations, it puts into place a mechanism for monitoring the extent to which its curriculums contribute to student success. In this regard, evaluation of a program helps determine whether to expend the time or effort to make changes in it or seek another one with greater potential.

Why not just examine standardized test results and implement needed remedial strategies accordingly? The answer to this is that such an approach cannot do what a sound program assessment can. First of all, test scores should not be considered the only indicator of school performance,

and as discussed later in the book, there should be others as well. With regard to the *process* involved in evaluating a program, this endeavor determines in a more in-depth and comprehensive way factors that enhance or hinder effective delivery of instruction. Thus program evaluation involves obtaining perspectives from different groups—faculty, the administrator(s), students, and parents. Their input leads to greater understanding of the various aspects of how a program functions and its outcomes. Having the benefit of these insights puts the school in a stronger position to meet expectations held for it by the community and its district.

Engaging in program evaluation by the very people responsible for producing results has the effect of strengthening the operation of a school because its personnel are involved firsthand in planning and implementing data-driven actions to increase student achievement. In this regard, when individuals collaborate in a project designed to help them do their job better, they are more apt to relate to and accept the recommendations for improvement because they are part of the solution. This is a productive position to be in; it changes how people regard and respond to situations. Thus teachers become proactive participants in change initiatives, rather than reacting to the results yielded by high-stakes testing.

According to the results of mandated testing, a school may not do as well as it would have liked. However, the fact that it set up the machinery for assessing the effectiveness of a program is in and of itself a worthwhile endeavor because faculty would be able to guide future efforts based on what they have learned from an evaluation. Moreover, providing for self-corrective actions communicates to the public that the school has taken another step to improve its work.

For practitioners themselves, taking an active role toward making a situation better can contribute to people feeling that they are more in control and are thereby more optimistic about how change will turn out. It should be pointed out, however, that as discussed in this book, program evaluation is not all about finding where modifications should be made in a curriculum. It is just as important to confirm the extent to which a program is finding success in accomplishing its goals. Both perspectives have implications for enhancing organizational performance since program evaluation carried out regularly in a school has a systemic effect. In this regard, it discloses information that can be useful for linking the efforts of teachers across grade levels or within departments.

Given this background, program evaluation can help bypass, or at least ease the frustration, of seeing one's hard and sincere efforts directed at helping students learn but not meet standards. From this perspective, teaching those with different levels of attitude and motivation is difficult enough without having the benefits of a well-designed program. Under these circumstances, a teacher has to improvise and rely on his or her own ingenuity to think of instructional strategies and learning activities to prepare students for the realities of mandated testing. Beyond satisfying this

need, as educators well know, teaching in and of itself can be a joyful experience because as the beginning of this introduction indicates, it can help make students be and feel successful. When they are, teachers who were instrumental in contributing to this outcome will consequently feel that they have been successful as well. This feeling is a defining characteristic of what it means to win. It connotes a sense of having accomplished something worthwhile and a promise of further progress to be made for both teachers and students.¹

In the context of winning, effective teaching and an excellent program makes for an unbeatable combination. It finds expression in students becoming more engaged in the learning process, mastering material challenging to them at their ability level, and ultimately, achieving higher—the underlying theme of this book.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

As with my earlier work,² I wanted this version to be one that could be used by practitioners themselves in their local building, hence the term *site-based program evaluation*, an underlying theme of this book. This perspective was taken because programs should be assessed in the context of where they are delivered. To this end, there are substantive changes in the current edition that I believe would facilitate carrying out on-site projects. The following are highlights:

There is greater reliance on the use of percentages. Since educators are used to working with these, this makes it easier to analyze data. Additional figures have been included. These serve to synthesize the procedures involved in carrying out the phases of an evaluation as described in Chapters 7 and 8. The use of graphs to display the results of an evaluation is new to this edition. In Chapter 4, a formative evaluation approach has been added to determine if and how improvements should be made to a modified program being tested experimentally. More items have been included in the needs assessment. A miniguide for the evaluation team leader has been added. Finally, more detailed explanations and examples have been incorporated in various chapters to clarify the assessment process.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Guidelines are provided that a team of faculty members can apply to evaluate ongoing programs that are either a regular or an ancillary part of the curriculum. Moreover, the techniques presented can also be used to evaluate programs recently completed.

The focus is on analyzing program processes and student performance. The latter can include academic or vocational outcomes, or can concern

development in other areas, such as improving self-concept or discipline. Investigating the processes used to deliver the program is essential since they determine in large measure the curriculum's impact as well as the attitudes of students and faculty toward its instructional activities. In this regard, evaluation of processes identifies specific factors operating at the core of the program that may be inhibiting successful outcomes. Such disclosure aids in generating solutions that could lead to improved student achievement. For this purpose, the methodology for obtaining, analyzing, and using "process" information is covered.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is designed for practitioners with little or no experience in evaluating programs. Thus this activity offers an opportunity for further professional development.

The contents are organized so that Chapters 1–6 build a foundation of knowledge and attitudes applicable to conducting an evaluation study. Numerous examples are provided in order to clarify the various tasks involved in this process. Chapters 7–10 take the reader through the steps of the evaluation process, while Chapter 11 highlights the importance of the principal's leadership in program evaluation. More specifically, the following are covered.

Chapter 1 reviews various perspectives on program evaluation, with a view toward school improvement. In this regard, the benefits of site-based evaluation are identified, and the cyclical process of formative and summative methodology is also described.

The theme of Chapter 2 is essentially that program evaluation is a natural feature of a learning organization since it provides a mechanism for gaining insights about which aspects of the curriculum produced the best learning conditions and which need to be strengthened. Characteristic of a learning organization, a systems approach to increase student achievement is also treated.

Chapter 3 describes how evaluation carried out to improve student achievement strengthens the link that connects assessment results, a curriculum's ongoing development, and progressively higher student performance. Background for conducting experiments as an outgrowth of assessing a program is provided. In the next chapter guidelines are given for various experimental approaches to determine if modifications based on assessing a curriculum are effective.

Chapter 5 covers various perspectives on the role of collaboration in carrying out a program evaluation. Included are the advantages of having a faculty evaluation team, steps the principal can take in forming one as well as recommendations for the team leader to help the group do its work

effectively and efficiently. How the team can collaborate with the staff members whose program is being evaluated is also featured.

Chapter 6 discusses the types of data—quantitative and qualitative—to use in measuring outcomes of a program evaluation, validity, and reliability of evaluation data, and how the evaluation team would communicate practical techniques to the faculty to determine test validity and reliability.

Chapters 7 and 8 describe the steps involved in carrying out Phases 1 through 3 and 4 through 6 of the evaluation process. This involves the use of a specific set of questions to guide the evaluation and how data can be analyzed by approaches that are readily applied by practitioners.

In Chapter 9, the contents of an evaluation report are described along with a checklist to track its completion. How the evaluation project can be assessed from two perspectives—formative and summative—is discussed in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 revisits the role of the principal with respect to helping to ensure that the evaluation project is a success. Finally, as indicated previously, a miniguide for the evaluation team leader has been added as an Appendix to this edition. It is in the form of a checklist encompassing the major tasks of an evaluation project.

Guidelines are presented that encompass actions leaders can take to help ensure that program evaluation as a tool for organization development has an opportunity to accomplish its purpose of providing direction for improving school outcomes. Therefore, how the leadership roles of the administration and faculty can be integrated synergistically with program evaluation and reflective practice to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of a learning organization is also discussed.

Note that a distinction has been made between effectiveness and efficiency as criteria of organizational functioning. Effectiveness refers to the extent to which goals have been accomplished, whereas efficiency considers the extent to which resources, financial and human, have been expended in accomplishing goals.

THRIVING IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF HIGH-STAKES ASSESSMENT

Decisions based on test results that may substantially or even adversely affect students as well as administrators and teachers characterize high-stakes assessment (Jenkins, 1993). Despite the many critics who disparage the use of standardized tests to determine if schools are successful, these tests, at least in the foreseeable future, are not going to be discontinued.³ One reason for this is that their results provide a uniform and relatively easily understood means of communicating to different groups the performance of a single student, a class, a school, or a district. Furthermore, findings from standardized testing provide a clear target to aim for when administrators and faculty seek improvement.

It is not the intent at this point to argue the benefits and limitations of standardized tests. In the final analysis, they constitute the reality that teachers and leaders at the building or district levels must deal with in this era of accountability. This should not be construed as negative. Helping students do well on these tests can serve as a challenge, a word not being used lightly here. Human experience teaches us that when individuals and groups confront difficult situations, they call on inner, untapped resources that enable them to meet these situations and grow stronger as a result. This means that educators who see only the downside of high-stakes assessment should instead regard standardized testing as an opportunity for growth.

The willingness of school personnel to assess their own work is an indicator of professionalism that can be expressed through program evaluation projects. In this regard, this book offers an approach to results-oriented inquiry that should pass the crucible of practicality.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

The importance of the leader's role in program evaluation is reiterated at various points in this book. With this orientation, the work describes the methodology to conduct a creditable evaluation. However, the principal needs to communicate to the staff that program evaluation is an integral part of the organizational fabric and follow up with leadership behaviors to actualize this priority. Otherwise, program evaluation projects are destined to become another school reform technique added to the heap of "tried but didn't work" initiatives. Thus the call to leadership is heightened so that this situation is not likely to occur.

NOTES

1. Along these lines, Sommers (1995) refers to a sense of accomplishment when people feel they have completed "something to which . . . [they have] dedicated a lot of effort" (p. 13).

2. The previous edition of this book is the outgrowth of a paper presented at the first Phi Delta Kappa International Conference on Effective Schools in 1999. The presentation involved a modification of materials the author has used with his graduate courses concerning program evaluation.

3. That No Child Left Behind standards must be met by 2014 supports the point of continued use of standardized test results.