

Using empowerment evaluation to improve community-based programs

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AES lunchtime seminar
Brisbane, 14 September 2005



Outline of seminar

- Overview of empowerment evaluation methodology and principles
- The three steps in empowerment evaluation
- Evaluation of the Good Start Breakfast Club program
- Strengths and limitations of this approach



Background

- Increasing use of participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation
- Value of these approaches in evaluating complex community-based programs
- Empowerment evaluation distinguished by its principles
- Requires commitment to democratic participation, inclusion and other key principles



Definition of empowerment evaluation

An evaluation approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (1) providing program stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program, and (2) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organisation.

(Wandersman et al, 2005, p. 28)



Development of empowerment evaluation

- Developed by David Fetterman at Stanford University in 1994 as a three step approach:
 1. Developing a mission and vision
 2. Taking Stock
 3. Planning for the Future
- Wandersman and others developed a 10 step approach called 'Getting to Outcomes'



Uses of empowerment evaluation

EE has been successfully used to:

- help make a children's hospital more family-centred
- evaluate a school-based reading improvement program
- institutionalise evaluation as part of a higher education accreditation self-study
- develop and assess a \$15 million Digital Village project
- foster organisational learning in a child abuse prevention collaborative



Ten underlying principles of empowerment evaluation

- 1. Improvement:** A key aim is to improve people, programs, organisations and communities and to help them achieve results.
- 2. Community ownership:** Program stakeholders, with the assistance of evaluators, take responsibility for designing and conducting the evaluation and putting the findings to use.
- 3. Inclusion:** Participants, staff from all levels of a program or organisation, funders, and community members are invited to participate.



EE principles (cont.)

- 4. Democratic participation:** Active participation by all in shared decision making is valued; processes are based on deliberation, action and authentic collaboration.
- 5. Social justice:** High value placed on addressing the larger social good of practices and programs and achieving a more equitable society. Seen as a means to help people address inequities through capacity building.
- 6. Community knowledge:** Community-based knowledge, information and experience is respected and used to make decisions, understand the local context and interpret results.



EE principles (cont.)

- 7. Evidence-based strategies:** Value placed on providing empirical justifications for action and drawing on other evidence-based strategies that have worked. However, they need to be adapted to the local environment, culture and conditions.
- 8. Capacity-building:** Program staff and participants learn how to conduct their own evaluations. All people and organisations are seen as capable of conducting evaluations when provided with the appropriate tools and conditions.



EE principles (cont.)

- 9. Organisational learning:** EE helps create a community of learners. Continually reflecting on and evaluating programs and organisations makes groups or organisations more responsive to changes and challenges. Evaluation results are used to guide improvement.
- 10. Accountability:** Individuals and organisations are held accountable for commitments made. Funders are held accountable concerning their expectations. A commitment is made to results-based interventions and continuous improvement.



Roles of the professional evaluator

- Facilitator, critical friend, coach, teacher and evaluation expert
- Supports the purpose of the program, wants it to succeed (ie not impartial)
- Helps participants develop a rigorous and organised approach to evaluation and clarify their theories of change
- Helps establish baseline data, monitor interventions and document change over time
- Ensures everyone has an opportunity to speak



Three steps in an empowerment evaluation

Step 1: Developing a mission and vision

- Key phrases are developed that capture the mission and vision of the program
- This is done even when an existing mission and vision statement exists
- Allows new ideas and divergent views about the program or organisation to emerge
- Consensus is reached on the statements which represent the values of the group

School of Education mission statement phrases

- MISSION
- Forge partnerships w/ community - PROFESSIONALISM, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC
 - Train Educational leaders of tomorrow (1)
 - Conduct research to improve ed. ^{nationally} internationally
 - Provide theoretical foundation
 - Create knowledge
 - Scholastic ; FUN ^{diverse} learning environment
 - Influence NATIONAL, int'l, State, Local Policy
 - Play a key role in ed reform
 - Develop field of ed. as a profession
 - Facilitate career & employment
 - Foster collaboration & collegiality
 - Make connections between theory & practice
 - Teach language & jargon associated w/ education
 - Provide access to resources ^{WORLD}



Three steps in an empowerment evaluation (cont.)

Step 2: Taking Stock

- Part 1: Brainstorm list of 10 – 20 activities crucial to functioning of program. Voting process used to prioritise the list and identify the 10 most important activities to evaluate
- Part 2: Rate how well the 10 key activities are doing on a 1-10 scale; discuss ratings. Discussion provides evidence to support ratings. Also provides baseline data on program and its strengths and weaknesses.

Example of prioritisation exercise from Part 1 of Taking Stock

TAKING STOCK

Interdisciplinary collaboration	●●●●●●●●●●●●●●		13
Coursework	●●●●●●●●●●●●●●	1	4
Research	●●●●		8
Practicum/Internship/Job	●●●●●●●●●●●●●●		13
Teaching	●●●●●●●●●●●●●●		7
Advising	●●●●●●●●		2
Admissions	●●●●●●●●		8
Financial Aid	●●●●●●●●		7
Projects (Applied research)	●●●●●●●●●●●●●●	4	4
Respected faculty	●●●●●●		2
Faculty Recruitment	●●		0
Orientation (students)			6
Curriculum	●●●●●●●●		6
Defined program structure	●●●●●●●●		2
Cohort activities (social)	●●		2
Communication	●●		1



Three steps in an empowerment evaluation (cont.)

Step 3: Planning for the Future

- Part 1: Brainstorm realistic goals for each key program activity
- Part 2: Develop strategies to help reach these goals
- Part 3: Identify forms of documentation or evidence that will monitor progress towards goals (ie surveys, checklists, minutes of meetings etc, development of website etc.)
- A series of meetings and workshops are then held to plan and implement the evaluation in more detail



Example of Planning for the future exercise: Children's hospital project

Key activity: Training staff

<i>Goals</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consensus as to what Family Centred Care is• Include medical staff• Complete training curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal training pilot• Identify critical people (medical staff)• Ongoing training• Grouped by discipline or multidisciplinary?• Experimental studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attendance checklists for training• Pre and post test using Likert scale• Training materials

Use of EE to evaluate the Good Start Breakfast Club program

Background:

- A school Breakfast Club was established in NSW by Australian Red Cross in 1991
- The Sanitarium Health Food company has supported the Club since 2001
- GSBC program launched in December 2003, following increased support from Sanitarium



Good Start Breakfast Club program

- Clubs in nearly 100 primary schools in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory
- Involves over 1,200 volunteers who deliver over 140,000 breakfasts to children in need each year
- Anecdotal evidence on program impacts include that it increases student's ability to learn, and improves their social and behavioural skills and nutritional knowledge





Background to evaluation of GSBC program

- No evaluation had previously been conducted to determine the nutritional, social and educational impacts of the program on children
- Graduate School of Public Health, University of Wollongong approached by Sanitarium and the Adventist Development Relief Agency to develop a research methodology for use in the Breakfast Club



Project to develop practical methods to evaluate breakfast programs

- ARC Linkage grant obtained by UOW in 2003 for a PhD scholarship and some research costs for the project 'Practical methods to evaluate school breakfast programs'
- Following a literature review, EE was selected to evaluate the program - had demonstrated strengths and simplicity, was congruent with values and objectives of GSBC program
- A case study of the impacts of the EE approach on the delivery of the program will be developed
- An expected outcome of the project is the development of a practical and useful GSBC Evaluation Toolkit



To date, the evaluation has involved:

1. Questionnaires distributed to volunteers and teaching staff in most program areas to enable input into the EE process
2. EE workshops with GSBC coordinators and managers from around Australia held over two days in May 2005
3. Two full day EE workshops with GSBC volunteers and teaching staff from schools in Sydney and Western NSW in July 2005
4. Feedback questionnaires on EE methodology and workshops. Data also collected on gender, age, role in program, location and prior knowledge of participatory evaluation



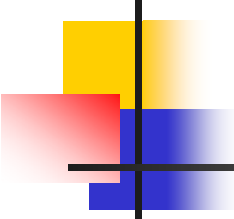
Outcomes so far

- Development of proposed new mission and vision statements
- Identification of key activities that will be evaluated (eg. 'volunteer management and support'; 'providing breakfast to children in need')
- Individual and average ratings for each key activity and reasons for giving these ratings
- For each key activity, a list of goals, strategies to meet these goals, and suggested forms of evidence to monitor progress towards goals



Feedback on methodology and methods

- Most thought the methodology was valuable
- Opportunity to share information, experiences and ideas appreciated
- Knowledge and understanding of participatory program evaluation increased
- More time needed at some workshops for discussion on program's strengths and weaknesses and Planning for the Future step



Strengths of empowerment evaluation include:

- Robust process; demonstrated effectiveness in improving community-based programs
- Builds evaluation capacities and a culture of evaluation based on continuous improvement and learning
- Evaluation designed and controlled by program staff, participants and stakeholders
- Process is participatory and inclusive
- Methods aim to be democratic and empowering
- Enables the ongoing collection of reliable, evidence-based data
- Can provide more open and honest assessments of a program's strengths and weaknesses

Limitations and issues

include:

- Evaluators need a wide range of skills, including facilitation and training, and knowledge of program evaluation
- Requires careful management of power relations and differing agendas, values and perspectives
- Process requires time and resources that are not always available
- Involvement of volunteers can be problematic



Conclusion

- EE has many strengths that makes it valuable for improving community-based programs and increasing their sustainability
- However, a number of issues need to be considered, such as the time and resources required to build capacities and include a diversity of people in planning and conducting the evaluation
- To be effective, requires a commitment to its principles by senior management, staff and participants



Some resources on empowerment evaluation

- Empowerment Evaluation website:
www.stanford.edu/~davidf/empowermentevaluation.html
- Fetterman, D. (2001). *Foundations of Empowerment Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. (includes details of the three step empowerment evaluation process)
- Fetterman, D. and Wandersman, A. (eds). (2005) *Empowerment Evaluation. Principles in Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press (includes a critique of the method)
- Paper by Wayne Miller and June Lennie: 'Empowerment evaluation: A practical method for evaluating a school breakfast program'. To be presented at the AES Conference, October 2005