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INTRODUCTION

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.

PURPOSE AND FORMAT OF THE BOOK

This book¹ provides guidelines that a team of faculty members can apply to evaluate ongoing programs that are either a regular or 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 outcomes. 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

PERSPECTIVES ON PROGRAM EVALUATION

A decorative graphic consisting of several translucent, overlapping spheres of varying sizes, arranged in a loose, upward-curving pattern. The spheres have a soft, glowing appearance with subtle gradients and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional, ethereal look. They are positioned behind the main title text.

OVERVIEW

No matter the area—academics, sports, music, or any other endeavor—in order to improve performance, current efforts *must* be evaluated. In this regard, program evaluation is indispensable for school improvement. Given this position, this chapter presents a case for local schools to conduct their own program evaluations, with a view toward raising student achievement. Also covered are the goals of program evaluation, how formative and summative evaluation methods complement each other, and the role of evaluation in program development.

HOW PROGRAM EVALUATION CONTRIBUTES TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Evaluation provides a tool for determining the extent to which a program¹ or curriculum is effective and at the same time indicates direction for remediating processes of the curriculum that do not contribute to successful student performance. Thus program evaluation serves two organizational functions—it confirms and it diagnoses (see Figure 1.1).

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COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

	Formative	Summative
Purpose:	To improve a program's operation by examining its processes	To judge the worth, merit, or success of a program based on its effectiveness in meeting goals
When conducted:	In the early stages of a program's implementation and at the time a summative assessment is made	At the end of a program or agreed upon date after it has been in operation for a sufficient length of time to measure its impact
Data source:	Relies primarily on opinions from staff delivering the program on how it can be improved	Student outcomes, e.g., test and attitude scores; opinions of students, teachers, administrators, and parents

Figure 1.4

efforts in helping students reach their potential. However, no matter how well this belief is conveyed, and even if it galvanizes a staff to work toward agreed-upon common goals, the enthusiasm for these will become short-lived without the mechanism for their attainment. In this regard, personnel in an individual school who are well versed in program evaluation methodology will be in a more knowledgeable and empowering position to effect change. Both formative and summative evaluation methods are related when efforts are directed toward program improvement as reflected in the following discussion.

LINKING EVALUATION WITH PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

The process of improving a curriculum as described in this book is cyclical.⁹ From this perspective, a current program is evaluated with respect to its outcomes (summative) and the processes that produced them (formative). Changes designed

to improve instructional activities that are feasible to implement are incorporated into a revised program. Next, the modified curriculum is tested experimentally and then reassessed summatively and formatively at an agreed-upon later date e.g., toward the end of the school year.

Applying these evaluation methods provides direction for improving the program. Thus program development is iterative. Each cycle leads to higher levels of curriculum quality, continually evolving in its content and delivery as program staff learn from their efforts. Figure 1.5 illustrates the program improvement cycle.

The price for excellence and beyond is continued effort.

CYCLICAL PROCESS OF IMPROVING A CURRICULUM

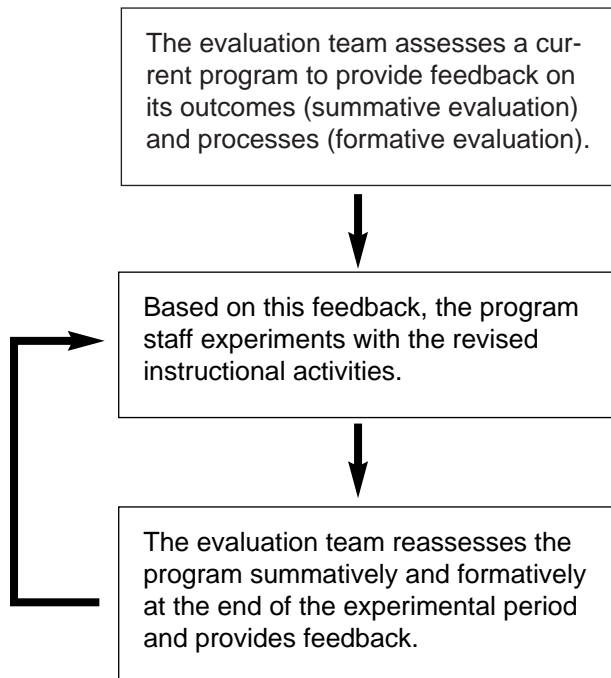


Figure 1.5

The entire process is grounded in a systems approach to organizational improvement. In this regard, the modified program is also referred to as an intervention since it represents a new factor introduced into the individual school as an open system.

The concept and dynamics of a systems approach to organizational performance is treated in chapter 2. At this point, however, it should be mentioned that an intervention also represents an innovative program since some of its features would be newly added. Finally, if it is decided that, based on an evaluation, a program ought to be discontinued and replaced with a more promising alternative, then this action can also be considered program development. The rationale for this is that the change represents the evolution of what may be a better curricular offering.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

The assessment approach taken in this book considers a program or a curriculum as a “work in progress” because those who deliver it should constantly seek to improve how its instructional activities are carried out, realizing that there could always be ways to make the process more effective and efficient. The notion of something being “in progress” does not imply that a lower standard is maintained until the program is finalized as a polished package, ready to be taught. No curriculum should be considered as ultimate.¹⁰

The price for excellence and beyond is continued effort. This is a good price to pay. This metaphor should be conveyed by leaders to their staff and, in turn, by faculty to their students because we do not know—and can never know—what can be finally achieved. To have such knowledge is a logical impossibility since the more we learn, the more our capacity to grow increases.

From an existential perspective, our existence as educators and the existence of those whose lives we touch in our roles can be immeasurably enhanced by unleashing the growth