CHAPTER 17

POLITICS OF EVALUATION, ETHICS AND STANDARDS

Information is power. Information can be put to political uses. Hence, evaluation, which creates somewhat "objective" information on the effectiveness of literacy and development actions, has political implications. In order to establish this objectivity, technical and ethical standards need to be observed.

Handling the politics of evaluation

How can we handle the politics of evaluation? No sure-fire formulas can be taught. In any case, most of us who have worked (and survived) within bureaucracies are not all that naive about the politics of survival and advancement within bureaucracies. Each one of us is perhaps somewhat qualified already in the art of "file-manship" and even "one-up-manship"! Yet, some general suggestions for handling the politics of evaluation may be in order.

There are two aspects to the politics of evaluation: (a) the evaluator should not be punished for doing the evaluation which may be seen as having produced "embarrassing" information; and (b) the information produced by the evaluation study should be put to practical use. Political problems do arise when, on the one hand, the evaluator seeks to make too much capital out of the evaluation study; and, on the other hand, creates information that threatens the various stakeholders within the system. Without compromising one's personal and professional integrity, one can do things, however, which will cool the politics surrounding the evaluation study.

Defend your right to undertake evaluation

Defend your right to conduct the evaluation. Let people know that evaluating is an integral part of good literacy work. Quote from a presidential speech, from planning documents, or from published prospectuses or reports of the parent institution. Your institution is bound to have declared evaluation to be a necessary part of its mission, though no one may have paid much attention to this particular objective. In an educational setting (as distinguished from

an administrative setting), the right to evaluate can be defended as part of your professional interest. You, as a professional, are supposed to have an interest in evaluation.

Keep a low profile

There is a need for an evaluator to keep a low profile and have a sense of modesty about the evaluation study done. The evaluator should not demand to be considered a star on the institutional horizon. The report should be presented without too much fanfare, as a matter-of-fact collection of feedback information on the program. It should not be touted as a breakthrough of some sort.

Provide a framework of expectations for evaluation results

No program will ever be found to be performing at 100% efficiency level. Especially in social change programs, participation levels of as low as 30% may sometimes be acceptable. Before presenting the feedback on performance of a program, one must indicate what would be a reasonable level of expectation of performance. Findings should then be presented within such a framework. In other words, the readers of an evaluation report should be provided with standards and yardsticks with which to judge the success or failure of a literacy program or a development action. Without norms, readers may not know whether to be satisfied or to be dissatisfied with a particular set of results.

As we have said elsewhere, the focus should be on finding causes, not culprits. This is not to say that the program staff is never at fault and that as evaluators we should be finding alibis for them. Yet, processes and personnel must not be confused in the allocations of credit and blame. Things must be kept in balance.

Begin with a "draft" report

An important part of the political strategy may be to present the evaluation report to colleagues in a "draft" form, offering to do a final draft on the basis of collegial discussion and review. In a revision that follows, it will be important to neutralize the politics but *without* compromising the integrity of results.

Indicate possible actions

Indicate the actions that must be taken to make use of the findi of the study. Distinguish between things within the institutio control and those outside its control. Start with what the instituti can do within its existing mandate -- such as curriculum revisi preparation of new testing procedures, etc. If the implementation findings demands additional work, offer to do it singly, or with t help of a group or a committee. What we have suggested here m not always work, but it will increase the chances of an evaluati study influencing actions within the setting of a training center o training institute.

Ethics of evaluation

The professionals are supposed to be self-disciplined, and profe sional institutions are meant to be self-regulating, normative su cultures. For that reason, ethical behavior has always been centr to the lives of professional workers -- doctors, lawyers, accountan teachers, engineers and, of course, researchers and evaluators.

In the U.S.A., the question of the ethics of the professions h come center-stage as politicians, bureaucrats, bankers, and ministe of God have all made a spectacle of their venality on nation television. Of course, the U.S.A. cannot claim uniqueness for i lack of ethical standards in daily life. Ethical problems have indee appeared worldwide.

In evaluation, questions of ethics emerge in different context Ethical problems will be involved if:

1. the evaluation study is being undertaken to embarras another individual, to kill a program, or to provid legitimacy for an action the politicians have alread decided upon;
2. the evaluation data are being cooked up or if anti-socia or criminal behavior is being encouraged or abetted so tha the evaluator can collect the required data;
3. the privacy of the respondents is not protected, an respondents are being personally violated;
4. the data are being falsified during analysis to suit persona or political purposes; and

5. the results of an evaluation are withheld for selfish purposes.

It is not possible, of course, to ensure ethical behavior from evaluators. However, it is possible to discuss all the ethical dilemmas an evaluator is likely to face and to teach evaluators to learn to engage in ethical decision-making.

Evaluation standards: Evaluation of evaluations

Evaluators should themselves be held accountable. Their work must be judged according to some agreed standards of technical competence and ethics.

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluations of the U.S.A. has developed 30 standards which the committee suggests should become the working philosophy of evaluators and should guide and govern the evaluation efforts of educators (and development workers).[1] A summary of these standards is provided below:

Summary of the standards for evaluations

A. Utility standards
Evaluation should serve practical information needs.

1 A(1) Audience identification
Audiences involved in or affected by evaluation should be identified.
2 A(2) Evaluator credibility
The evaluator should be both trustworthy and competent.
3 A(3) Information scope and selection
The scope and selection of information collected should enable pertinent questions to be answered.
4 A(4) Valuational interpretation
Value judgements used by evaluators should be made clear to readers.
5 A(5) Report clarity
Objectives, procedures used, findings, and recommendations should be clearly stated.
6 A(6) Report dissemination
Findings must be disseminated for use.

7 A(7) Report timeliness
Evaluation must be completed on time for use i decision-makers.
8 A(8) Evaluation impact
Evaluators should encourage follow-through by the concerned audiences.

B. Feasibility standards
Evaluation should be realistic, prudent, diplomatic and frugal.

9 B(1) Practical procedures
Procedures should be practical and should avoid disru tions of normal work.
10 B(2) Political viability
Evaluators should attract cooperation of various interes groups, avoid their attacks, ensure against misuse of results.
11 B(3) Cost effectiveness
Results should justify resources expended.

C. Propriety standards
Evaluation should be conducted legally and ethically and shoul contribute to human welfare.

12 C(1) Formal obligation
Formal obligations and contracts may be develope between various parties involved (especially in the case c external evaluations).
13 C(2) Conflict of interest
Should be avoided and where unavoidable should be dea with openly and honestly.
14 C(3) Full and frank disclosure
Pertinent findings should be fully disclosed; limitations should be frankly stated.
15 C(4) Public's right to know
The public's right to know of evaluation results should b respected (unless it is clearly a matter of individua privacy or public safety).

16 C(5) Rights of human subjects
Rights of human subjects should be respected and protected.
17 C(6) Human interactions
In their interactions with subjects, evaluators should respect the dignity and worth of individuals.
18 C(7) Balanced reporting
The reporting should balance both strengths and weaknesses of what is evaluated.
19 C(8) Fiscal responsibility
Financial and other resources spent should be accounted for.

D. Accuracy standards
Evaluation should convey technically adequate information.

20 D(1) Object identification
What is being evaluated should be clearly identified.
21 D(2) Context analysis
Context of evaluation should be sufficiently described so that its influences on the object evaluated can be identified.
22 D(3) Description of purposes and procedures
The purposes and procedures of evaluation should be described in enough detail.
23 D(4) Defensible information sources
The sources of information should be described so that the reader can see if they are defensible sources.
24 D(5) Valid measurement
Evaluation instruments should be constructed and applied in ways to ensure validity.
25 D(6) Reliable measurement
Evaluation instruments should be constructed and applied in ways to ensure reliability.
26 D(7) Systematic data control
Data should be reviewed and corrected at various stages of the study.
27 D(8) Analysis of quantitative information
The analysis should be appropriate and systematic.
28 D(9) Analysis of qualitative information
The analysis should be appropriate and systematic.

29 D(10) Justified conclusions
Conclusions should be explicitly justified.
30 D(11) Objective reporting
The reporting should be objective and unbiased.

Some of these standards may seem too tough, and some too squeamish and overly fastidious, to evaluators working in cultures other than the United States where these standards were developed. Evaluators everywhere should, however, take these standards into account to the extent feasible.

Things to do or think about

1. What do you think of the practicality of suggestions made in the first part of this chapter for managing the politics of evaluation?

2. Evaluate a recent evaluation study done in your country in terms of the 30 standards for evaluation listed above.

Note

1. The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. *Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1981.