CHAPTER 3

# INFUSING CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS INTO THE EVALUATION OF PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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## INTRODUCTION

The notion that evaluation is an added burden to the design and delivery of peace education programs should be rethought in light of the benefits of participatory and culturally responsive evaluation practice. Such an evaluation practice can enhance program outcomes and lead to sustainability because program beneficiaries are key voices in the evaluation process.

An evaluation that seeks to ascertain the effectiveness of a peace education program, and which addresses personal growth issues in the domain of value formation, identity, and peaceful conflict resolution, has to look beyond measurable manifestations of certain behaviors. Deep-rooted convictions need to be explored in the context of the larger community and culture. Cultural responsiveness becomes a necessity.

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Evaluation that is culturally responsive takes into the program culture and program beneficiaries in robust ways (Frierson, et al., 2010), while recognizing the importance and value of lived experiences, especially in communities of color or indigenous groups (Hopson, 2009). Peace education addresses highly relational issues in human behavior (Feuerverger, 2008). Therefore, the culture of those participating in a peace education program is a vital element in program design as well as in the understanding of its impact. Close collaboration with program beneficiaries and a search for deep understanding of the program context could potentially strain the evaluation endeavor. However, if all stakeholders understand that the evaluation serves not just funding agencies or remote program designers, but is also a tool for better understanding their own problems—and if they work locally towards sustainable solutions—the evaluation becomes an integral program support tool.

The chapter analyzes the evaluation process when infused with culturally responsive evaluation (Hopson, 2003) in relation to peace education programs and offers practical experiences to illustrate the application of such an evaluation. More specifically, this chapter is a critical reflection on methodological and theoretical issues in evaluation with respect to peace education programs. The methodological discussion is illustrated with experiences gained during the evaluation of a culturally responsive arts education program that aims to educate stakeholders in an urban school district in Southwestern Pennsylvania about racism and racial upliftment by integrating culturally responsive arts across the curriculum. The theoretical discussion builds upon literature in the evaluation and peace education fields with intentions to think more critically about infusing cultural responsiveness into the evaluation of peace education programs. The program of study, which will serve as the case example in this chapter, was conceived in order to overcome long-standing educational inequities, racial tensions, discrimination, and marginalization of African Americans in the school district and the community at large (Trotter, 2010). The program seeks to build resilience and positive racial identity among upper elementary school children of largely African American background with a smaller percentage of European American children. Education about the arts of Africa and the African diaspora infused across the curriculum is intended to lead to better cross-cultural understanding for European American children and a more positive notion of their own heritage and contributions to societal development for the African American children. One key goal is to develop more caring, peaceful, and understanding relationships among students, teachers, and parents through a better understanding of each others' and one's own lived experiences, using the arts as an expressive tool and as a source for learning about culture (CRAE, 2009).

## PEACE EDUCATION AND EVALUATION

Lin, Brantmeier, and Bruhn (2008) describe a new peace education paradigm that addresses various assumptions and values such as the attainability of a culture of

peace, the existence of universal values underlying peace education efforts, the interdependence of inner and outer peace and the affirmation of diversity, and the building of common understanding. They state that:

> Education for peace should both affirm diversity and build common understanding… Peace education efforts need to be linked to social justice. Examining power, oppression, privilege, and social stratification in relation to gender, class, race, dis/ability, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, and language are essential to peace education efforts. A critical peace education should guide peace education efforts (p. xv).

Peace education projects take on many different forms. There is education about peace and about conflict, its causes, and resolutions. There are skill-building efforts for conflict resolution, educational efforts aimed at changing attitudes and perceptions of the "other" and oneself (Feuerverger, 2008). Anti-oppressive education and education for social justice (Kumashiro, 2009) serve the goals of peace education by allowing learners to comprehend inequities and power imbalances and address those constructively, thus, eventually achieving a culture of healing (Danesh, 2008).

Evaluating such programs and assessing the impact on learners has proven to be difficult (Harris, 2008). Even if students might know about ways to resolve conflicts, understanding their origins on a large or small scale and pathways to resolve them, will they be able to actually act upon this knowledge? Will there be long-term effects that lead to more peaceful relationships as a result of an intervention? Harris (2008) points to the many violence prevention and peace building efforts in schools and the challenges for evaluators to prove that these efforts are furnishing results. Outcomes-based evaluation with pre- and post-tests or the use of control groups is made difficult by fluid and changing environments, confounding variables, hard to quantify outcomes, and often subtle changes that are unique for individual participants. Formative and summative evaluation might shed some light on program implementation, but it would be beneficial if such evaluations go together with an understanding of a larger context and the lived experience of participant and demonstrate cultural responsiveness (Hopson, 2003, 2009).

## CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND COMPETENCE IN EVALUATION

Cultural responsiveness and competence in evaluation is but one of diverse evaluation positions that seeks to overcome the notion that evaluation is value neutral and can look at isolated phenomena while taking the larger context of a program or project into account. Being culturally responsive challenges the evaluators to gain a deep understanding of the people participating in any given program or project, to learn their histories, perceptions, notions of identity, ways to communicate, power relationships, and everyday lived experiences. This attitude is not an additional evaluation method, but rather an informed understanding of the context

surrounding an evaluation task (AEA, 2011). Achieving cultural responsiveness is ongoing learning, reflection, and action by the evaluators on their personal lenses and the evaluation design. Cultural responsiveness requires humility (Morris et al., 2005) on the part of the evaluators, which would translate into valuing all stakeholders as empowered decision makers in the evaluation process (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). This understanding in turn informs all aspects of an evaluation cycle. It shapes how evaluators would endeavor to integrate program/project participants in the design, implementation, analysis, and use of an evaluation. It shapes the choice of methods, the recruitment of participants, design of data collection instruments, analysis, reporting, and recommendations. It shapes the intended use and expectations for the long-term desired effect of an evaluation. Will the evaluation simply be a verdict about whether or not an intervention works, or does evaluation serve value-laden purposes with long-term effect on social justice?

In a public statement on cultural competence in evaluation commissioned by the American Evaluation Association, it is stated that

> Cultural competence is a stance taken toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills. A culturally competent evaluator is prepared to engage with diverse segments of communities to include cultural and contextual dimensions important to the evaluation. Culturally competent evaluators respect the cultures represented in the evaluation (AEA, 2011, p. 1).

The statement defines culture as the shared experience by population groups. Population groups can have commonalities beyond the typical classifiers of race/ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, or social class and include a variety of traits that are changing and evolving. Broad descriptors frequently continue stereotyping and overlook differentiations within cultural groups. People belong to a variety of groups and have a diversity of life experiences. Individuals draw on many different identifiers for defining themselves. An evaluation that does not take into account these different experiences would, according to Karen Kirkhart (2005), be at threat for better understanding the relational and experiential justifications of multicultural validity.

An evaluator will need to understand the diverse experiences and contrast and compare them to his/her own experience to gain a deep understanding of the population group. But it is not sufficient to understand a group as a stand-alone entity. The relationships among groups are essential because belonging to a group is linked to access to goods and services, to being able to collaborate in decision-making, and to assume certain professional or political positions. The power differentials based on assumed or inherited identity are the sources of conflicts, not the identity in itself (Maalouf, 2000). When conducting an evaluation of a peace education program, the evaluator needs to understand these power differentials, recognize the benefit of being informed by a cultural lens, and consistently build

program understanding through the vigilant understanding of cultural differences in the entire practice.

## PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND COMPETENCE

Peace education programs or projects intend to raise awareness about and remedy historical and current power imbalances in societies, address injustices, and overcome oppression. Essential for peace education programs is the recognition that

> Cultural groupings are ascribed differential status and power, with some holding privilege that they may not be aware of and some being relegated to the status of "other." For example, language dialect and accent can be used to determine the status, privilege, and access to resources of groups. Similarly, in some contexts, racialized "others" are framed against the implicit standard of "whiteness" and can become marginalized even when they are the numerical majority. Cultural privilege can create and perpetuate inequities in power and foster disparate treatment in resource distribution and access (AEA, 2011, p. 7).

Peace education programs help conflicting parties to establish a dynamic peace in which conflicts lead to deeper understanding the design of innovative new systems in order to replace or reshape defunct systems in societies. Diverse perspectives and divergent understandings are brought together in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of an issue, which in turn would allow conflicting parties to explore mutually beneficial solutions (Banathy & Jenlink, 2005). Peace education programs seek to shape very personal beliefs and identities. They challenge participants to engage in critical reflections about their values and attitudes, their understanding and interpretation of occurrences in a society, and the factual learning that shaped values, attitudes, understanding, and interpretation (Feuerverger, 2008). Any evaluation would be intertwined in such processes and needs to seek a deep understanding of the occurring processes along with measurable outcomes.

Evaluators need to understand the power differentials and inevitable conflicting parties and be sensitive to them, while looking for opportunities to acknowledge stakeholder views, interests, and value judgments (Yarbrough, et al., 2011). That translates into careful crafting of language to eliminate bias and challenge stereotyping and marginalization. It means using a language understood and preferred by program participants and having communication pathways that are horizontal and include all voices (AEA, 2011, Figueroa et al., 2002)

## SEEKING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION OF AN EDUCATION PROGRAM AIMED AT OVERCOMING RACE-BASED INJUSTICES

It is well documented that assimilation policies and an educational setting shaped by a dominant white European culture disadvantages students from diverse mi-

nority backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lucas, 2008; Nieto, 2010; Pollok, 2008). The program used here to illustrate and reflect on cultural responsiveness in peace education intends to overcome the persistent achievement gap for African American children by rebuilding a shattered racial identity. The premise is that the dominant curriculum and school structures do not allow African American children to build on the strength of their cultural heritage. Instead they continue to be labeled as deficient and are encouraged to overcome the lack of achievement by assimilating into a dominant mainstream. Hanley and Noblit (2009) describe how, even in the context of desegregation, assimilation goals remained strong to the detriment of cultural uplift

> …school desegregation meant that African Americans were now subject to a key historical logic of public education in the United States—an assimilation logic. This logic was developed early in the history of public schooling to deal with immigration from Europe, and was intended to "Americanize" the waves of European immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The logic argued that by rejecting one's heritage and mimicking the cultural beliefs and practices of the dominant Anglocentric group, one would gain access to benefits of American society (p. 16).

This continued denial of bringing one's roots and experiences into the academic formation is seen as a major detriment to achievement. Based on these insights, an urban school district with support of a local and regional foundation piloted a culturally responsive arts education program.

### *The Culturally Responsive Arts Education (CRAE) Program*

The mission and vision of the Culturally Responsive Arts Education (CRAE) program is to integrate African and African diaspora art into the curriculum in order to help participating children improve their artistic and academic skills, develop a positive racial identity, build resilience when encountering manifestations of racism and oppression, demonstrate leadership and positive behavior, and foster supportive relationships with the community and among artists and teachers. It is hoped that upliftment of a marginalized group, together with a better understanding of the group by others, leads to more caring and peaceful relationships with benefits for all.

The arts of Africa and the African diaspora and learning about the origin and intent of the various art forms were to be employed and infused throughout the curriculum with the above stated goal in mind (PPS CRAE). Schools were invited to submit proposals for designing a culturally responsive arts education program at their school. From among the applicants, three K-8 schools were chosen. The schools are all located in a predominantly African American and economically distressed urban area in the northeastern United States. The students are mostly African American while the majority of the teachers are of white European background.

Each school developed different plans around the general goal of the program. Local artists of African and African American background were recruited to work with art and core subject matter teachers. The artists taught their respective disci-

plines and infused the teaching of the arts with background knowledge about the culture, history, and values. They co-taught with visual arts and music teachers for several hours each week during the school day and in one school during after-school hours. The teachers of core subject matters were also asked to collaborate and infuse the arts and culture of Africa and the African diaspora into the general curriculum, where possible. Each school selected a certain grade level for participation, mostly fifth to eighth graders. Approximately 50 students at each school participated.

This pilot program was to inform a larger effort by the school district towards culturally responsive education. The program itself was funded for four years, one year of planning and three years of implementation. The evaluation began towards the end of the first year of implementation.

### *Evaluating Perceptions of Racial Identity and Resilience towards Discrimination, Racism, and Oppression*

This culturally responsive arts education program seeks to frame culture and racial identity as an asset and intends to help students develop caring relationships. The evaluators are challenged to find out if a positive perception of racial identity occurred among the largely African American students and if caring relationships are emerging. They need to document the subtleties of such shifts in perception and behavior, how the children and other key stakeholders like teachers, teaching artists, building administrators and others understand the extent to which the themes of the program were realized. To achieve this, cultural responsiveness needed to be infused into all stages of the evaluation. Evaluators needed to diffuse initial anxieties on the part of teachers who see evaluation as a critique of their classroom practices and yet another imposition on their already heavy workload. They also needed to become an accepted presence in the classroom so the children would feel comfortable voicing their thoughts and feelings.

Evaluating an education project that addresses racial identity issues and wants to foster a positive racial identity is a delicate matter in the context of U.S. schools. Evaluators need to know the circumstances that shaped a largely discouraging and disempowering racial identity and understand how such a perception of oneself can lead to low school achievement and high dropout rates. Evaluators are also trying to unearth very private feelings and determine if these have changed based on a program intervention.

### *Gaining Trust*

The evaluation process can become a contributing or distracting factor. It can help the program achieve its goals or be an obstacle. The way questions are asked, evaluation instruments designed, and field observations noted down will add a layer of interpretation. How evaluators interact with program participants can build trust or close down sharing of personal perceptions, especially when trying to explore these very sensitive feelings around race and identity. In addition the majority of the program participants and those interviewed and observed were children from around ten to thirteen years of age. These children are just learn-

ing the language around identity and race and the complex American and African diaspora history involved.

Cultural responsiveness begins with the formation of an evaluation team. Whether or not individual evaluators are from the same racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background, they should make an effort to become very familiar with the program setting and approach program participants as collaborators (Millet, 2002). This necessitates that the flow of communication is horizontal, rather than vertical or top-down. Open communication is essential but, in reality, not always easy to achieve, especially if evaluators work within the confines of a still very hierarchical education system setting.

In the case of the CRAE program evaluation, the team includes some evaluators intimately familiar with the struggle around racial discrimination and with public school settings. They personally know the neighborhoods and schools, having taught or hired in them within the larger school district. In addition, the team made a conscious effort to become familiar with the history and current circumstances of the neighborhoods and school district

Program participants—here mostly the teachers and teaching artists—shared information about the neighborhood, the children's lived experiences, and the schools' circumstances. Program participants are not simply to be evaluated, but their expressed views and requests ought to shape the evaluation design. The children themselves need to see the evaluators as trustworthy and remain assured that what they say and do does not reflect negatively on them. All should see a benefit in the evaluation and be confident that the outcomes, even the less favorable ones, inform program improvement and learning and do not reflect negatively on their work performance. Ideally, the program participants themselves should be the ones requesting help of evaluators and using the data gathered to inform their program implementation, but in the case of the CRAE program the funders required the evaluation, which meant that the evaluators had to overcome some initial mistrust. Teachers were rightfully skeptical that the program evaluation could impact their official work performance evaluation.

### *Developing the Evaluation Design*

As mentioned, cultural responsive evaluation is not a new method added to the toolbox of evaluation methodologies; rather, it means that evaluators include cultural context and participants' values and expectations at all stages of an evaluation process. While the evaluation itself might well follow the customary steps of an evaluation, the various activities carried out during an evaluation are infused with knowledge about the context, understanding of local perceptions, establishing the purpose of the evaluation, seeing a greater good in the evaluation, and ongoing open communication.

The ongoing open communication is a process issue and a skill, which is not necessarily thought about when figuring out the technical aspects of an evaluation design. It is crucial, however, to pay attention to it because the flow of com-

munication is an indicator of power structures, and when practicing culturally responsive evaluation, communication ought to be authentic and democratizing (Jenlink, 2004). Instead of preconceived agendas and using power relationships to influence outcomes there ought to be an open exchange of observations around the program implementation, its successes, and its challenges. Voicing critical observations needs to be acceptable and not have any detrimental consequences for those who are stating them. This, then, will help to uphold the level of trust needed to carry out an honest evaluation. After the first year of the evaluation, evaluation questions were overhauled and re-established after a series of meetings between the evaluation team and the school district deputy superintendent and key staff based on the results of the Y1 evaluation. In this case, as a result of critical and reflective results of the program and the evaluation, including key program staff changes, a revised evaluation design was developed which better capture the dynamic program time elements, better reflected the school district's needs of the program, and more aptly reflected how the program impact was to be understood.

While the evaluators intended to have open and free flowing communication, time constraints and the hierarchical nature of schooling, along with the fact that the evaluation was a requirement by funders and not requested by the program participants, limited the flow to some degree. The evaluation design itself, though, was vetted with program designers and received feedback from teachers and artists during and after the first full year of evaluation work.

### *Evaluation Methods*

In order to capture the subtleties of identity formation and attitudes about race and race-based injustices, the evaluation methods included an ongoing presence of the evaluators in the field. Through observations and conversational interviews, these issues were explored. The evaluators documented gains in academic and artistic achievement, which called for a more quantitative approach. Mixed methods were used and each theme was researched using a variety of tools; they included:

- Classroom observation of CRAE classes
- Surveys of teachers involved in CRAE, teachers and learning support personnel in general at each school, school administrators, teaching artists, parents, and students.
- Conversational interviews with CRAE teachers, teaching artists, school administrators, and students
- Secondary data: Grade averages, disciplinary records, absences (available through PPS office of research); Selected student artistic and performative work; Art rubric applied to selected student work (developed by PPS CRAE teachers and teaching artists).

Table 3.1 summarizes which of the instruments addresses each theme (Stokes, et al., 2011). The table illustrates that to capture racial identity and resilience to-

TABLE 3.1.

| INSTRUMENT | Arts Learning | Academic Learning | Racial Identity & Resilience | Leadership | Collaboration | Engagement | Cultural Exposure | Professional Growth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observations | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| Parent Survey | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| Child Survey | √ | | √ | √ | | √ | √ | |
| Teacher/ TA/Admin Survey | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| Staff Interviews | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Parent Interview | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | | |
| Student Interview | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ | | |
| Arts Rubric | √ | | | | | | | |

wards racial oppression, several tools were used. The students themselves were asked about their perceptions during a conversational interview and with surveys. Questions asked to what degree respondents agreed with the following:

- I am proud of my racial background and heritage.
- I am learning more about my racial background and heritage.
- I say positive things about myself.
- I say positive things about my racial group.
- I hear positive things about myself at school.
- I hear positive things about my racial group at school.
- I have positive role models at the school.
- I am aware of positive contributions African Americans have made.

Teachers, artists and parents were asked similar questions asking about their observations of the students' attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Triangulation of answers from various sources led to a more complete picture of student perceptions and attitudes. Anecdotes offered by teachers and artists helped to illustrate shifts in student attitudes, such as this one told by one of the teaching artists:

> So you know I think in terms of having high regard for who you are and where you come from is one of the things that we've been able to instill in the kids, to be proud of Africa. When we started last year, in particular [a student] he said, 'I am not Afri-

> can. I don't know what you're talking about. I am not black. I'm this. I'm that.' I'm like, 'That's okay.' Now he's like, 'You know what? It's cool. I like Africa. I like African Americans' (Stokes, et al., 2011, p. 37).

The surveys and interviews occurred at the end of year one, two and three of the program implementation. This allows evaluators to see long-term changes. Observations too are done on a regular monthly basis in each classroom and efforts are made to observe each artist and participating teacher with each of their classes at a minimum of once per month throughout the school year. Participation in CRAE team meetings and attendance of special events such as student performances or exhibitions of artwork allow evaluators to be immersed in the program's larger context.

The combination of approaches was chosen to gain insights into very personal attitude changes and also to track whole-group shifts in perceptions of racial identity and resilience. The survey analysis used descriptive statistics to summarize agreement or disagreement with statements such as the ones listed above. Open ended survey questions, conversational interviews, and observations allowed for a more in-depth focus on the individual. Together, these mixed methods aim for a comprehensive picture.

### *Critical Reflection on the Theoretical Issues Underlying the Choice of Methods*

The evaluators embarked on the evaluation with personal goals of aiding the education of a group of students disadvantaged by an assimilationist agenda of an education system (Hanley & Noblit, 2009). The realities of implementing a culturally responsive education program into a rigid school setting, where subjects are taught in discrete blocks and forty-five minute periods, uncovered the power structures inherent in current education practices. Teachers were often handicapped by time constraints, mandated curricula, time consuming standardized testing requirements, or lack of preparation in doing what they wanted to do with the program. Teachers have to conform their teaching styles and content to mandates handed to them in the form of standards, mandated curricula, and prescribed textbooks. Teacher-centered classroom practices are still ingrained in the daily teaching routines, and teachers as well as students needed to get used to more constructivist teaching practices, which are a logical requirement for culturally responsive teaching. As the evaluation proceeds, evaluators are challenged to point out these larger inequities and development needs that influence program implementation. The evaluation might well show that issues of inequity and cultural oppression within the education system at large can seriously handicap well meant but small-scale programs. The evaluation itself is then propelled into a larger context and begins to serve educational change issues beyond mere program evaluation.

Veronica Thomas and Brook McKie (2006), in their article on collecting and utilizing evaluation research for public good on behalf of African American children, point out that a culturally and contextually responsive evaluation can furnish data to inform a more equitable school reform (p. 341). The authors conclude that evaluations are

> … not done *to* the students, the school context, and educational projects; but, instead are done *for* the students, the school and the educational effort under study. … Educational evaluators working in this area should seek to make a positive difference in the lives of African American students and the settings where evaluators work, changing them in some important and constructive ways through data that are collected and the utility of the findings that are reported (p. 349).

The evaluator thus takes on an advocacy role, one that should not prevent a critical and objective collection and analysis of data in favor of steering the reporting more heavily towards positive outcomes. Only a balanced reporting will allow the pinpointing of areas in need of improvement and larger contextual issues that might impede program development. Here again trust and open communication will weigh in (Stokes, 2008). The choice of methods should always follow the recommended standards for good evaluation design (Yarbrough et al., 2011). But the interactions among evaluators, program participants, and other beneficiaries of the evaluation shape the evaluation processes. If trust is established through open communication and cultural responsiveness, the necessary honesty to address shortcomings constructively is possible.

## CONCLUSION

The evaluation of peace education programs is challenging because of the complexity and open-endedness of peace education programs. Peace education programs reach beyond the acquisition of facts and skills and want to change ingrained attitudes and identities. Hard to quantify outcomes might frustrate the efforts of program designers to clearly communicate the benefits of a program. For evaluators it is a prerequisite to gain a deep understanding of the context of the program to be evaluated, become culturally competent, and employ methods that are culturally responsive. It needs to be recognized that evaluation cannot be culture-free. Evaluators need the humility to acknowledge that they always learn from program participants and the setting and should not assume that cultural competence is a static skill. Trust among all participants is essential for achieving valid evaluation results. If program participants realize that the evaluation helps them to better understand the program impact and resulting changes in their own perceptions and identities, they can take more ownership of the evaluation and become reliable generators of evaluation data. Program participants themselves need to deeply understand the aims of the program so they can reflect accurately on their learning gains and attitude shifts and communicate those to evaluators. Cultural relevance and competence, along

with an understanding of power dynamics, are thus key to achieve and maintain trusting relationships and open communication.

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