

Session 4: Competency, Capacity and Culture: Toolboxes for Evaluators

Micheala Zint: Can Self-directed learning resources increase individuals' evaluation competency? Insights from case studies of environmental educators' experiences with the web-based "My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant" or "MEERA."

Resource and evaluation of the resource

- great demand for evaluation in environmental education and very little competency or capacity to conduct evaluation so the resource was created
- purpose = help cooks do their own cooking

MEERA

- step by step guidance to walk through evaluation process, searchable database of evaluations, suggestions on related topics – clearinghouse of evaluation resources for environmental educators
- unique b/c focused on needs of environmental educators, based on research, builds on existing resources, selective, suitable for different levels of evaluation expertise, acts like personal consultant (tips)
- growing number of visitors from over 80 countries
- growth can be attributed to EPA's office of environmental education pointing people to MEERA
- Unique: resource that we evaluated to see if it can meet its goals

Helps environmental educators through an evaluation process to do an evaluation of their programs

Evaluation of MEERA

- case studies with environmental educators who had never done an evaluation before
- participants used MEERA as it was intended, followed steps, used links, etc.

Benefits for participants:

- planned program improvements as a result of their evaluations
- prepared good evaluation reports
- increased in evaluation competency (what individuals know about evaluation), confidence and commitment to evaluation

Participant challenges:

- time constraints, feeling overwhelmed, desire for interaction/tailored expert assistance, some difficulties with select tasks

Conclusion: MEERA can increase environmental educators' competency and could serve as a model for other contexts on how to support self-directed learning about evaluation – benefits can be enhanced by collaborating with partners and external evaluators

Ann Crabbé – The Handbook of Environmental Policy Evaluation

- links evaluation questions with evaluation methods, answering why and how questions on state of the environment (explain the conditions we're in)

Content:

- perspective on policy and policy evaluation, distinct features of environmental policy, etc.

Different ways to look at policy and policy evaluation:

- goal rationality: impact assessments, (quasi)experiments, cost-benefit analysis, etc.
- political interactive perspective: participatory responsive evaluation, deliberative democratic evaluation;
- institutional perspective (missing): focus on networks, regimes, policy arrangements, discursive coalitions – Gap to fill

25 methods, described with the same framework

Framework method description:

- elucidation and context (essence of the method, context, research and evaluation context)
- methodology – steps to apply the method
- references – additional methods, examples

www.earthscan.co.uk

Doug Horton: A Tool-Kit for Agricultural Research Impact Evaluators

Background and context

- context is everything
- international agricultural research
- rich history of economic impact assessment
- increasing demands for evidence of impact
- as programs become more complex, traditional methods become less adequate – goals are more challenging, interventions are more technically complex, partnerships are becoming the norm, traditional methods are too linear
- most evaluators aren't economists for traditional economic assessment model

Challenge:

- improve evaluators' access to a broad range of evaluation methods
- provide guidance in use of the methods
- people want different methods to traditional methods that aren't working/ can't be applied

Proposal:

- develop a web portal for impact evaluation methods for ag research and development
- provide some methodological support from experienced evaluators
- Work done by: ILAC Initiative, RIU Program. Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia

Progress to date:

- Patricia Rogers is leading this work: patricia.rogers@rmit.edu.au
- Hundreds of tools, methods and cases located
- Basic framework developed
- Summaries initiated

*** If thinking about standard way of access to methods, framework is important

Framework

1. focus the evaluation
2. conceptualize the intervention
3. ID what is valued
4. measure and describe
5. analyze causal contributions
6. report on results
7. support use of results

Often too concerned with 4 and 5, have to look at whole range – use is important throughout

For each task:

- diverse methods are listed
- for each method, summary presents description, possible uses, advantages and disadvantages, examples, links to further info, space for user comments

Need to bring in other domains but also provide examples of use of method in your domain

****Issues:

- Might something like this be useful for environmental evaluators?
- What is the appropriate “unit” of a “tool-kit”? Tool vs. approach, methodology, paradigm?
- Who/how to prepare credible, authoritative summaries?
- What can be expected of a tool-kit in relation to other capacity development interventions? Who provides the basics of impact evaluation?
- How to provide advice and mentoring for potential users – long term, ongoing?

Discussion:

Q: Recognizing there's an increasing amount of self-directed learning around evaluation – what does your project contribute to? Are their skill sets not suited to transmission by self-directed learning?

Doug: providing methods tailored to agricultural research methods (tailored to the field, what applies in my language) – translation of general concepts to

Micheala: knowledge transmission can be conveyed, site can't be a human, learning is a social process, interacting and questioning with others is how we learn – hard to be interactive with users unless you have a lot of money

- need assurance, feedback, discussion – desire for social interaction that can't be met with web/print materials
- Importance of a network – 8 people that participated in MEERA were part of the same network and could talk to each other and others in their network
- important that networks are a part, place to discuss and interact
- not a regular chat site/ discussion board – didn't sufficiently meet people's needs in MEERA's experience

Who is our user/learner? How can we meet that learners needs?

Q: extent to which individual work would be translatable and applicable to environmental program evaluation? Can we take out 'education' or 'agriculture' or 'policy' – do we need to tailor something?

Ann: bring together all the methods – gets people informed about what's available but it's important to look at specific context in which you'll evaluate – must have tailor-made evaluations, need other people to help you focus on specific issues you want to know better

- useful to get to know all methods, need broad view and pick out what you need in your situation

Doug: Translational issue – topic engagement is important, group needs to be engaged

Michaela: Lots to learn from other efforts that build on existing efforts/insights

- context/examples are extremely important – helps learners make things concrete
- methods are the same but need specific examples for specific context

Q: How do we consider the driving forces (production and consumption) behind environmental degradation? Agency as a society. Need to focus on this link. (Hans B's questions)

Michaela: movement to focus on sustainability in US, understanding interconnectedness of environment with social/market issues

EPA: establishment of national guidelines for environmental education