

EEN Forum 2009 Notes, 6/9/2009 11 a.m.

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Session 3: Theory, Practice, & Application of the Utilization-Focused Evaluation Approach: Case Studies from Environmental Education

Overview of Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Annelise Carleton-Hug, Trillium Associates

- As opposed to program evaluation in general, utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE) is done for and with specific, intended primary users for specific, intended uses.
 - Evaluations should be judged by their utility (how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process).
- Features of U-FE:
 - Collaborative: working relationship between evaluators and primary users
 - Contextual: specific to situation
 - Always focusing on the intended use of the evaluation
- Key stages in U-FE:
 - Gain commitment to evaluation process – active participants, open to change
 - Identify intended users of evaluation
 - Engage primary users in decisions related to evaluation
 - Identify methods
 - Work together to disseminate results
- Potential outcomes of U-FE:
 - Increases utilization of evaluations
 - Builds evaluation capacity of the organization
 - Contributes to a culture of evaluation
- U-FE resources:
 - Patton, Michael Quinn. (2008) Utilization-Focused Evaluation – 4th Edition
 - Utilization-Focused Evaluation Checklist: Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University
 - Journal of Evaluation & Program Planning ~Aug. 09
- Carol Weiss (2004): “Utility is what evaluation is all about.”

Case Study #1

Lisa Flowers, Boone & Crockett Club in Montana

- “Applying U-FE to Assess Effectiveness of Montana’s Hooked on Fishing Program”
- Background:
 - Montana schools volunteer to implement Hooked on Fishing Program
 - Mostly rural schools
 - Student activities: go fishing, perform dissections with instructors
- Evaluation Research:
 - Summative Evaluation to measure and determine with stakeholders how effectively the Hooked on Fishing Program affected participant (students,

classroom teachers, Hooked on Fishing instructors) outcomes (skills, behaviors, knowledge).

- Primary purpose:
 - Ensure evaluation findings would be applied to improve program effectiveness.
- Stakeholder activities:
 - Teachers, Students, Instructors, Coordinator: helped in designing evaluation
 - Teachers, Instructors, Coordinator: helped in framing questions, implementing evaluation, process use, interpreting results, and acting on findings
- Qualitative aspects of these types of evaluations are as important as the typical quantitative measures.
- Students got excited about the program activities, they added valuable comments and stories for the evaluation.
- Findings – students:
 - Significant difference in knowledge and skills (compared to control group)
 - No significant difference for attitude and behavior outcomes
 - This may have been an effect of the lack of clear goals and objectives
 - 2-3 outdoor experiences correlated with positive change for knowledge and skill outcomes
- Findings – teachers:
 - Most teachers thought students enjoyed fishing the most, but students expressed enjoying dissection the most
 - 3 major themes in suggestions: new ideas for activities, new ways to structure programs; cost assistance
 - Need to emphasize/implement environmental ethic/stewardship – potentially though land adoption
- Conclusions:
 - Evaluation approach was successful
 - Stakeholders accepted the evaluation process
 - Participatory approach was personal and situational
- Recommendations:
 - Realign program goals and objectives
 - Implement teacher suggestions
 - Reevaluate
 - Replicate process across other programs, replicate successful forms of programs
- Value of Evaluation:
 - Can look at costs, see whether the program is worth implementing/continuing
 - Improving sustainability of this and other programs

Case Study #2

Annelise Carleton-Hug, Trillium Associates

- U-FE in evaluating online Yellowstone experience: Windows into Wonderland
- “Trips” through Yellowstone designed for middle school students based on educational theme
 - Live video incorporated with cartoon discussions and interactive activities
- Background:

- Created in 2001, had never been formally evaluated before Trillium evaluation
- Funding came during planning for final eTrip, so this became a summative evaluation
- Process of evaluation:
 - Focus groups with program staff
 - Logic model
 - Mixed-method evaluation: Teacher interviews, Classroom observations (distant from Yellowstone), Online survey
- Key Findings
 - Teacher interviews
 - Found out how they were using the program, what they perceived as barriers, educational recommendations
 - Student observations
 - How engaged they were, what they found challenging
 - Online survey
 - Who's actually using the program (wider audience than expected – pre-K thru college and some unrelated to education), what are their attitudes towards parks, environmental behaviors
- What became of the evaluation?
 - Unfortunately, no funding available to create more or revamp eTrips
 - Yellowstone sharing report with other National Parks projects
 - Disseminating results to public, educators, etc. so this information and form of evaluation can be used in the future