



Goal-Free Evaluation and Goal-Based Evaluation

Two program evaluation approaches one
synthesized report

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Goal-Based Evaluation

- Before discussing a GFE...

Definition of a Goal-Based Evaluation (GBE):

- A GBE is “any type of evaluation based on and knowledge of—and referenced to—the goals and objectives of the program, person, or product, (Scriven, 1991, p. 178).”

Goal-Free Evaluation

- GF evaluator avoids learning the stated purpose/goals/intended achievements, of the program prior to or during the evaluation.
- Instead, the GF evaluator observes and measures actual processes and outcomes; and interviews program consumers.
 - This prevents tunnel vision, or only looking at the program as it pertains to the intended goals at the risk of overlooking many positive and/or negative unintended side-effects.

GFE

- GFE evaluator asks: What does the program actually do? Rather, what does the program intend to do?
- “Merit is determined by relating program effects to the relevant needs of the impacted population, (Scriven, 1991. p. 180).”
- A comprehensive needs assessment is conducted simultaneously with data collection.
- “The evaluator should provide experiential accounts of program activity so that readers of the report can, through naturalistic generalization, arrive at their own judgments of quality in addition to those the evaluator provides, (Stake, 2004 in Alkin, 2004, p. 215).”

Arguments for the Utilization of GFE

(see Scriven, 1991)

- ❑ It may identify unintended positive and negative side-effects and other context specific information.
 - ❑ As a supplement to a traditional evaluation, it serves as a form of triangulating both data collection methods and data sources.
 - ❑ It circumvents the traditional outcome evaluation and the difficulty of identifying true current goals and true original goals, and then defining and weighing them.
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Arguments for the Utilization of GFE (continued)

- ❑ It is less intrusive to the program and potentially less costly to the client.
 - ❑ It is adaptable to changes in needs or goals.
 - ❑ By reducing interaction with program staff, it is less susceptible to social, perceptual, and cognitive biases.
 - ❑ It is reversible; an evaluation may begin goal-free and later become goal-based using the goal-free data for preliminary investigative purposes.
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Arguments for the Utilization of GFE

(continued)

- It is less subject to bias introduced by intentionally or unintentionally trying to satisfy the client because it is not explicit in what the client is attempting to do; it offers fewer opportunities for evaluator bias or corruption because the evaluator is unable to clearly determine ways of cheating.
- For the evaluator, it requires increased effort, identifies incompetence, and enhances the balance of power among the evaluator, the evaluatee and client.
- Its focuses on human experience and what people actually do and feel, allows for understanding how program implementer deal with its nonprogrammed decisions^[1] (Stake, 2004; in Alkin, 2004).

^[1] *Nonprogrammed decisions are decisions regarding relatively novel problems, or problems that an individual, group, organization, or entity has never encountered (George & Jones, 2000).*

GFE as a Supplement to GBE

The weaknesses in exclusively using any one approach are significantly minimized by combining the two; consequently, the validity of the synthesized final evaluation is enhanced.

- The GBE and GFE are combined by having the GB and GF evaluators design and conduct their evaluations independently.
- In synthesizing the GBE and GFE, evaluators interpret the data while discussing whether the evaluation methods, results, and conclusions support or contradict each other; and the evaluators (possibly with key stakeholders) weigh the data from both approaches to make an evaluative conclusion.

GFE as a Supplement to GBE

(Continued)

- GB evaluator screen all material and communiqués to ensure that the GF evaluator was not provided with information that could have revealed the program's stated or intended goals.
- Prior to data collection, the evaluation team discussed the two evaluation methodologies with the program staff specifically instructing them not to discuss program goals with the GF evaluator.
- After analyzing the data and writing the GFE draft report, the GF evaluator learned the program goals. The GF evaluator considered the stated goals, re-analyzed the data and judgments, and responded by writing an addendum to the draft report.

2 Data Sources, 3 Value Interpretations

The combination of GBE and GFE provides the program stakeholders with two distinct and independent sources data and three value interpretations of which to judge the program's outcomes and impacts.

- Data comes separately from the GBE and GFE.
- The three sets of value interpretations are:
 - (1) Those of the GB evaluators' (which includes the consideration of stakeholder values)
 - (2) Those of the GF evaluators' based on a needs assessment
 - (3) Those from the combined and synthesized GFE and GBE reports.

Implementation Considerations

GFE must be appropriate for finding the information needed by key stakeholders and for making evaluative conclusions.

- GFE may be most useful in formative external evaluations. A qualitatively designed GFE may be appropriate given certain evaluation questions, particularly related to understanding the program's context, processes, actual outputs/outcomes, and side-effects.
- Additional considerations: The time allocated for the evaluation; the financial and other resources available; the level of expertise and competence of the evaluation team; and the ability to ensure that the goal-free nature of the evaluation will not be compromised.

Evaluation of MSSEP

- Evaluation Team: Two GB evaluators & one GF evaluator
- Middle School Enrichment Program (MSSEP): Five week summer school program for students who were “at risk” and “disadvantaged.”
- At any point in time, roughly 70 students were enrolled in the program; and there were ten teachers, one administrator, three additional staff, and seven paraprofessionals (teacher aides).

Official Program Description

The following is a selected summary of the official description of the MSSEP:

- MSSEP will be funded using federal Title I funds and Section 31a “At Risk” funds. Both programs require site-based decision-making and strongly encourage the implementation of extended-day and extended-year programs for eligible students. The principals of the three middle schools want to implement a summer program that employs the use of high-yield, research-based instructional strategies that enable students to apply what they have learned in new and practical situations. The Michigan Curriculum Framework serves as the basis for curriculum decisions for the MSSEP.

Program Description (continued)

- Instructional strategies such as accelerated learning, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, and Effective Schools research concepts will be incorporated into the integrated language arts, mathematics, science and social studies curriculum. Those concepts in the areas of language arts and mathematics for which student mastery has not been demonstrated will be the instructional focus for the 2005 Middle School Summer Enrichment Program. This extended time for mastery is intended to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate success during subsequent school years. An emphasis will be placed on the development of writing skills, thinking skills, and strategic problem-solving tasks.

Evaluation Standards

- Both GB and GF evaluators used the Key Evaluation Checklist (Scriven, 2005)
- The GF evaluator also used the Qualitative evaluation Checklist (Patton, 2003)

Limitations in the Designs of the MSSEP GBE and GFE

- First, there was little ability to examine long-term outcomes; rather, both evaluations examined short-term outcomes, or outputs.
- Second, neither evaluation approach used random assignment or a control group; therefore, the evaluators made no attempt to generalize to a larger population.

Investigative Framework for the GFE

- Based on classroom observations, structured open-ended student interviews, and standard instruments.
 - Interviews from the program principal, home school interventionist, counseling intern, and program secretary.
- A total of 70 student interviews were conducted.
- The GF evaluator was on-site for approximately 75 percent of the time that the program operated with students attending.
- The GF evaluator visited each classroom unannounced and remained in that classroom for the majority of the program day at least once per classroom.

Comparison of GFE Goals and Stated Goals

| | Program Stated Goals | Excerpts from the Goals Identified in the GFE | |
|-----|--|---|---|
| I | Create an environment conducive to learning | "Student safety, student/teacher relationship" | Safety and student/teacher relationship may be considered indicators in creating a conducive environment |
| II | Provide students with opportunities to explore | "Investigate a topic of interest and relevance to them" | Providing students with a topic of interest and relevance may be what the program did to create opportunities for exploration |
| III | Improve students writing, thinking, and strategic problem-solving skills | "Critically and logically analyze" and "writing, and analytic skills" | "Thinking" and "strategic problem-solving skills" is similar to critical and logical analytic skills |

Comparison of GFE Goals and Stated Goals (continued)

| | Program Stated Goals | Excerpts from the Goals Identified in the GFE | |
|------------|--|--|---|
| IV | Help students make connections between core content areas | "Through connecting math, literacy, and democratic values" | Math, literacy, and democratic values were part of the program's core content |
| V | Help students apply and demonstrate their acquired knowledge | "Students were supposed to learn and use" | "Using" is very similar to "applying" and "demonstrating," while "learn" is similar to "acquired knowledge" |
| VI | Instill the desire in students to extend their learning | "Increase interest, motivation, and participation in the learning process" | Again, the goal recognized in the GFE is very similar to the stated goal |
| VII | Students will demonstrate success during subsequent school years | N/A | The GF evaluator did not identify, this stated goal; although, it may be implied in program activities |

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

As recognized by the GB and GF evaluators

Both the GBE and GFE reports identified three significant unintended outcomes, side-effects, and side-impacts: (a) recidivism, (b) passing-on students, and (C) the program as a safety net.

A) Recidivism

- One of the program's core values and goals is that its "students will demonstrate success during subsequent school years."
- Overall, 29 percent (n = 77) of the program's participants were recidivist.
 - The program just managed to reach the bar which was set at 30% of its total students having been in the program previously.

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

GB and GF evaluators (continued)

B) Passing-On Students

- The program itself did not have the authority to pass-on students; rather, the program principal reported to the district and the students' individual schools as to whether the students passed the summer school program or not. However, the evaluators noticed that students who may or may not be adequately prepared for the next grade level may still be passed on to the next grade.
 - Almost 44 percent of instructors reported that the duration of the program was insufficient to prepare the program's students for entering the next grade. Furthermore, there was general agreement within and between instructors and parents regarding the inappropriateness of passing students to the next grade when they may not be academically prepared.

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

GB and GF evaluators (continued)

C) The Summer Program as a Safety Net

- The evaluators felt it plausible that the students may perceive the program as a safety net. That is, given the relatively high recidivism rate, the evaluators suspected that the students who were aware that they could attend the program following poor performance, attendance, or behavioral patterns in the prior school year will think that they can take the 19 day summer school program and still pass to the next grade. These students would likely show a reduced desire or motivation to perform in the regular academic year.

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

from the GFE

There were four side-effects identified only in the GFE report: (a) teacher confidence, (b) student networking, (c) environmental impact of water bottles, and (d) familiarity with high school.

A) Teacher Confidence

- Depending on their experiences and perception of the program, the teachers may be encouraged or discouraged from teaching similar student populations or subsequent summer enrichment programs. Disruptive students may have affected a teacher's confidence and sense of competence in her/his teaching or ability to work with these types of students.
- On the other hand, the experiences and perceptions of the program may motivate teachers to learn new theories, methods, and techniques for teaching students like the ones that were in their classrooms.

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

from the GFE (continued)

B) Student Networking

- All students had the opportunity to network with other peers and establish relationships. Networking may allow students to establish relationships that may continue into, through, and beyond high school.
 - This was particularly beneficial to students:
 - Who have challenges with making friends and
 - Who will be attending the same school together in the fall.
 - If new friends are positive influences on each other.
 - If a relationship leads to the support of negative behaviors, this would be considered a negative side-effect.

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

from the GFE (continued)

C) Environmental Impact of Water Bottles

- The program provided each student with two bottles of water a day. Some of these bottles may have been recycled, yet it appeared that most were thrown in the waste basket.
- The average daily attendance was about 65 students x 2 bottles of water x 19 days = 2470 plastic water bottles potentially used.
- Conservation and other environmental practices could be taught and role modeled.
 - The evaluator recommended giving the students one large bottle of water a day, using jugs of water and reusable cups, relying solely on the drinking fountains, or providing procedures for recycling and emphasizing them to teachers and students.

Side-Effects/Side-Impacts

from the GFE (continued)

D) Familiarity with High School

- There was likely a small number of students who were being acquainted with the high school that they will be attending in the future.
 - These students learned portions of the physical grounds and developed a sense of what it might be like when they attend high school.
 - The students' introduction to high school may reduce anxiety about beginning high school and may initially increase student comfort during their transition to high school and it may manifested itself in increased compliance with the school's attendance policy.

GBE: Overall Ratings

- Content = B+
- Implementation = B+
- Acquisition & Application of Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Attitudes = C
- Unintended Outcomes, Side-Effects, and Side-Impacts = D
- Costs Comparative = B
- Cost-Effectiveness = C

GFE: Overall Ratings

- Moral Impact = C-
- Environmental Impact = C
- Educational Impact = C-
- Social-Developmental Impact = D
- Financial Cost = B+
- Cost to Teachers, Parents/Guardians, and Other Impacted = C
- Cost-Effectiveness = B-

GBE-GFE Comparison

Total GBE
2.43 = High C+

Total GFE
2.02 = C

Where A = 4.0, A- = 3.6, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, B- = 2.6, C+ = 2.3, C = 2.0, C- = 1.6, D+ = 1.3, D = 1.0, F = 0.99 and below.

Where A = excellent, B = Good, C = Adequate, D = Marginal, F = Poor.

QUESTIONS?

Questions about the general nature of GFE?

Questions about synthesizing GBE and GFE?

Questions about the GFE in regards to the evaluation of MSSEP?

BIO & Contact

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