

Book Review
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Roger Kaufman, Ingrid Guerra, & William A. Platt
Practical Evaluation for Education
Finding What Works and What Doesn't
Thousand Oaks, California, Corwin Press, 2006
299pp.
Amazon.com \$38.31
0-7619-3198-8

Introduction

Author Information from Practical Evaluation for Educators (2006):

Roger Kaufman is Professor Emeritus, Florida State University, and Director of Roger Kaufman & Associates. He is also Distinguished Research Professor at the Sonora Institute of Technology. His PhD is in communications from New York University. Dr. Kaufman has published 36 books and more than 235 articles on strategic planning, performance improvement, quality management and continuous improvement, needs assessment, management, and evaluation (p. xiii).

Ingrid J. Guerra is Assistant Professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, and Research Associate Professor at the Sonora Institute of Technology in Sonora, Mexico. She is also a private consultant for private and public organizations nationally and internationally and a professional member of Roger Kaufman & Associates. She has served as Chair of Needs Assessment for the American Evaluation Association and Chair of the Research Committee for the International Society for Performance Improvements. Ingrid received her PhD and MA in Instructional Systems and her bachelor's in Psychology from Florida State University (p. xiii).

William A. Platt is currently a Principle Instructional Designer for Concurrent Technologies Corporation in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He is a member of the American Evaluation Association. His PhD is in Instructional Technology from Indiana University. He served as a member of the Adjunct Faculty at the Marine Corps Service Support Schools and has served as a training advisor for Marine Corps training commands. He retired at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (p. xiv).

The purpose of *Practical Evaluation for Educators* is to provide readers a straightforward approach to educational evaluation. The authors successfully provide a how-to guidebook for principals, superintendents, curriculum consultants, teachers, and evaluation teams. After reading this book, practitioners will be able to develop a program evaluation that will help define measurable results and outcomes based on the goals and objectives of an initiative. From the viewpoint of the authors, the bottom line is to find out what works and what does not work, and most especially in an academic setting. Kaufman, Guerra, and Platt (2006) are qualified to write this book. Their opinions are better understood as expert advice based on not only their respective academic credentials (each has a PhD), but also drawing from years of experience in education, business, and the military.

The book is written in a highly readable style and format. It is well organized, providing the reader with fundamental principles and tools of evaluation presented in a logical sequence, including four scenarios to help the reader see how the principles they purport might apply in a real-world context. In the introduction, the authors immediately begin to dismantle objections and defuse intimidation that the reader might have in conducting a solid program evaluation. Why should the reader trust this book? The authors respond:

There are lots of books on evaluation—why use this one? This book is different. It is based on the solid definition of the context of education in our shared society, and it requires us to plan and deliver in ensuring that our learners will be successful both in school and in life. (Kaufman et al., 2006, p. x)

This book offers a turnkey solution to conducting an effective evaluation of a program.

Content Summary

The 299-page book is brimming with sage advice for the inexperienced program evaluator. Readers are introduced to evaluation essentials, key principles, helpful frameworks, and field-tested guidelines which provide raw materials to develop an:

- Evaluation Action Plan (EAP) (p. 2)
- Organizational Elements Model (OEM) (p. 25)
- Evaluation Management Plan (EMP) (p. 78)

Notably, the authors empower readers to actually implement their own Evaluation Action Plan by offering detailed instructions on how to safely navigate through the four phases of the EAP, each of which earns a section in the book devoted to the phase: Part 1: Alignment and Direction (p. 21), Part 2: Observation (p. 81), Part 3: Results (p. 171), and Part 4: Actions and Adjustment (p. 217). The authors are purists when it comes to their philosophy of evaluation touting the principles of systematic inquiry, competence, integrity and honesty, respect for people, and responsibility for general and public welfare as being fundamental core values (p. 2).

The reader is introduced to the concept of “Mega,” that is, a social contract of sorts where program outcomes contribute to the greater good or ideal vision (p. 157). Just as “Mega” is linked with “Outcomes,” according to the authors, other levels of planning suggest that “Macro” is paired with “Outputs;” “Micro” with “Products;” followed by “Processes,” “Inputs,” and “Continuous Improvement.” Kaufman et al. (2006) pull from their extensive combined experience to offer workarounds for evaluation traps such as the values trap (p. 73), and the process-product trap (p. 75), to name a few. Furthermore, the authors kindly flag errors that can be circumvented such as the errors of association, relevancy, logic, technique, omission/commission, and bias (pp. 160-165).

The authors write passionately about all aspects of data identification, collection, and evaluation. They assert: “The data you collect must match the questions you want answered” (Kaufman et al., 2006, p. 85). Helping prospective program evaluators to differentiate between “soft” and “hard” data (p. 87), the authors begin to unpack methodologies for good qualitative evaluations with sections devoted to direct observation (p. 109), interview methods (p. 115), focus groups (p. 116), nominal group technique (p. 119), and the Delphi technique (p. 120). Solid counsel is offered to assist future evaluators to select appropriate instruments to collect data (p. 121) including tests (pp. 122-129), questionnaires (p. 135), samplings (p. 131), classic experiments (p. 139), and simulations / games (p. 145).

Once the data is collected, readers are not left to fend for themselves thanks to Kaufman and his team. Much detailed advice is offered to analyze and interpret the data and ensure reliability, validity, and fidelity (p. 182). Some discussion ensues to set the record straight on properly understanding evaluation measurement standards (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, etc.) (p. 186). Finally, reporting basics are offered to escort fledgling evaluators through oral reports (p. 213), executive briefings (p. 213), demonstrations (p. 214), and written evaluations (p. 214).

Review

Kaufman, Guerra, and Platt (2006) have performed a valuable service for the academic community in collaborating on this book. The book puts evaluation into a framework of social needs and preaches the

gospel of big thinking terms like “Mega” and the “Ideal Vision.” The book is a “how-to” primer written in language that is both practical and comprehensible. Kaufman and his co-writers pull from their multi-faceted experience to deliver a concise volume of best practices in program evaluation. By following their recommended step-by-step action plan, a novice or seasoned program evaluator can develop an Organizational Elements Model (OEM) that will generate reliable and valid data for their clients. The book instructs readers how to ask and answer the right questions in order to measure the gaps in results and their consequences. The scenarios, practical examples, self-assessments, numerous tables, figures, and checklists, all harmonize to provide prospective evaluators the template, tools, and tenacity to get the job done effectively. Dale Brethower, Professor of Psychology Emeritus at Western Michigan University, posting a review on Amazon.com, describes the book: “Consistent with the very best in evaluation theory and practice...I heartily recommend it to superintendents, principals, school boards, and concerned parents. If you could read only one book during the next decade about improving education, this is it” (Editorial Reviews, para. 4). Though there are many books in print today on the subject of program evaluation, other reviewers agree that *Practical Evaluation for Educators* stands out from the crowd. One of the ways any book can be judged is by peer review. Several peer reviews may be obtained from the Corwin Press web site (www.corwinpress.com/books) where reviewers possess the credentials to offer an informed opinion. The featured scholars agree that this book is unique, practical, and provides a service to the academic community.

Conclusion

Practical Evaluation for Educators is successful in its mission to provide educators with a no-nonsense template to conduct quality program evaluations. By using their four basic processes of alignment and direction (of the right evaluation questions), observation (to gain reliable data), comparing results (of what was accomplished with what was planned), and action and adjustment (bringing programs into alignment to meet societal needs), the authors empower educators to find out what works and what does not.

The authors thoughtfully include four scenarios that use familiar language, settings, and situations that will be instantly recognizable to the professional educator. It would take little imagination for educators involved in the day-to-day grind to be able to connect the dots to their own experiences. The scenarios and practical advice offered is convincing evidence that program evaluation can not only be done by an amateur evaluator, but it can be done well, producing meaningful results.

How important is program evaluation? Kaufman and his team assert: “Evaluation – good evaluation – is the best friend of the competent and caring educator, and thus the best friend of the learner and our shared world” (Kaufman et al., 2006, p. 45). By following the principles and incorporating the tools shared in this book, program evaluators can expect to add value to their respective school (or organization) by asking the right questions using a system approach that produces reliable and valid data for confident and competent decision making.

Reference

Brethower, D. (n.d.). [Review of the book *Practical evaluation for educators*]. Amazon.com. Retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/Practical-Evaluation-Educators-Finding-Doesnt/dp/0761931988/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1327607733&sr=8-1

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