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Empowerment Evaluation, Objectivist Evaluation, and Evaluation Standards: Where the Future of Evaluation Should Not Go and Where It Needs to Go

DANIEL L. STUFFLEBEAM

INTRODUCTION

Some recent popular conceptualizations of program evaluation are inadequate philosophically, theoretically, and practically, and are potentially counterproductive. Nevertheless, evaluation innovators can help advance the theory and practice of evaluation even when they set forth confused or wrong proposals. This is especially so when their recommendations attract the attentions not only of those who are seeking easy answers and quick fixes in the difficult and sometimes lucrative business of evaluation, but also of serious students of evaluation who haven't adequately studied and addressed the involved issues. This article attempts to illuminate and address some of the problems in one such reconceptualization of evaluation.

Issue-oriented exchange and critical debate can enrich the professional discussion and are thus appropriate. I acknowledge a special obligation to Professor David Fetterman (1994), because his recent proposal that evaluators engage in **empowerment evaluation** caused me to revisit and think further about some of the fundamental issues in evaluation work. I also owe special debts to Michael Scriven (1991a) for his clear and forthright examination of fundamental philosophical issues in evaluation since the 1960s, and to my colleagues on the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation for having identified and articulated the common principles that should undergird any sound approach to educational evaluation (Joint Committee, 1981, 1988, 1994).¹

The main purpose of this article is to articulate what I see as serious issues in **empowerment evaluation**, in order to help assure that this enthusiastically presented concept will not mislead evaluators, detract from sound progress in serving evaluation

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clients, or discredit the evaluation profession. Fundamentally, this article's orientation is to foster evaluation technology that adheres to appropriate professional standards. Part 1 summarizes the main requirements of *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee, 1994). Part 2 examines the strengths and weaknesses of **empowerment evaluation** in consideration of the *Standards*. Part 3 offers proposals in the vein of **objectivist evaluation** (Scriven, 1991a) for reducing some of the deficiencies. Part 4 concludes with 15 general recommendations for applying objectivist evaluation.

This article is a limited response to what I see as a major need to thoroughly examine the empowerment and objectivist views of evaluation. I hope this article will help, at least in some small way, to stimulate productive exchange, sound theoretical development, and effective professional leadership toward better meeting the standards of the evaluation field.

I have cross-referenced my critical comments and counterproposals to pertinent specific standards within the Joint Committee's *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994). The Appendix contains a numbered list of the descriptors and summary statements of all 30 standards². Throughout the article, within parentheses, each standard is either named in *italics* when no more than four apply or identified by its number when there are more than four. My intent in referencing the individual standards throughout this article is to promote and assist the further development of a well-grounded, strongly principled approach to program evaluation.

One caveat is in order. I acknowledge that *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee, 1994) were developed for use in educational evaluation and may not be totally applicable to the range of evaluations intended to be covered by **empowerment evaluation**. But I see this as a minor worry since the Joint Committee *Standards* that contributed to the original General Accounting Office Evaluation Standards (Cordray, 1981; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1978) were found through a number of studies to cover essentially everything in the Evaluation Research Society Standards (Braskamp & Mayberry, 1982; Cordray, 1982; McKillip & Garberg, 1991; Stufflebeam, 1982), and consistently have been found in a number of studies to be useful and acceptable for judging evaluations outside the field of U.S. education (Burkett & Denson, 1985; Nevo, 1982; Ridings, 1980; Rodrigues de Oliveira, Barros, & Santos, 1981; Orris, 1989; Stockdill, 1984; Straton, 1982). Nevertheless, it is appropriate that I disclose that I am using the Standards in a way that exceeds their intended uses.

PART 1: THE STANDARDS OF SOUND EVALUATION AS A BASIS FOR EXAMINING EVALUATION PROPOSALS

Since 1975, U. S. educators have been forging an agreement on the principles to use in conducting and assessing educational evaluations. The most recent result is the second edition of *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee, 1994). Thirty detailed standards are provided to articulate four basic principles of a sound evaluation: **utility, propriety, feasibility, and accuracy**. For a more complete understanding of these standards and their application in this article, readers are advised to consult the Joint Committee's full account of the *Standards*.

The seven *Utility Standards* collectively require that evaluations be grounded in stakeholder involvement and articulated values, and be credible, informative, timely, and influential. The eight *Propriety Standards* require that evaluations be ethical and fair to the affected parties, including both the service providers and their clients. The three *Feasibility Standards* require that the evaluation procedures and level of effort are appropriate, affordable, politically viable, and reasonably easy to implement. The 12 *Accuracy Standards* require that evaluations reveal and convey technically adequate information and justified inferences about the features of the program or other object that determine its merit and worth.

The Joint Committee Standards are arguably *the* evaluation standards of the education field in North America, since they were systematically developed by a joint committee representing the major professional organizations in the U.S. and Canada concerned with education, have stood the tests of time since their original publication in 1981, were updated in 1994, and are accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) as the American National Standard for judging educational evaluations.

PART 2: SERIOUS ISSUES IN EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION

Professor Fetterman (1994) said little about how well **empowerment evaluation** meets any external standards. Had he considered the Joint Committee Standards, he would have been forced to change his recommendations substantially or to reject *The Program Evaluation Standards*. However, by avoiding reference to external standards, Dr. Fetterman might have been illustrating his advocacy of *self-determination*.

How "Evaluation" is Defined

In fact, Dr. Fetterman (1994, p.1) defines empowerment evaluation as "... the use of evaluation concepts and techniques to foster self-determination." While his commitment to "... helping people help themselves" is a worthy goal, it is not the fundamental goal of evaluation. Surely, this is a valuable role that evaluators and all citizens should play, but it is not evaluation.

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1981, 1988, 1994) defined **evaluation** as "the systematic investigation of the worth or merit of an object." This definition is consistent with the common sense meaning of evaluation presented in standard dictionaries, and with the powerful philosophical argument on the meaning of evaluation given by Michael Scriven in his classic 1967 article, "The Methodology of Evaluation."

Obscuring the Essence of Evaluation—To Assess Value—by Overemphasizing Its Constructive Uses

Empowerment evaluation, as defined by Dr. Fetterman, is grounded firmly in a key logical flaw that Dr. Scriven warned against in his 1967 article. This is the flaw of confusing

the various potential roles of an evaluation with its essential nonvariant goal of determining something's value, or the similar flaw of subordinating an evaluation's (possibly threatening) essential value determination function to less threatening activities that are sometimes, but not necessarily, involved in evaluation work, such as providing evaluation training to clients, helping them to institutionalize systematic evaluation, and informing public relations reports. Scriven (p. 41) noted that "Failure to make this rather obvious distinction between the roles and goals of evaluation ... is one of the factors that has led to the dilution of the process of evaluation to the point where it can no longer serve as a basis for answering the questions which are its goal."

The problem here is not with Dr. Fetterman's recommendation of constructive roles that an evaluator might play (p.1), i.e., "training, facilitation, advocacy, illumination, and liberation." Clients often need such professional services, and there are no a priori reasons why any professional should not provide such help. However, while one might appropriately assist clients in these ways, such services are not evaluation. Clients who believe or claim that such constructive services from an evaluator constitute evaluation are deceiving themselves or others. For example, it would be a serious breach of professional ethics³ for the evaluator to help a client project and publish a positive, noncritical image for a particular program and cause or knowingly allow the client to claim that this advocacy service constituted a defensible evaluation of the program. The evaluator must not confuse or substitute helping and advocacy roles with the rendering of assessments of the merit and/or worth of objects that he/she has agreed to evaluate.

To some degree the problem with **empowerment evaluation** involves accuracy in labeling. I would have had much less problem with the presentation, had it been labeled and presented as "evaluators' adjunct roles and associated social responsibilities." In this vein, Dr. Fetterman has provided much useful advice, but the evaluation's social service and evaluation training roles of the evaluator must not be equated to or confused with the evaluator's obligation to assess merit and worth.

The Potential for Misuse of the Evaluation Process or Its Outcomes

The approach advocated by Dr. Fetterman gives over authority to the client/interest group to choose criteria, collect data, and write/edit and disseminate reports, all in the name of self-evaluation for empowerment. The client/interest group seems to be given license to tell some preferred story, obtain the evaluator's assistance in getting the story across to constituents or others, possibly project the illusion that the evaluation was done or endorsed by an outside expert, and remain immune from a metaevaluation against standards of the evaluation field⁴. These worries occurred to me from both a thorough reading of Dr. Fetterman's article and from hearing his presidential address at the 1993 annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association.

Dr. Fetterman (1994, p. 10) states "**Colleagues who fear that we are giving evaluation away are right.**" I acknowledge that this position is professionally sound if its thrust is to help groups institutionalize evaluation processes that adhere to the Standards of sound evaluation. However, Dr. Fetterman's message is silent on this key requirement.

What worries me most about Dr. Fetterman's portrayal of **empowerment evaluation** is that it could be used as a cloak of legitimacy to cover up highly corrupt or incompetent evaluation activity⁵. Anyone who has been in the evaluation business for very long knows

that many potential clients are willing to pay much money for a “good, empowering evaluation,” one that conveys the particular message, positive or negative, that the client/interest group hopes to present, irrespective of the data, or one that promotes constructive, ongoing, and nonthreatening group process (a particular hazard of cluster evaluations, mentioned in Dr. Fetterman’s article).

Many administrators caught in political conflicts over programs or needing to improve their public relations image likely would pay handsomely for such friendly, nonthreatening, empowering evaluation service. Unfortunately, there are many persons who call themselves evaluators who would be glad to sell such service. Unhealthy alliances of this type can only delude those who engage in such pseudo evaluation practices⁶, deceive those whom they are supposed to serve⁷, and discredit the evaluation field as a legitimate field of professional practice⁸.

I have no doubt that Dr. Fetterman intends **empowerment evaluation** to be an ethical service that advocates appropriate involvement of stakeholders⁹. To avoid abuses such as those noted above, I believe that he must, at the very least, strongly advocate that **empowerment evaluations** be subjected to an independent evaluation against acknowledged professional standards of the evaluation field. To do less could result in aiding and abetting **pseudo evaluations**, which at best are public relations exercises and, worse, can involve biased and unethical uses of information in political battles (Scriven, 1991; Stufflebeam & Webster, 1988). Not to require some level of credible examination of evaluations against appropriate standards is in clear violation of the Joint Committee’s *Metaevaluation* standard.

Empowerment Evaluation as a Form of Relativistic Evaluation, Including this Approach’s Inherent Critical Problems

Empowerment evaluation seems to be a form of **relativistic evaluation**, as are a number of other evaluation approaches, including *discrepancy evaluation*, *responsive evaluation*, *naturalistic evaluation*, and *goal-based evaluation*. In all these approaches the criteria used to judge a program or other object are dependent upon the particular beliefs, goals, or preferences of the client or other stakeholder. The evaluator does not necessarily endorse and/or verify these criteria as indicating whether or not the object of the evaluation is valuable. The evaluator validates the criteria mainly in the sense that they are endorsed by some person or interest group¹⁰. Moreover, when different stakeholders subscribe to different, even conflicting criteria of merit and worth, the relativistic evaluator may thus produce different evaluations to reflect the varying value sets and leave the evaluation conclusions about merit and/or worth to be decided differentially or collectively by the different stakeholders.

A serious issue in this approach, that curiously is not addressed by Dr. Fetterman, concerns what to do about the value conflicts that are inherent in a pluralistic society and what to do about the advocated criteria of merit that are clearly indefensible or at least suspect¹¹. It is not enough to say that such determinations are left to the stakeholders as a part of the empowerment process. By uncritically accepting conflicting interpretations of a set of evaluation findings, the relativistic evaluator promotes conflict and confusion about what constitutes good service and how to improve it. It also seems to signal that the particular field of professional practice and the society where it resides are so primitive that they have no established purposes and rules of ethical behavior and established

principles of sound practice from which different groups can reach equivalent evaluative conclusions.

The relativistic approach to choosing and defining evaluative criteria can be especially counterproductive as regards serving the interests of all the stakeholders¹². By seeking and assigning equal value to contradictory interpretations (such as advocacy and adversary reports), relativistic evaluation can confuse many stakeholders as to what course of action would best serve the needs of clients. Such confusion engenders inaction and can help immobilize progress in a program, as was frequently seen in applications of the relativistic approach called *Discrepancy Evaluation* (Provus, 1971).

Ironically, the heightened uncertainty that may emanate from relativistic evaluation can actually assist biased, autocratic actions by Machiavellian decisions makers. They thrive in situations where degrees of freedom in decision making are unlimited, as when there are no basic agreements on purpose and criteria, and repeated efforts to reach consensus fail. A loose, open approach to evaluating and interpreting data permits authority figures to press their advantage and impose their self-interests with relative immunity to external review regarding the logic, philosophical base, and defensibility of their judgments and decisions¹³.

It seems clear that empowerment evaluators need to attend directly to the issue of evaluative criteria. Leaving the issue to negotiation among the stakeholders hardly bodes well for empowering the weakest members. On the other side, it seems that clear, carefully defined, and validated criteria of merit and worth could help move the issue of criterial determination out of the realm of power politics and into the realm of fair and equal treatment of all the stakeholders. The evaluator can and should play a powerful professional role in assuring that evaluative conclusions are grounded in appropriate and validated criteria of merit and worth¹⁴.

PART 3:

TOWARD A PROFESSIONAL, OBJECTIVIST APPROACH TO EVALUATION

The preceding analysis might contribute to a needs assessment for the evaluation field. It suggests that the state of the art of evaluation, even when viewed in the context of the most recent contributions of the past president of the American Evaluation Association, is rife with unresolved issues, including some seriously flawed proposals. On the other hand, **the evaluation field has developed professional standards, even if it hasn't yet matured to the point of consistently applying and fulfilling them.**

I say let's start that process now. We can move ahead, I think, by adopting more of an objectivist approach to evaluation. *Objectivist evaluations are* based on the theory that moral good is objective and independent of personal or merely human feelings. They are firmly grounded in ethical principles, strictly control bias or prejudice in seeking determinations of merit and worth, invoke and justify appropriate and (where they exist) established standards of merit and worth, obtain and validate findings from multiple sources, set forth and justify conclusions about the evaluand's merit and/or worth, report findings honestly and fairly to all right-to-know audiences, and subject the evaluation process and findings to independent assessments against the standards of the evaluation field. Fundamentally, objectivist evaluations are intended to lead to conclusions that are correct—not correct or incorrect relative to a person's position, standing, or point of view.

According to this view, evaluators should search for, validate, and invoke defensible criteria for determining merit and worth of given objects¹⁵. One obvious example of this recommendation is that evaluators should vastly increase and improve their use of the Joint Committee *Standards* to judge educational evaluation approaches and studies¹⁶. By employing an objectivist approach in evaluating its own work, the evaluation field would signal that not all things, including one's professional ethics, are arbitrary. Instead professional evaluators could continue to examine their professional values for evaluation work; develop agreements on the standards they intend to implement; teach and disseminate the *Standards*; periodically review and update them; regularly apply them; and demonstrate, by such actions, that evaluation is a field of professional practice that has and lives by standards.

In the same vein, evaluators would assist their client groups to also select, clarify, validate, and apply criteria for judging merit and worth of their contributions. This is facilitated by the fact that many fields have developed excellent standards of quality, for example, the computer software field, the blind rehabilitation field, the accounting and auditing field, and many others. In fact, the American National Standards Institute has registered more than 10,000 American national standards across a wide range of products and services.

Moving to an objectivist stance on evaluation is consistent with the tenets of America's democratic society in which public services must be evaluated against the foundation principles of the Constitution, for example, the Fourth Amendment in assessing police actions in obtaining evidence in the criminal court cases. More to the point here, the U.S. public education system must be evaluated against the constitutional requirements for an enlightened citizenry and equitable treatment under the law for all citizens, irrespective of who is making the evaluation. This requires a grounded position in which different evaluators and reviewers of evaluation data will arrive at fundamentally equivalent valuations. A recent example of **objectivist evaluation** was the decision by the Kentucky supreme court that the Kentucky public schools were unconstitutional due to the state's failure to finance public education equitably throughout the state. The Western Michigan University Evaluation Center's current evaluation of Kentucky Education Reform Act programs must be, and is grounded in the same constitutionally based criteria that led to the reform program.

Why a Value-Free Approach is Not an Acceptable Alternative to Objectivist Evaluation

Some members of the evaluation field would say that reaching sound evaluative conclusions is too difficult and important to be left to the evaluators. In the interest of helping evaluators avoid mistakes, Alkin (1969, 1990) has counseled that evaluators just present sound data and leave it to the stakeholders to interpret the findings and make decisions. Like nondirective counseling, this advice has both pragmatic and philosophic underpinnings. On the one hand, this stance helps evaluators, who can hardly be expected to have competence in all substantive areas where they apply their skills, to avoid misinterpreting findings. Philosophically, the value-free stance on reporting findings, by the evaluator's inaction, is thought to impel the clients and other stakeholders to grow in their abilities and habits of using data to make decisions.

While the value-free stance on reporting evaluation findings is appealing because of its stress on helping to assure that the evaluator will "do no harm" and helping stakeholders

mature in their ability to use data, it is professionally inadequate. Leaving value determinations only to decision makers and other users of the evaluation findings places too much faith in the abilities, consistency, and integrity of those with authority and influence by giving them full reign to ignore evaluation findings or to bias their interpretations based on personal interests rather than sound program area principles¹⁷.

Moreover, when evaluators only deliver and do not interpret information, they essentially abrogate their responsibility to help the full range of stakeholders achieve an appropriate understanding of the evaluation procedures and findings and to hold decision makers and others responsible for sound and ethical use of the evaluative information¹⁸. Evaluators must issue auditable judgments along with their evaluation findings¹⁹. Although evaluation is an inexact science and although evaluators often feel more comfortable in not issuing value judgments, it is their professional responsibility to do so (as is clear from the Joint Committee's definition of evaluation). As its root term denotes, an evaluation is a determination of value; and an evaluation of the contributions of a school, hospital, reading program, housing project, administrator, doctor, or teacher is not complete until the value of the contributions has been judged. It is the responsibility of the evaluator or evaluation team to carefully make judgments about quality and worth, to ground the judgments in explicit societal values and valid information, to report the findings and judgments to the right-to-know audiences, to stand able and ready to defend the evaluation report, and to promote and assist appropriate use of the findings²⁰.

The bottom line function of professional judgments by evaluators is to assess and report the extent to which the assessed needs of all the program's clients are being appropriately addressed and effectively served and to demonstrate that the underlying evaluation is professionally sound.²¹

Honoring the Authority-Responsibility Principle

While evaluators should stand without equivocation behind their determinations of merit and worth, they must not develop and act on delusions of grandeur. Becoming well informed about a program or institution by evaluating it gives no license to take it over. In delivering their professional services, evaluators must honor the principle that those with responsibility for delivering sound services must also have commensurate authority to make appropriate decisions, including what actions to take based on evaluation findings²².

Whether they are employed inside the organization where the evaluation is conducted or are commissioned as external agents, evaluators must not usurp the authority of the person(s) duly charged to make and be accountable for organizational decisions²³. For example, they should not publicly campaign for a particular course of action, unilaterally contact and pressure the decision maker's policy board or funding agency to implement the evaluator's recommended course of action, attempt to publicly discredit the decision maker, or seek to take over the decision maker's job. Unfortunately, these examples have a base in reality and are not just abstract worries. Those with responsibility to lead programs and deliver services cannot do so effectively unless they have commensurate authority to make and defend the pertinent decisions. The evaluator's main responsibilities, with respect to program decision making, are (1) to inform and through validity and persuasiveness of their issued findings and judgments to influence decisions and (2) to issue public reports that assist all stakeholders to assess the merit and worth of available options and the defensibility of ensuing decisions, in consideration of the evaluation findings.

Evaluators should play an influential role²⁴ and they should clearly state and be able to defend their findings and conclusions²⁵, but they should keep their involvements on a high professional and moral plane and should not engage in power struggles with duly appointed decision makers²⁶. In consideration of the decision context²⁷, it is enough for evaluators to expect that decision makers duly consider the evaluation reports, along with other relevant information, and that they make the reports available to the full range of right-to-know audiences²⁸.

Keeping in Mind the Range of Evaluative Inputs

Whatever their particular evaluation assignments, evaluators should view and pursue their work realistically in consideration of the particular context²⁹. While a given evaluator can provide valuable information and judgments for consideration by a decision-making group and its constituents, often this is only one of the inputs. For example, in a given decision situation a school district might be able to consider evaluation reports from an external evaluator, an internal evaluation department, a federal grant agency, the state education department, and an accreditation agency. It is not unusual that decision makers have to sort through multiple, sometimes conflicting evaluation reports that in some measure bear on a particular decision situation.

Although conflicting reports may make the decision-making task more difficult, in the long run decision makers are aided by being able to consider and contrast the results of more than one evaluation of a particular program or other object. I believe that decision makers can be greatly assisted to sort out valid from invalid conclusions by employing an objectivist concept of evaluation and then using foundation principles, as found in the Joint Committee *Standards*, technical standards of quality in the fields under study, the U. S. Constitution, and other authoritative codes, to reach determinations of value³⁰.

The Evaluator's Formative and Summative Roles in Project/Program Decision Making and Accountability

In order to make informed decisions, project/program decision makers need more than findings after the fact about what was accomplished³¹. They also require evaluative input on client needs; the range of available, actionable design options; the adequacy of project implementation; and success in serving the targeted beneficiaries. Objectivist evaluators can give invaluable service in providing both formative evaluation to guide projects/programs and summative evaluation to provide overall assessment of the merit and worth of the complete project or program cycle.

Depending on the stage of the project or program, a range of different decision problems and associated needs for evaluative information might be involved, such as the following:

- 1) In the context of strategic planning, a community development corporation's policy board requires assessment data on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in its neighborhood service area in order to set goals and priorities for providing future services.
- 2) In order to decide which of several interventions will most cost effectively help a school district to assist at-risk children to develop basic educational skills, a

school board needs an assessment of alternatives, for example, a particular computer assisted instruction program versus intensive tutoring, a parent involvement program, and some other options.

- 3) The director of a state's program to establish a network of professional development schools needs feedback on the implementation of the project work-plan in order to decide whether to pursue the plan as is, to revise, or to retrain or more closely supervise the staff.
- 4) A private foundation needs a summative evaluation of a program designed to strengthen community development corporations, in order to help the foundation decide whether to continue, expand, or discontinue the program.

The first three examples illustrate formative uses of evaluation, while the fourth illustrates a summative use. In the first example, the evaluator provides evaluation to help assure that the community development corporation is considering the full range of needs, opportunities, and problems in the service area and to assess which (outcome and instrumental) needs are unmet for which segment(s) of the community. In the second example, the evaluator assesses the merits and worths of the alternative educational programs from which the school district might choose. In the third example, the evaluator assesses and reports both the feasibility of the project work plan and the extent and quality of the staff's work, to date, in carrying it out. In the final example, the evaluator assesses the worth of the particular program by looking at its outcomes and its costs.

In all four examples, the evaluator's report would both inform the decision process and help assure that the decision group is fully accountable for making and implementing a defensible decision. The latter is accomplished by validly examining an appropriate range of decision-making options and by reporting the findings to the interested stakeholders³².

PART 4: GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYING OBJECTIVIST EVALUATION

The following recommendations are provided as general advice for applying **objectivist evaluation** as described in this article.

1. Ensure evaluation plans, processes, and reports satisfy the Joint Committee's four basic requirements for a sound evaluation: **propriety, utility, feasibility, and accuracy**. (Joint Committee, 1981, 1988, 1994)
2. Examine programs for their service to citizens of a **democratic society**, including, at the general level, developing and maintaining an enlightened citizenry, achieving equity throughout the society, and serving the common good of the society, and at the more specific level addressing the particular client needs the program is designed to serve.
3. Assess programs for both their **merit and worth**. Merit refers to intrinsic value—are the educational materials accurate, well written, and effectively illustrated? Is the engineer well trained, a competent practitioner, an effective team member? In general, is there evidence of high quality in whatever is being evaluated? Worth concerns extrinsic value—is the entity essential to a particular setting? Does the

- program effectively and efficiently address an area of client need and fulfill a valuable function in the particular organizational setting? (See Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Scriven, 1991.)
4. Reference evaluations of employees and institutions to clear and valid definitions of the appropriate **duties**, that is, responsibilities, recognized in the society and defined by the pertinent profession, that individual professionals and groups of professionals have to fulfill in serving their clients.
 5. Assess the extent to which program staff, institutions, and other responsible parties are professionally **accountable**; that is, publicly and creditably responsible in fulfilling their rightful professional obligations—duties.
 6. Provide direction for **improvement**. (The purpose of evaluation is not only to prove the merit and worth of entities, but also to provide studies and analyses that foster and provide direction for improved services to clients and society.)
 7. Pursuant to Points 5 and 6, conduct both **formative evaluations** oriented to helping program staff improve services and materials *while they are under development* and **summative evaluations** oriented to providing consumers with a full accounting and associated judgments of the appropriateness, quality, and effects of the *delivered services and materials*. (See Scriven, 1991.)
 8. Promote and provide direction for **self-referent evaluation**. Each professional has a basic responsibility to obtain and use creditable assessments of her/his competence and performance in order to be accountable for high quality services and to improve them. Such practice is the hallmark of what it means to be a professional. As a practical example of this, in the coming years U.S. teachers will have the opportunity to have their competence and effectiveness examined against the standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and if they pass to become nationally certified. This is consistent with long-standing, similar practices in such professions as medicine, auditing, and pipe organ playing. (See Scriven's 1983 chapter on self-referent evaluation.)
 9. Employ **context evaluations** (assessments of needs, opportunities, and problems within a service area) *prospectively* (as a regular, ongoing part of planning) to help focus institutional missions and goals and assign priorities. Periodically update and apply context evaluations *retrospectively* to examine whether client needs have been reduced as a possible consequence of program effectiveness. (See Madaus, Scriven, & Stufflebeam, 1983; Stufflebeam & Webster, 1988.)
 10. Employ **input evaluations** (assessment of alternative plans and approaches) *prospectively* to assure that an appropriate range of program approaches is considered and to help assure that adopted plans are responsive to assessed needs, generally superior to available alternatives, comparatively cost effective, grounded in sound policies/contracts, doable and auditable, adequately scheduled, appropriately budgeted, and sufficiently staffed. Also employ input evaluations to search out what Scriven terms the "miracle workers" in any profession, to find out the reasons for their success in areas where others fail, and to assess the extent to which their methods can be successfully transported and taught to others. (See Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985.)
 11. Employ **process evaluations** (assessment of program activities or the performance of individual professionals) *prospectively* to assess, guide, and

- document the implementation of plans and responsibilities and provide feedback for improvement. Apply process evaluations *retrospectively* to assess and judge the extent and quality of the staff's implementation of a plan and help determine why outcomes were or were not substantial and of high quality. (See Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985.)
12. Employ **product evaluations** (comprehensive assessment of results) to identify and assess intended and unintended outcomes and, as the evaluation technology develops, to assess and contrast the unique contributions of individual staff members and groups of staff members to program success. Assess outcomes *prospectively* to help gauge progress and identify areas where additional or improved services are needed. Apply product evaluations *retrospectively* to help identify the full range of positive and negative outcomes and reach judgments of merit and worth of the project, personnel performance, or other enterprise. (See Sanders & Horn, 1993; Scriven, 1991; Webster & Edwards, 1993; Webster, Mendro, & Almaguer, 1994.)
 13. Ground evaluations in functional **communication** among stakeholders regarding the key questions, criteria, findings, and implications of evaluations so as to promote their acceptance, use, and impact. Moreover, conceptualize and employ evaluation systematically as part of a long range improvement process. (See Alkin, Daillak, & White, 1979; Joint Committee, 1988; Keefe, 1994; Stronge & Helm, 1991.)
 14. Employ **multiple perspectives, multiple outcome measures**, and both **qualitative and quantitative methods** to gather and analyze the required information. Program objectives are varied and complex, and data sources and methods used in many evaluations are prone to considerable measurement error. Therefore, it is necessary to employ a multidimensional approach to gathering and analyzing data in order to help assure that evaluative findings have adequate scope and reliability, that they are appropriately cross-checked, and that inferences and conclusions are valid and meaningful. (See Scriven, 1991.)
 15. Judge evaluations by both formative and summative metaevaluations. Formative metaevaluations represent ongoing assessment of the merit and worth of an evaluation to help guide and improve the quality and appropriate uses of evaluations. Summative metaevaluations provide a comprehensive assessment and judgment of the merit and worth of a completed evaluation to help users assess and interpret findings and to give direction to improving future evaluations. These metaevaluation tasks are greatly assisted by application of the preceding 14 recommendations and especially the full text of the Joint Committee's professional standards for program and personnel evaluations in education. (See Joint Committee, 1981; Joint Committee, 1988; Joint Committee, 1994; Madaus, Scriven, & Stufflebeam, 1983; Scriven, 1991.)

The above 15 recommendations apply to a wide range of evaluations of programs, projects, materials, equipment, facilities, and personnel in social and educational program areas. In my view, professionals who master the meaning and use of these recommendations for sound evaluation are in a strong position to effectively plan, conduct, and use evaluations to help assure that services are appropriate; of high quality; frugal; beneficial to the full range of stakeholders; focused on appropriate foundation purposes, policies,

and priorities; clearly directed to the duties of the responsible parties; supportive of the democratic principles of enlightenment and empowerment of all citizens; well informed by sound evaluative feedback; and fully accountable to constituents.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this article has been to show that the recommendations set forth for **empowerment evaluation** are not consistent with the standards of the evaluation field and to present some alternative recommendations that would move the evaluation field in the direction of meeting *The Program Evaluation Standards*. The bottom line recommendation is that evaluators, especially in the field of education, adopt and implement *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee, 1994).

In addition, analysis and recommendations were provided for the adoption, development, and implementation of the **objectivist concept of evaluation**. Essentially, the objectivist approach is based on the ethical theory that moral good is objective and independent of personal or merely human feelings. When competently executed, objectivist evaluations lead to conclusions that are correct—not correct or incorrect relative to a person's position, standing, preference, or point of view. Also, it was shown that sound **objectivist evaluation** essentially is evaluation that conforms to the Joint Committee's program evaluation standards.

The article was concluded with 15 recommendations designed to provide the essential elements of an **objectivist** approach to evaluation. By following the recommendations the responsible evaluator avoids the pitfalls of the **value free orientation** (leaving value determinations to others), the **relativist orientation** (fostering confusion and conflict by accepting and reporting a range of alternative personalized answers to given questions, and ignoring the fact that foundation principles exist for objectively answering questions about many program areas and the quality of evaluations), and **empowerment evaluation** (giving away the control of the evaluation's quality and integrity and turning evaluation into pseudo evaluation exercises, in the quest to foster self-determination).

Evaluation is an enormously important societal function. To serve society well evaluations must address and answer important questions, provide well-grounded judgments of merit and worth, be utterly ethical, and be trusted and respected by clients and members of the evaluation profession. It is indeed appropriate that U.S. educators developed standards by which to govern and assess the work of evaluators. It is incumbent on professional evaluators to do all they can to live up to the standards of their field. **Empowerment evaluation** essentially ignores the *Standards* and, wittingly or not, goes in the direction of making evaluation a massive public relations and group process enterprise. It is well and good to help stakeholders conduct their own evaluations; but self-evaluations, at least as much as independent evaluations, must be held to sound standards of technical and ethical practice and often supplemented with independent evaluations. The **empowerment evaluation** line so far is silent on these crucial issues. I don't like issuing the kind of message I've given here about **empowerment evaluation**. But I cannot stand silent and watch a charismatic spokesman for evaluation give away this field's progress toward attaining and maintaining the status of a profession that sets and lives up to high standards of professional conduct.

APPENDIX THE PROGRAM EVALUATION STANDARDS

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation; Sage, 1994

Utility Standards. The utility standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of intended users. These standards are as follows:

- U1 **Stakeholder Identification.** Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs can be addressed.
- U2 **Evaluator Credibility.** The persons conducting the evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent to perform the evaluation, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance.
- U3 **Information Scope and Selection.** Information collected should be broadly selected to address pertinent questions about the program and be responsive to the needs and interests of clients and other specified stakeholders.
- U4 **Values Identification.** The perspectives, procedures, and rationale used to interpret the findings should be carefully described, so that the bases for value judgments are clear.
- U5 **Report Clarity.** Evaluation reports should clearly describe the program being evaluated, including its context, and the purposes, procedures, and findings of the evaluation, so that essential information is provided and easily understood.
- U6 **Report Timeliness and Dissemination.** Significant interim findings and evaluation reports should be disseminated to intended users, so that they can be used in a timely fashion.
- U7 **Evaluation Impact.** Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage follow-through by stakeholders, so that the likelihood that the evaluation will be used is increased.

Feasibility Standards. The feasibility standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal. The standards are as follows:

- F1 **Practical Procedures.** The evaluation procedures should be practical, to keep disruption to a minimum while needed information is obtained.
- F2 **Political Viability.** The evaluation should be planned and conducted with anticipation of the different positions of various interest groups, so that their cooperation may be obtained, and so that possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation operations or to bias or misapply the results can be averted or counteracted.
- F3 **Cost Effectiveness.** The evaluation should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value, so that the resources expended can be justified.

Propriety Standards. The propriety standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results. These standards are as follows:

- P1 **Service Orientation.** Evaluations should be designed to assist organizations to address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of targeted participants.
- P2 **Formal Agreements.** Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or formally to renegotiate it.
- P3 **Rights of Human Subjects.** Evaluations should be designed and conducted to respect and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects.
- P4 **Human Interactions.** Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation, so that participants are not threatened or harmed.
- P5 **Complete and Fair Assessment.** The evaluation should be complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program being evaluated, so that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.
- P6 **Disclosure of Findings.** The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings along with pertinent limitations are made accessible to the persons affected by the evaluation, and any others with expressed legal rights to receive the results.
- P7 **Conflict of Interest.** Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly and honestly, so that it does not compromise the evaluation processes and results.
- P8 **Fiscal Responsibility.** The evaluator's allocation and expenditure of resources should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.

Accuracy Standards. The accuracy standards are intended to ensure that an evaluation will reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the program being evaluated. The standards are as follows:

- A1 **Program Documentation.** The program being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately, so that the program is clearly identified.
- A2 **Context Analysis.** The context in which the program exists should be examined in enough detail, so that its likely influences on the program can be identified.
- A3 **Described Purposes and Procedures.** The purposes and procedures of the evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail, so that they can be identified and assessed.
- A4 **Defensible Information Sources.** The sources of information used in a program evaluation should be described in enough detail, so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed.
- A5 **Valid Information.** The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the interpretation arrived at is valid for the intended use.
- A6 **Reliable Information.** The information gathering procedures should be chosen or developed and then implemented so that they will assure that the information obtained is sufficiently reliable for the intended use.

- A7 **Systematic Information.** The information collected, processed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.
- A8 **Analysis of Quantitative Information.** Quantitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.
- A9 **Analysis of Qualitative Information.** Qualitative information in an evaluation should be appropriately and systematically analyzed so that evaluation questions are effectively answered.
- A10 **Justified Conclusions.** The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified, so that stakeholders can assess them.
- A11 **Impartial Reporting.** Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any party to the evaluation, so that evaluation reports fairly reflect the evaluation findings.
- A12 **Metaevaluation.** The evaluation itself should be formatively and summatively evaluated against these and other pertinent standards, so that its conduct is appropriately guided and, on completion, stakeholders can closely examine its strengths and weaknesses.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Arlen Gullickson, James Sanders, Michael Scriven, and Anthony Shinkfield for their useful critical reactions to a prior draft of this article, but of course absolve them of responsibility for any deficiencies in the text.

2. Appreciation is expressed to the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation for its permission to list in this article the descriptors and summary statements of the 30 standards appearing in the 1994 *The Program Evaluation Standards*.

3. Including Joint Committee standards labeled *U2, U3, U4, P5, P7, A5, A10, and A11*.

4. Evaluators who give away the authority to write, edit, and release the evaluation report put at risk the Joint Committee standards labeled *Evaluator Credibility, Conflict of Interest, and Impartial Reporting*).

5. See Joint Committee standards labeled *U2, F2, P5, P6, P7, A4, A5, A10, A11, and A12*

6. This violates the *Conflict of Interest, Valid Information, Justified Conclusions, and Impartial Reporting* standards)

7. Violates the *Service Orientation* standard

8. A violation of the *Evaluator Credibility* standard.

9. Points in favor of meeting the *Service Orientation* and *Stakeholder Identification* standards.

10. This is problematic regarding the Joint Committee standard labeled *Values Identification*, which requires a careful examination and justification of the criteria used to reach determinations of merit and worth.

11. See the Joint Committee standards labeled *Political Viability* and *Values Identification*

12. See the Joint Committee standards labeled *Stakeholder Identification, Evaluation Impact, and Service Orientation*

13. This situation is a clear violation of the Joint Committee standards labeled *Political Viability, Conflict of Interest, and Metaevaluation*.

14. These are concerns of the Joint Committee standards labeled *Evaluation Credibility* and *Values Identification*.

15. This is consistent with the Joint Committee standard labeled *Values Identification*.
16. Conforms to the *Metaevaluation* standard.
17. See the *Service Orientation*, *Rights of Human Subjects*, and *Conflict of Interest* standards.
18. See the *Evaluator Credibility* and *Service Orientation* standards.
19. See the *Information Scope and Selection*, *Valid Information*, and *Justified Conclusions* standards.
20. See the *Evaluator Credibility* standard.
21. See the *Service Orientation* standard.
22. See the *Evaluator Credibility* standard.
23. See the *Conflict of Interest* standard.
24. See the *Evaluation Impact* standard.
25. See the *Report Clarity*, *Justified Conclusions*, and *Impartial Reporting* standards.
26. Clear violation of the *Conflict of Interest* standard.
27. See the *Context Analysis* standard.
28. In accordance with the *Report Timeliness* and *Dissemination* standards and within the constraints of the *Disclosure of Findings* standard.
29. See the *Context Analysis* standard.
30. See the *Values Identification* and *Metaevaluation* standards.
31. See the *Information Scope and Selection* standard.
32. See the *Report Timeliness and Dissemination* and *Disclosure of Findings* standards.

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