

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THIS BOOK

There is a growing demand throughout the world for assessment and evaluation of social development programmes. Administrators and planners find themselves under pressure from a variety of sources to establish the effectiveness or otherwise of their rapidly increasing expenditure on social development. There is considerable evidence, and certainly a wide-spread assumption, that the more traditional styles of programme are failing to achieve the objectives for which they were designed or to meet the needs of the population to whom they are directed.

These pressures are probably particularly true in respect to programmes concerned with young people. On the one hand many countries of the world find the numerical majority of their people are under twenty-one years of age. Secondly they recognise, appropriately, that the future of a nation lies in the hands of those who are young people at the present time.

It is therefore not surprising that the need for evaluation has been more strongly expressed by the new countries who are most aware of the important role to be played by young people. However, one might also suggest that their particular concern with evaluation originates in part with their dissatisfaction with existing programme models.

Although superficially it might be suggested that one of the major problems facing new nations is the extent to which programme models adapted from the more developed countries are inappropriate to their needs, the real situation is more complex than this. Many of the programmes in developed nations have been perpetuated without any critical examination to ascertain the extent to which they achieve their goals and, in fact, many of them may be ineffectual in their country of origin. The extent to which paternalism by the adult generation towards the youth generation plays a major part in planning is probably a major factor in the uncritical attitude towards youth programming. However, during the last five years administrators in even the longest developed countries have been taking a much more critical stance towards social development and so we now see an increasing demand for more adequate evaluation in virtually all countries.

This book has been written to provide some preliminary guidelines for planners and administrators of services to young people. Obviously a great deal of what it says will be true of evaluation of any social development programme and not merely those concerned with youth, but the author has attempted to focus upon special issues relating to youth wherever these arise. The focus is also upon "out-of-school" services and programmes rather than upon formal education because there are many special issues and an extensive literature on the assessment of schooling. At the same time, there is a considerable movement towards the restructuring of education, and so many of the comments here may prove relevant to those concerned with educational evaluation, even though this is not the primary focus of the book.

It is not possible within a work of this length to provide a text book for the professional worker actually engaged in implementing an evaluation programme. References will be given elsewhere to some of the more detailed texts on methodology but the aim of the present volume is to provide guidelines to the establishment of evaluation programmes and to their place in the overall planning process.

The arrangement of the volume is that in *Section A* an outline is given to issues in the establishment and administration of evaluation, while in *Section B* some brief abstracts of examples of evaluation reports in various Commonwealth countries are given. No attempt has been made to develop a comprehensive list of evaluation projects but a number selected in order to demonstrate the diversity of approaches which may be taken and the wide variety of cultural settings in which evaluation has been undertaken.

1.2 PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

In writing for an international audience it would obviously be unwise to establish rigid definitions of such terms as youth, youth work, youth programmes, or even education. Obviously each of these will be defined (or will fail to be defined) by each country according to its own conditions and situation. Some of these terms will be subject to continuing controversy about definition, much of which is often relatively fruitless.

When one is entering upon critical evaluation, however, it is important to define terms and the way in which they are used. It is also important to be consistent in the way in which one uses each term. As a very simple example, one sees literature on youth services adopting a definition of youth which implies limitation of the term to those between approximately 14 – 21 years. These studies then often take into consideration, without making explicit the extent to which they have departed from the stated definition, the services provided for young people in the 10 – 14 years age category.

Part of the reason why societies find it difficult to achieve a clear and satisfactory definition of youth is the constant social change surrounding the concept of "youth". In a simple primitive society there is no stage of social development corresponding precisely with that period known as adolescence or teenage in the so-called "developed" countries. This period of life is compressed by primitive societies into a brief ceremony of initiation during which the individual passes from childhood to adulthood. As societies have become more complex, developing a wide variety of social roles together with the need for specialised and prolonged education, so the period of initiation has grown into a lengthy stage of life which we generally call youth. Consequently just as the growth and change of society is a dynamic thing so must any adequate long-run definition of youth be a dynamic one.

Herein lies the difficulty of trying to reach a widespread common agreement on a definition of such a term and the fruitlessness of many efforts to do so. At the same time this does not excuse the person concerned with research, evaluation or planning, from being other than absolutely clear about the definitions he adopts for his immediate purpose and then being consistent in their application. Such definitions may, of course, have tight rigid boundaries, or they may be framed with some flexibility and tolerance in their boundaries. Programmes which have to be provided for through formal legislation will often lay down quite specific and rigid boundaries (e.g., "from the date of his or her 14th birthday to the date of his or her 21st birthday"). However, individuals develop at vastly different rates, and a boundary based rigidly on chronological age in this way will obviously be an artificial one insofar as the needs of individual people are concerned.

Various social characteristics will often provide more useful boundaries, not only for purposes of definition, but more importantly for purposes of programme planning. These characteristics might include boundaries like:—

- Completion of primary education
- Entry to secondary education
- Entry to full-time employment
- “Drop-out” from full-time education
- Marriage
- Departure from the parental home, etc.

As an extreme example of flexibility in definition, we note the recent suggestion of an American psychiatrist for the redefinition of adolescence:—

“..... a person whose behaviour indicates that he has come to grips with a conflict between his need to remain dependent on the one hand and his intense desire to become independent on the other”.¹

A comparable situation exists with regard to formal education. The educational system has become highly institutionalized in most countries and as a result has often established limited and rigid inter-relationships with other aspects of living. However this pattern of organization has been seriously questioned by many critics and there is a rapidly growing volume of literature suggesting that the traditional approach to schooling is inadequate.

Thus, although one could traditionally define education clearly and in terms of schooling, it is now recognised that education is a pervasive and life-long process taking place in a variety of contexts throughout each individual's life. Formal schooling systems have therefore attempted to relate themselves more adequately to family life, community life and work life. The pattern of this change differs widely from one society to another and to attempt in a work of this kind, any definition of educational programmes as opposed to other kinds of programme would clearly be improper. Each country must examine and determine this question for itself.

The most important point to make in respect to definition is that administrators, planners and evaluators must strive for clear definition of their terminology and for a maximum clarity of communication with each other. Evaluation will often in itself reveal the extent to which lack of clarity in communication has damaged the effectiveness of programmes. However, the evaluator who is careless about his own definition of terms and his own clarity of communication may further confuse the situation. There is a particular responsibility upon those engaged in planning and evaluation to ensure that this does not happen.

1.3 THE CONDITIONS FOR EVALUATION

It is of fundamental importance to recognise that evaluation must essentially be concerned with possible change in an existing programme. One of the obvious preconditions for evaluation to occur is a state of uncertainty about a particular programme and a felt need to reduce the uncertainty.

Useful evaluations are most likely to occur when: (1) There is agreement amongst those concerned that evaluation of the programme is desirable; (2) There is a clear understanding of the purpose of the evaluation to be carried out; and (3) There is agreement regarding the uses and possible consequences of the evaluation.

The consequences which arise may include significant change in the programme, and hence in its pattern of staffing; no change in the programme but increased confidence in those involved; or complete abandoning of the programme in favour of an alternative. Thus it is easy to see that evaluation poses a potential threat to those persons committed to a programme and equally easy to see why genuine evaluation has all too rarely been undertaken. We will comment further in the next Chapter on the organizational process which must underpin any approach to programme evaluation.

Evaluation is least likely to be useful when administrators attempt to use it as a tool in the control of staff or as a device to collect only that information which will either support or destroy a specific programme. It is probably better not to evaluate a programme than to evaluate it for the wrong reasons.

Even given appropriate reasons and conditions for evaluation it is all too easy to be uncritical in one's approach. Professor Alan Klein has commented:

"..... that many workers find all kinds of reasons and rationalizations for avoiding a thorough, honest examination and tabulation of their scores of effectiveness and failures. To be sure the tabulation of 'reaching-hits and reaching-failures' of human needs and goals is a more complex matter than for instance that of playing pool, where every player knows exactly that if the 8 ball rolls into the side pocket when he is trying to put the 12 ball into that pocket and the 12 ball does not get there, the 8 ball does not count.

Yet despite the difference in complexity, this example still implies a challenge to the group work profession's own program-testing faculties and skills. Too often when accounting in a monthly or annual program report, group work practitioners have been remiss in this sense: We take aim at ball 12. Instead of ball 12 we touch ball 8 and then we proceed to write the report on 8 without ever coming to grips with why we missed the ball 12, the very aim we had been trying to reach. It seems to me, it is of utmost importance that we learn to call our shots, that we further learn to follow not only their direction but learn also to give the reason for their deflection from the intended goal, as applied to each program we use".²

It is now useful to end this Introduction with an overview of the possible objectives for evaluation together with an example of the kinds of question which might be asked in a specific programme.

OBJECTIVES OF EVALUATION

- (1) To examine the goals of a programme and assess their appropriateness within the context where the programme operates.
- (2) To measure the extent to which the programme is successful in achieving these goals.
- (3) To measure the extent to which expenditure of resources upon the programme is justified by its results.
- (4) To test possible alternative methods of achieving the programme's goals.
- (5) To develop a system of providing a continuing check upon the effectiveness of a programme in order to facilitate its review and change as part of the continuing process of programme operation.

Let us now assume as an example, that we are looking at the evaluation of a vocational training institute established to provide marketable employment skills to young men who have dropped out of the formal educational system. Some of the questions which might be asked in respect to this programme are listed below divided into groups according to the five goals above.

(1) *Goals*

Are there sufficient young men without marketable skills to justify the programme?

Are the skills being taught likely to be in sufficient demand within the economy during the next ten years?

(2) *Achievement of Goals*

Do the skills being taught motivate the young men concerned to participate in the programme?

Does the teaching staff have sufficient capacity to teach the skills to a marketable level?

Are there sufficient resources (staff, equipment, teaching aids, accommodation, finance) to provide this programme to the number of young men who need it?

Is the programme being utilized by that section of the population for whom it was designed?

Is the programme reaching a sufficient proportion of the population for whom it was designed?

Are the skills being taught at the right level to ensure participants of an adequate opportunity in the labour market?

(3) *Resource Expenditure*

What is the real cost of the programme per participant?

How many of the participants, once trained, are actually entering the work for which they have been trained and how long do each of them remain in gainful employment in this field?

What are the gains to the economy in respect to each participant entering and remaining in employment?

Does the programme have beneficial side effects either upon the individuals concerned or upon society? If so, can the benefit of this be measured?

(4) *Alternatives*

In the light of answers to the above questions, can more effective or less costly methods be devised to achieve the same goals?

(5) *Continuing Programme*

Are the records being kept by the programme adequate to enable regular checking of its effectiveness?

If not, what further records should be kept, by whom should they be kept, and in what way can they best be analysed to provide continuing information.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Bauer, Francis C., Fact and Folklore About Adolescents, *Bulletin National Association Secondary School Principals*, 49: 172–182 (March, 1965).
2. Klein, Alan, *Reaching Teenagers Through Effective Programming* (New York City Youth Board, 1956).