

Ryan, K. E., & Cousins, J. B. (Eds.). (2009). *The Sage International Handbook of Educational Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 608 pages.

*Reviewed by Wolfgang Beywl*

As part of globalization, many industrial societies transform into knowledge societies. As a result, optimized individual and organizational learning increases in significance. Moreover, educational policy and science turn into experimental, comparative, international assessments and external school evaluations with the intent to identify best practices. At the same time, “evaluation for learning” emerges as an immediate means to improve pedagogical practice and educational institutions. The book discusses the results of both roles of evaluation as well as tensions between them.

The anthology includes 31 contributions divided into six parts. Four “families” of evaluation approaches—namely the scientific approach, monitoring and evaluation capacity building, learning and discovery, and politics—are discussed in Parts II through V. Part I discusses the context of educational evaluation, and Part VI concludes with opportunities and new dilemmas.

*Part I:* In the chapter “Globalizing Influences on Western Evaluation Imaginary,” Thomas Schwandt introduces two scenarios: “homogenization” and “unfinished unevenness.” He argues that the apocalyptic perspective of the neoliberal-technocratic alignment dominates, increasing the urgency of political discourse about morally reasonable and socially legitimate evaluation practices. Nick L. Smith describes “Fundamental Evaluation Issues in a Global Society” and calls for answers to six questions: What exactly is the purpose of evaluation? How do evaluators define their identity? What counts as adequate evidence? What methods are necessary to obtain such findings? What exactly is the role of stakeholders? How are evaluation and organizational development connected?

*Part II:* Writing on “methods,” Melvin Marks suggests that globalization increases the interest in generalizability. Peter Steiner, Angela

Wroblewski, and Thomas Cook call for more randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Madhabi Chatterji questions the utility of RCTs and alternatively argues for extended-term, mixed methods with exploratory and confirmatory phases. Gary Henry and Dana Rickman present an exemplar of “scientific” evaluation that is targeted at generalizability and exemplified by a preschool program in Georgia. Lois-ellin Datta criticizes the unrealistic gold standard of the RCT and votes for the “platinum standard” of contextually appropriate evaluation.

*Part III:* Katherine Ryan and Irwin Feller discuss the effects of accountability based on student-outcome measurement and make claims for in-house and self-evaluation. Gerry McNamara and Joe O’Hara examine the failure of external school evaluation in “Where Global Meets Local,” and point to the difficulties in implementing internal school evaluations. David Nevo urges the readers to define the relationship between internal and external evaluation anew. Internal school evaluation would be a sustainable investment that requires evaluation competencies currently lacking in schools.

*Part IV:* Peter Dahler-Larsen perceives the globalizing societies to be in a mode of “reflective modernization,” which would lead to more monitoring and empirical inquiry. He also argues for a new cooperation between internal and external evaluation and emphasizes the role of participatory, learning-oriented evaluation approaches such as self-evaluation, where people critically examine something that they do themselves. Evaluators should share their knowledge and voice their critique in larger public forums. John Elliott criticizes the current trend of “scientific measurement,” because it hinders learning. Instead, evaluation should advocate for autonomy of the educational system.

*Part V:* In “Own Goals,” Saville Kushner emphasizes the relevance of evaluation rooted in local democracy and describes its task as follows: Evaluators have no warrant to make their own judgement—their job is to articulate and feed into other people’s judgements. Ove Karlsson Vestman and Christina Segerholm report on a mostly failed attempt to use “deliberate evaluation”—largely perceived as “alternative”—within a post-socialist context. They warn of the inappropriate application of Western evaluation approaches to culturally and normatively different societies.

*Part VI:* Ulf Lundgren suggests that evaluation originally was a means for open school development, and that it has now evolved into

a driver of efficiency and control under the auspices of economics of education. In her article, "Serving the Public Interest Through Educational Evaluation: Salvaging Democracy by Rejecting Neoliberalism," Sandra Mathison critically reflects on the interconnections of measurement and testing using the example (among others) of the McGraw-Hill enterprise, which also incorporates the rating agency Standard & Poor's as well as the test and textbook producer CTB. Bradley Cousins and Katherine Ryan conclude the anthology with a goal of allowing learning from the prior articles. They connect the six fundamental issues, denominated by Nick Smith with the four evaluation "families," and formulate resulting requirements for the professionalization of evaluation.

In sum, the book presents a successful approach to intensifying the international discourse of experts who are researching evaluation and adjacent fields. The predominantly economically stimulated changes in the educational system—and relatedly, in educational research and evaluation—are partly advocated and partly critically discussed from different cultural, ethical, and methodological lenses. The central question is how the relationship between external and internal, and improvement- and accountability-oriented evaluation develops under consideration of the powerful economic and political force fields. To vet this question, the edited book provides a lot of material and concise arguments, as well as examples from several countries and regions.

Services and opportunities as well as counterproductive effects of large, standardized evaluations are illustrated. Although more examples of successful cooperation between external and internal evaluation could have been enlightening, this is not a shortcoming of the book, but rather one of current evaluation practice. Even advocates of increased internal evaluation suggest that there is little compelling evidence for its successful and sustainable application. As a result, the existence of many useless, or even dysfunctional, standardized evaluations and the lack of viable alternative approaches present an emerging dilemma.

With its diversity and breadth, the book is internationally unique and therefore a good reference for research and critical reflection about the tensions between globalization, educational systems, and professional evaluation. It provides an intellectual foundation for scientific discourse and the developments of professional educational evaluation in a globalized world.