A Cross-cultural Evaluation Conversation in India: Benefits, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

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Abstract: *Through a guided discussion, this article explores a five-year cross-cultural evaluation relationship comprising multiple projects involving an evaluator from Canada and a group of Indian colleagues working on educational reform in India. The initiative was funded through a multilateral consortium of donors and involved Western evaluation specialists working in collaboration with Indian colleagues to (a) develop evaluation capacity within the country and (b) produce evaluative knowledge about education quality initiatives associated with large-scale educational reform. This article is based on a conversation between the principal investigator from Canada and three Indian colleagues who had been involved in all phases of the work. It focuses on their respective perspectives and experiences, including the benefits obtained and the challenges encountered in the process of bridging Western and Indian knowledge systems. The article begins with background about the initiative and continues with a conversation among the participants about their cross-cultural evaluation experience. It concludes with an analysis of the issues that emerged and generation of lessons learned for evaluators interested in cross-cultural evaluation.*

Keywords: *Cross-cultural evaluation, evaluation capacity building, participatory evaluation, program evaluation*

Résumé : *Sous forme de discussion, l'article fait le point sur cinq années de relations entre un évaluateur canadien et un groupe de collègues indiens ayant travaillé, dans le contexte d'une évaluation interculturelle regroupant plusieurs projets, sur la réforme de l'éducation en Inde. Le projet était financé par un consortium multilatéral de subventionneurs. Des spécialistes occidentaux de l'évaluation ont collaboré avec leurs collègues indiens (a) au développement des capacités en évaluation dans le pays, et (b) à la production de connaissances en évaluation concernant des projets éducatifs de qualité associés à une réforme majeure de l'éducation. L'article est tiré d'une conversation entre le chercheur principal du Canada et trois de ses collègues de l'Inde ayant participé à toutes les étapes du travail. Il est centré sur leurs perspectives*

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et expériences respectives, et aborde notamment les avantages du rapprochement entre les deux systèmes de connaissances, occidental et indien, et les difficultés qu'il soulève. L'article s'ouvre sur la présentation générale du projet et poursuit avec les échanges des participants au sujet de leur expérience d'évaluation interculturelle. Il se termine par une analyse des questions soulevées par la discussion et une synthèse des leçons à retenir pour les évaluateurs qui s'intéressent à l'évaluation interculturelle.

Mots clés : *évaluation interculturelle, renforcement des capacités en évaluation, évaluation participative, évaluation de programmes*

Today, cultural diversity in the evaluation context is increasingly the norm rather than the exception. Evaluation stakeholders and participants are likely to contrast with the evaluator in terms of the ways in which they look, think, and act. For this and multiple other reasons, the relationship between culture and evaluation has received considerable attention from scholars and evaluators who are attempting to raise awareness about the need to understand the complexity of evaluations taking place in cross-cultural and multicultural contexts (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007, 2009; Hopson, 2003, 2009; Mertens, 2008). This attention is justified by the fact that an understanding of cultural dimensions is critical for evaluations that aim to improve social programs and generate desired outcomes (Hopson, 2009).

In this article we share an informal conversation that took place among a Canadian evaluator and a group of colleagues from India, all of whom have been collaborating together on a large-scale evaluation capacity building (ECB) initiative and a variety of evaluation projects over the past five years. As a cross-cultural experience, the focus of this conversation is on the benefits obtained and the challenges encountered in the process of bridging Western and Indian evaluation knowledge systems.

BACKGROUND

The focus for this article is an ongoing collaborative evaluation relationship associated with two large-scale initiatives in India: (a) ECB in the context of elementary education reform and (b) the design and implementation of a national evaluation of teacher in-service training in secondary education. Both involved evaluators and consultants from Western, developed country contexts working with Indian professional colleagues. Professor Brad Cousins from Canada has been in a leadership role with both initiatives since the outset. Dr. Jayshree Oza has led the coordination of the initiatives as head of the SSA Technical Cooperation Fund (SSA-TCF) and subsequently the RMSA Technical Cooperation Agency (RMSA-TCA), organizations created to manage these donor-funded initiatives. Professors Undurthy Lakshminarayana and Vassant D. Bhat, members of the Regional Institute of Education in Mysore, were participants in the elementary ECB initiative and assumed leadership roles in the national evaluation of secondary teacher training. In total, these colleagues have worked together for more than

five years on evaluation-related activities and can be described as cross-cultural implicating evaluation experts and specialists from Western developed countries and Indian education specialists.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)– Evaluation Capacity Building

This multiyear evaluation capacity building (ECB) initiative unfolded in two cycles.

Cycle 1: Since 2009, Cousins has been directly involved in large-scale evaluation capacity building projects and evaluations associated with the national educational reform in India. In January 2009, Cousins travelled to New Delhi, India, to begin what turned out to be the first cycle of an ECB initiative designed and coordinated by the SSA-TCF, an organization created to lead capacity-building work funded by international donors. Working in cooperation with the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the initial 3.5-year ECB initiative included the training of NCERT faculty and educational program community members in evaluation methods and practice. In the first cycle, four state-level educational quality initiatives were evaluated as part of the ECB strategy. These interventions were associated with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the major national elementary educational reform initiative sponsored by the Indian government with some multilateral donor support. The reform followed the United Nations Millennium Goals for education including "access to education for all."

The evaluations were designed to assist the Government of India with elementary educational quality initiatives associated with large-scale national elementary educational reform across the country. Under supervision, over 50 NCERT professors and educational program stakeholders in four separate states—Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Himachal Pradesh—designed and implemented evaluations of selected educational quality initiatives (e.g., activity-based learning, multilingual education). Under the coordination of TCA and the leadership of Cousins, Western evaluation specialists and consultants participated in designing and implementing training and on a technical advisory committee providing guidance to four state-level evaluation teams. Four state-level evaluations were produced and subjected to external peer review by Western international experts.

Cycle 2: A second cycle of the ECB elementary education sector initiative began in the summer/fall of 2011. A cohort of Indian educators committed to program evaluation training was sponsored by NCERT in New Delhi. About 50 educators from more than a dozen states in India answered the call for interest broadcast by SSA-TCF. The training, led by Cousins, involved centralized workshops given by Western international experts in program evaluation. Whereas the first cycle of training focused on four state-level evaluations, the second cycle focused on four multistate evaluations on (a) teacher training program in English (Karnataka), (b) Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) (Chattisgarh, Mizoram), (c) teacher professional development (Andaman & Nicobar Islands; Chattisgarh), and (d) Mid-day Meal programs (MDM) (Punjab & Uttarakhand). NCERT professors, having participated in the first cycle of training, provided support and guidance to teams

from the new cohort. The 2011–2012 series of workshops were delivered by a team of five evaluation specialists from Canada, the United States, and Israel with support from additional Canadian resource persons who were coordinated by SSA-TCF.

Both cycles of these initiatives involved centralized workshops held at key points: planning, instrument development, data analysis, and reporting. Most workshops were held in New Delhi, and one was held in each of Dharhamsala and Mysore. Ongoing technical support was provided to evaluation teams by Western resource persons. We now describe the second initiative, a national collaborative evaluation involving Western evaluation experts and Indian professional colleagues.

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA): National Evaluation of Secondary School Teacher In-service

Cousins recently assumed the role of principal investigator for a large-scale national evaluation coordinated by RMSA-TCA and was joined on the project by Hind Al Hudib. This formative evaluation focused on RMSA teacher in-service training, which had been implemented nationally in India since 2009–2010. RMSA is the most recent initiative of the Government of India to achieve the goal of universalization of secondary education.

The evaluation was essentially a mixed-methods, multiple case study in nine selected Indian states—Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha—and it comprised teacher questionnaire data, interviews, focus groups, and document data collection in each state. It was augmented by (a) a global review and integration of research on teacher in-service training, including a collection of empirical studies in development contexts, and (b) profiles of two organizations—British Council and IT for Change—implementing reputationally effective teacher training in the country. This formative evaluation project is being coordinated by RMSA-TCA, in cooperation with NCERT. The evaluation is based on principles for collaborative approaches to evaluation and involves a large team consisting of educational stakeholders and several Indian program evaluators who were involved previously in the SSA ECB project (including Lakshminarayana & Bhat). Members of the team met four times in Delhi to (a) conceptualize the evaluation, (b) develop instruments and a plan for data collection, (c) analyze data, and (d) interpret findings and generate recommendations for action.

Cousins and his three Indian colleagues (Oza, Lakshminarayana, & Bhat) have been collaborating on these projects for more than five years. During this long and successful relationship of exchange and interaction among them, they have on numerous occasions informally identified and discussed cultural differences related to their work on evaluation and capacity-building activities. This being the case, the inspiration to write this article came from Al Hudib, who has an interest in evaluation in cross-cultural settings and remained curious about Indian colleagues' views on evaluation and other cross-cultural differences.

The following section presents a modestly edited transcript of a recorded reflective conversation among Cousins, Oza, Lakshminarayana, and Bhat, based on their collaboration over the past six years. Of particular interest are cross-cultural elements and dimensions, and the potential benefits and challenges these bring.

CROSS-CULTURAL CONVERSATION

Cousins: We've been working together for about five years. You can look at the work that we've been doing as a cross-cultural evaluation. Catherine Elliott, Jill Chouinard, and myself are all coming from a different culture and we're working on capacity building and evaluation here in India, and everyone we're working with is within this culture. This is how we can define cross-cultural evaluation—when you have people constructing evaluation knowledge from two different cultures. In this conversation we want to talk about the benefits of this kind of arrangement and about the drawbacks or challenges that we face.

Oza: This cross-cultural experience brings increasing richness because we're bringing different perspectives. The different perspectives are emanating from lifestyles, belief systems, and historical orientations. I would also say that in this particular cross-cultural reference we're talking about a country from the South and a country from the North. While this could be a challenge, it's also a strength because you want to see if there's a meeting ground, particularly because you're looking at evaluating intervention programs, because intervention programs in a developed country will look and feel very different from the ones in developing countries. I think when you talk about the transfer of knowledge, evaluation methods and techniques, and how do you do evaluation, it's of course clear that these are good things to learn, so that it is by itself a big benefit. But, in doing so, the need to understand the different kinds of challenges comes up, and I think that brings a great amount of wealth to both parties in learning, so it's not that one party gives and the other party receives. I think in that sense I find it very healthy.

Cousins: That definitely resonates with me. I have always looked at it as a colearning experience. Every time I come here I learn new things. I was relatively in the dark in terms of any level of depth of knowledge about Indian culture when I came here. It was a bit of a cultural shock at some levels to begin with. For me it has been a growth period over time and it's still happening with all the interactions that we have. Evaluation is increasingly important globally, but what would it look like if it was somebody from India leading the capacity building versus somebody from the outside? Is there added value from bringing somebody from the outside?

Bhat: For me, there are a lot of academic benefits. First and foremost I feel a whole lot of validation of your knowledge, your studies, and academic institutions. This experience of working together helps you see that in perspective, not only from the evaluation knowledge but also from the field perspective. So, to me it's an opportunity to validate. The second aspect is I feel it's a kind of an academic challenge. It's that academic challenge that took us a little more from participation.

If you work with someone from your own culture, you don't see it as challenging compared to when you work with a person who is not from your culture.

Lakshminarayana: I think the major benefit is the interaction with people from a different culture. There are great variations between cultures and programs, and within the program itself. We're working on a project from different states in India. Across India there is a significant cultural variation. Evaluating educational programs in the Indian context is complex, as there are no inbuilt intentions or plans for evaluation. For example, most of the programs were implemented in one shot for a larger population, resulting in problems in terms of finding the counterfactual. However, thanks to interaction with experts from Canada and the United States, we could arrive at a program theory and evaluation design. The most important benefit is learning. We could learn while adapting to different cultures. I learned about accuracy and professional standards of evaluation. I learned about accuracy standards alongside tool development and data analysis, and about integrity while collecting data. The other most important benefit is that, in Indian culture, we speak whenever we want to make a point but during this cross-cultural interaction process over the past five years, I learned how to listen and wait for my turn and then speak. This is a great learning opportunity for me.

Cousins: For me, an important aspect was learning about Indian approaches to systematic inquiry. For example, it seems to me what I learned early on is that people have a pretty good fix on the quantitative methodology part, but the qualitative methodology—at least with the group that we're working with—this is all new to them. For me, that was a real eye-opener because I had not encountered that in such a direct way so much. But you know, in some of our faculties and departments of psychology they are very quantitative. For me that was a revelation in context and it led to some challenges as well.

Bhat: Direct interaction with a person brings you things that aren't in the textual knowledge. For example, I learned about the practice of informed consent before you start gathering the data. In India, we don't even think that it's necessary to obtain the permission of someone before you start collecting the data. We have seen the reaction to it, within ourselves also. How do you go and ask about consent? It's supposed to be a given thing. What we understand is that you have the right to collect the data and they have to provide you with it. The other thing is the program logic model. When we developed the logic model, I felt that in the other countries the logic model is there before you start the program, whereas in India it's culturally a different practice. It happens in what I would say is an "unplanned manner." It's an emergent thing. When we had to do the logic model, it was very difficult because I didn't know whom I should check with and there was the question about how it gets verified and how to get other people's input on it. The other thing is sampling.

Oza: In terms of sampling, we conduct a national survey and to me I think we don't need a big sample and I try to explain this to them. Well, it's not very technical but the concept is, for example, when you go to the doctor or the lab

to check, they will take a little sample of your blood and they will not drain all of your blood. "Please understand you do not need to ask all of the kids. You can take a few thousand and still get a very good picture." I struggle because in India we still believe the bigger the sample the better. It's a challenge!

Cousins: It also ties into that comment about qualitative and quantitative because my sort of reading of what happens, even when we're doing qualitative interviews and so on, people still have the mindset that we have to have a big sample because we're going to generalize the findings, whereas of course you want to get more depth and richness and that's a challenge.

I had a couple of challenges and I want your reaction to them. These are my interpretations of how things went because I had some thoughts that were pretty good ideas but they didn't fit. One of them was when we talked about hiring an evaluation specialist to help out and we had four evaluations going on; I thought if we could tag an evaluation specialist to each group they would act as a coach. They could come from North America for a three-week period at critical times when instruments are being developed and finalized, when data collection is happening, as well as analysis of data and reporting. So I imagined having one person assigned to each of the four teams. That was just not going to happen. My understanding was there were some concerns among at least some of the members that might undermine their own sort of authority with the local team. Was that an accurate perception by me? Was that the reason why we couldn't go that way?

Oza: I want to tie this to a bigger picture. There are two intertwining concepts. One is that I look to myself as the team leader and think about what I could have done differently, early on in our project, when we were all talking about the interventions and you know it was all about making change. So to expect resistance to change should be inbuilt at that time to win people over. I'm sure we did a good job in trying to do that and we see the results over time. But was the time and process adequate before we proposed something like this? I would question that. There's always resistance anywhere in the world, so this is the resistance part. The other thing is we have a top-down hierarchical system. To understand and be clear about that is to the advantage of the evaluation, and the capacity-building process is challenging. These two came in the way of a very good and smart idea. If you notice, as time went by, people grew into it in a more natural way.

Cousins: So it seems the idea was good in principle but it's a question of finding the right way to weave it in.

Oza: I won't say it's all cultural, some of it is human everywhere. I agree it has some cultural elements to it. It's a matter of the time.

Bhat: It's really interesting. There is a kind of cross-cultural relationship not only between India and other nations, but also within India as there are all kinds of subcultures. It's really surprising to note that it may be, in the processes that were generated, we can see what worked and what didn't work. Now the process that we went through has an impact on the formation of teams. Even today, we meet with the same kind of happiness and they do inquire and send messages and greetings. You know that even after the partnership is over, the relationship

continues. The relationships linger. Some of the team members initiated activities and there's networking. We put together a certificate program.

Cousins: I was thrilled when I heard that.

Bhat: The point here is why others didn't do the same? The benefits here are not equally distributed. I think there are certain preconditions. One is that there's minimal appreciation of program evaluation and they don't believe there's a need for it. The second is the systemic situation and where you are positioned and how much leverage you have in the program and its planning and implementation, and the kind of support you get within the system.

Cousins: And you're well set up in that regard in Mysore.

Bhat: Yes, and some members enjoy a certain amount of academic freedom and they did an evaluation of their own.

Lakshminarayana: There's a variation in benefits because some people are interested in learning and some aren't really motivated. Motivation is differently directed and this affects whether or not they carry out evaluations. The other point is in our culture there's a big gap between ideal and real in the sense that what we plan is likely to differ from what is done or implemented. What's ideal may not be compatible with what's real. In other developed cultures, I think that gap is smaller. This gap in Indian culture makes the difference in planning and executing evaluation.

Another challenge is to get real consent from the respondents. Like what Bhat said, we never thought about obtaining permission for data collection from people. We take it for granted and the respondents also are not aware of such a procedure. Hence, when we're asking for consent from people/respondents, they're technically giving their consent. They're putting their signature without even reading it. This may be due to our culture of openness to provide the information one has.

Oza: The other thing I want to add is even if we have a process and a protocol to do something, if it was to be done in a particular manner, my observation is that Westerners will stick to the process more often than Indians will. It's not a lack of intelligence. It's just that we haven't been disciplined in that way.

Bhat: Evaluation standards are another important example. How many of them really adhere to these standards?

Cousins: I keep hammering away at that and I know that people understand it differently, but I think some of the messages are there and maybe are looked after naturally, like we don't want to do harm to anybody. Nobody should suffer as a result of giving data. It's just there are different approaches to doing that. Obviously my comfort zone comes from the training in evaluation logic and methods and professional standards.

Oza: As we're talking about cross-cultural issues, you really raised a very important point. Even when we were preparing these letters it would continue to come to our minds that in general there's so much empathy, even to the system of individuals or one-to-one. I would never want to harm a teacher but, when it comes to write the rules and regulations, everybody is so rigid. Oh, but the teacher

must be punished if they don't perform! But you don't ask what happens if they perform well! I'm not saying that people shouldn't be held accountable but the manner in which we express this is not effective. So those 50,000 who you don't know—you're dealing with them with accountability measures, but those 5,000 I know—I say we need to be sensitive to their needs! Accountability measures take care of both, being sensitive to individual needs but also making sure the system ultimately benefits. That clarity is actually missing.

Bhat: True. Regarding the qualitative point, culturally as a nation, Indians are storytellers but they might not have seen stories as a valuable form of knowledge. They don't think or look at narratives as knowledge. For them knowledge has to exist in some other forms that are quite scholarly, like books or numbers. Numbers matter to us more than explanations.

Cousins: That's interesting, as I have been using the metaphor and it's working quite well. We've got to answer these four evaluation questions and we are working on the data and we're so close to the data and it's that little question. Is it that code or this code? And I kept trying to bring people back. Remember the questions that you have to answer. What's the story? You have to tell the story and support it with the data. So if you're asking yourself which code, think about the question to tell the story. So it's good that the narrative aspect is part of the culture because these two things can intertwine together.

Oza: Also, quantitative methods were extremely popular in the Western world in the '50s and '60s and they started qualitative over the '80s and '90s. I feel in India there's a 20-year lag time with the Western world. Okay, what about constructing knowledge? Actually, what was in the West in the '80s and '90s is what you tried to bring in 2008. So there's a big gap. There are Indians who did good qualitative work but they are very few. There are more quantitative people here and they're really good at it and now you're asking them to shift. First, they have to learn. So their existing paradigm has to change and the comfort zone has to shift. Believe me, if I was 20 years younger, I would have learned it and have done a good job at it. This is a storyteller, but I was ahead of the department because of my quantitative knowledge. Importance was gained because of that knowledge, and I know the head in a hierarchical system and know that he feels he's threatened because of this. See, it's his life work.

Just adding to that, knowledge created within India is not seen as true knowledge, and therefore more academics are engaged in creating that knowledge. I'm looking at the past 20 years of my experience in the government system. Before that I was in the private sector. Now, in 20 years we have implemented three programs, and the fourth one is going on right now. Now think about the population of this country and the number of schools. We have 1.5 million schools with so many classrooms and so many kids learning. There's no single research study that talks about how we learn in our context. As you know, we are culturally different and we have not really explored or examined this and what it means for the curriculum. When the kids come from home, they're bringing a wealth of knowledge and they're told here is the book and this is what we're going to do. These

experiences have not been documented because there is no qualitative research and these stories are not seen as a creation of knowledge.

Lakshminarayana: About the point that we're lagging behind, it's not that our knowledge is not a true knowledge but that we're unable to defend that and say this is a true knowledge. We have failed in establishing this base of knowledge because we don't have the tools that would make this knowledge true.

Cousins: Yes, and a lot of it is related to the evidence—providing the evidence and thinking of that as a way of knowing.

Bhat: We have not theorized this. We're heavily pragmatic. We believe in doing rather than theorizing. We take up tasks, we complete tasks, we might even report, but then theorizing is one step ahead. Foreseeing certain things, collecting evidence, and establishing them—I don't think fits into this loop.

Cousins: That runs up against the program logic model, which is the program theory, and I can see a misfit there and why people struggled with it.

Lakshminarayana: I think the context is important. Here, if I want to specialize in one field, the context and competition are really hard. As a result I cannot stick to one particular field or specialization consistently over an extended period.

Bhat: Working on one thing for very long is actually a benefit but because of the context we don't have this chance.

Cousins: We also had challenges around some of the activities like the study tours, and I think this is intangible. People have benefited just because they've been immersed in a different culture. In terms of the benefits of the program, I've wondered about the value of that part.

Bhat: When we went to Michigan, we learned about the qualitative research and the standards. We did benefit, but as you said the benefits are more intangible.

Cousins: This is the other thing I have and it doesn't fly so well. It's expensive! And I was really thinking, is there really value for money? My idea was, why not identify a conference somewhere around the world—Australia, Canada, USA, or UK—and send a small delegation, like five people. They go to the conference and have to present and network and absorb, and then they come back and it's kind of like the cascade model and they share with others. But I think there was something about the study-tour thing, and it had to do with people having the opportunity to just go abroad and understand things from a different perspective.

Bhat: When someone comes from a different culture, you see that individual and the knowledge they bring, whereas when you go to the workplaces you have several other things to observe. Like, for example, your university, the way the library was organized, the way you used the whiteboard, and many other things.

Oza: I take your point about presenting at a conference. The first thing is if you're not familiar with the background and workplaces where these people work and how things operate it's very critical. To go and present at a conference, I think it requires confidence building and understanding the context from where the other presenters are coming and then bringing myself up to speed. I think the second generation of these rounds of things happening should be the way to go. Also I think meeting the big names in program evaluation and understanding their

whole approach is important. When people see that very well recognized people are very humble it makes a big difference and people begin to understand that.

Bhat: True, like for example we met Michael Patton. These are big names we see in the library, but when you meet this person, someone who's really established in the field, it makes a difference.

Oza: We were a big group, but I think that institutionalizing the knowledge is very difficult. Some of us learned 50% and some others 80%, but the question is how we can institutionalize the knowledge we gain collectively.

Cousins: One last comment from me. It gets back to the hierarchy point. I remember we wanted to get people involved with data analysis but people were saying "No, no, no, we hire people to do that," and I think there were a couple of people hired temporarily to do the SPSS and then they were gone. This is part of the institutionalizing thing. When they were gone, the memory, the knowledge, and the capacity building were literally gone. That was a challenge.

Oza: Well, I see. The thing is that the use of technology is one of the big things that is being shifted because it was initially seen that any kind of a letter or a memo or even a report is done by somebody who is hired to be typing it in, and therefore we're not doing it. I see this changing. It's a huge cultural change because of the e-mails and so on that people are doing, and I'm so glad this is happening.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this article is to explore a cross-cultural evaluation experience from the perspectives of a Western evaluator and Indian colleagues working in collaboration on ECB projects. The conversation shows that evaluators from different cultures have different perspectives on the evaluation process, including the selection of evaluation questions, stakeholders and potential users, the methods of data collection, and the methods of reporting. Throughout the conversation, the evaluators brought to our attention some very interesting cross-cultural benefits and challenges that they identified during their collaboration. The analysis of this brief, yet rich, conversation is guided by the conceptual framework of the dimensions of culture and cultural practice that has evolved over several years (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009; Chouinard & Milley, 2016; Chouinard & Hopson, this issue). The framework, which is represented in the introduction to this special issue of *CJPE*, includes seven dimensions of cultural practices: epistemological, ecological, methodological, political, personal, relational, and institutional. In a cross-cultural context, these key dimensions affect not only the evaluation process but also the production of evaluation knowledge, the usefulness of the evaluation, and the extent to which unintended outcomes of the evaluation will be positive or negative.

The conversation reveals that learning is a common thread from the perspective of both the Western evaluator and the Indian colleagues. It is evident that, throughout the years of the collaboration, learning has taken an essential place at individual and group levels through ECB and process use, which has been one of the major benefits of this cross-cultural experience. It is through the act of

collaboration and through the relationships that are built, nurtured, and sustained that learning takes place. The conversation also shows that the colearning process that took place among evaluators was highly interactive, social, conversational, and dialogical. In fact, dialogue provided the evaluators with the opportunity to move beyond technical and instrumental learning to interactions that engage sometimes-conflicting perspectives, values, and experiences, which lead to the unfolding of new understandings. Learning has also accrued among the Indian participants themselves because of the number of states involved in the evaluation and the tremendous interstate cultural variation.

As we can see from this collaborative experience, the relational dimension was a key factor between the Western evaluator and the Indian colleagues, and it is clear that it influenced the process of constructing knowledge, which was a joint process that happened at two levels: between the Western evaluator and the Indian colleagues, and among the Indian colleagues themselves. Throughout the conversations, storytelling arose as a key theme when data-collection methods where discussed. The conversation confirms that Indians place a higher value on quantitative methods than on qualitative methods as ways to create scientific knowledge. The reason for this is that, even though India is a storytelling nation, Indians do not perceive stories or narratives to be a particularly valuable source of evidence-based knowledge for educational and social reform. Despite the fact that Indian culture is rich with stories, most of these stories are epics, legends, and myths and are seen more as a form of entertainment and cultural legacy preservation than as a way to create credible knowledge for reform. To Indians, as Bhat says above, "knowledge has to exist in some other forms that are quite scholarly, like books or numbers. Numbers matter more than explanations." If Indians do not trust their own stories or do not have faith in their own narratives, it would seem to follow that there are many challenges associated with collecting and analyzing qualitative data in such a context. Yet qualitative data were central to the evaluations that were conducted.

A related issue of concern touched on propriety standards, specifically the idea of obtaining informed consent from participants before starting data collection. In the Western context, informed consent is now an ethical requirement for research involving human participants and is integral to professional standards of practice. It is the process whereby a participant is informed about all risks and aspects of the study to enable her or him to make a well-founded decision and whereby he or she voluntarily confirms his or her willingness to participate. Our Indian colleagues discuss the fact that many people perceived informed consent to be a strange and superfluous bureaucratic practice and formality that appears to be at variance with the culture of openness to provide the information one has. In fact, the external evaluators recognized the limitations of using this mode of informed consent in India. Such documents are sometimes viewed with suspicion and are often accompanied by Indian participants' reluctance to affix their signature. In such a context, the informed-consent process can become a mere formality, with participants simply acquiescing to whatever is required of them. As such, informed consent that is premised on the principles of autonomy and

rational decision making as they are understood in the West is problematic in India as a result of the many differences in cultural norms and values.

Another important aspect that should be emphasized is the fact that this evaluation experience must be understood as being contextually grounded in the local Indian program setting, as well as being interconnected with the broader social, historical, economic, and political climate in India. In India, context exerts tremendous influence on the program and on its evaluation, a finding that becomes all the more significant in culturally and socially diverse communities (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009). For example, the prevalence of hierarchy that affects every part of life in India emerged from the conversation as a very important factor during the evaluation process. In many ways, working structures mirror Indian society. Both are extremely hierarchical in nature, where people have an allotted position that they do not attempt to overturn. As such, it is absolutely essential for evaluators to understand how deeply these hierarchical thought processes impact Indian attitudes to evaluation. Overlooking them runs the potential of seriously compromising the best intentioned evaluation process. Of course, India is not unique in using hierarchy to assign values and order, although for typical Western evaluators the ways in which hierarchy is practiced could be seen as considerable cultural challenges.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION PRACTICE

"All evaluation reflects culturally influenced norms, values, and ways of knowing" (American Evaluation Association, 2011, p. 5). The program evaluators' and stakeholders' beliefs, values, ways of knowing, and ways of communicating are all rooted in their respective cultures. As the subject of evaluation, social programs per se are embedded within specific social, cultural, political, and historical contexts (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009). Therefore cultural competence is indispensable for evaluators to enhance their credibility and to engage meaningfully with stakeholders in cross-cultural evaluation. A lack of cultural competence can cause conflict, frustration, and ultimately program failure. It follows that evaluators need to adopt ways of thinking and behaving that enable stakeholders of one cultural, ethnic, or linguistic group to work effectively with stakeholders of another group. This requires an awareness of one's own cultural limitations; a level of openness, respect, and appreciation for cultural differences; regard for intercultural diversity as a source of learning opportunities; the ability to use cultural resources in interventions; and an acknowledgement of the integrity and value of all cultures (Lynch & Hanson, 1998). In a cross-cultural context, this means "an active demonstration of respect for differences, an enthusiastic eagerness to learn about other cultures, an acceptance of different viewpoints on reality, and a flexibility and willingness to adjust, change, and reorient where required" (Lynch & Hanson, 1998, p. 493).

Evaluators need to know that "cultural competence is a stance toward culture, not a discrete status or simple mastery of particular knowledge and skills" (American Evaluation Association, 2011, para. 3). Thus, maintaining an appropriate

attitude toward a different culture is paramount for evaluators throughout the entire evaluation process, especially during their interactions with stakeholders. The investment of effort into developing a genuine understanding of Indian culture might be extrinsically and intrinsically worthwhile for Western evaluators, particularly when they are involved in long-term evaluation projects in India. The ongoing and rapid economic growth of India is producing a multitude of opportunities for evaluators to apply their expertise and to test evaluation theories. A deep understanding of Indian culture makes it easier for Western evaluators to win the trust of and to work effectively with Indian stakeholders and participants. This article is an endeavour in this vein. It attempts to enrich evaluators' understanding of Indian culture by drawing on the perspective of local Indian professional colleagues engaged with evaluation so that in future they will be able to work more efficiently in the Indian cultural context.

Finally, evaluators who work in a country that is different from their own need to understand the importance of giving serious consideration to including on their evaluation team individuals who are native to that country and who are sensitive to the cultural context in which their work is conducted. In our view, this is a strong rationale for the development and use of collaborative approaches to evaluation that stand to benefit from partner strong suits: knowledge of evaluation logic and professional standards of practice, on the one hand, and knowledge of program logic and cultural, political, economic, and social context on the other.

In the end, it is our hope that the cross-cultural conversation set out above and the discussion that follows will help to expand the range of thinking about the benefits and challenges of conducting evaluations in cross-cultural contexts while stimulating ongoing dialogue and reflection.

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