

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus de livres

Spaulding, D. T. (2014).

Program evaluation in practice: Core concepts and examples for discussion and analysis (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 198 pages. (ISBN 978-1-118-34582-5).

Reviewed by Sandra Sellick

Program Evaluation in Practice by Dean T. Spaulding should be required reading for every student in a teacher education program, every aspiring administrator in a master's program, and every faculty member in a teacher preparation program. Doing so may inspire educators to look more deeply at the outcomes of programs offered in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) sector and in teacher preparation programs, and it may open eyes to the practice knowledge that has evolved in the field of evaluation.

Spaulding's PhD in Educational Psychology and Statistics was conferred by the University at Albany/State University of New York (UA-SUNY). At the time *Program Evaluation in Practice* was published, he was an associate professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the College of Saint Rose in Albany. Spaulding is also a former chair of teaching program evaluation for the American Evaluation Association. His portfolio for the decade before writing this book includes other publications and over 100 evaluations including state and federal projects in the health, K–12, and higher education sectors.

In just under 200 pages, Spaulding has authored a deceptively simple book synthesizing key concepts about program evaluation and illustrating them with 11 case studies. This is not a book for advanced program evaluation, but it is a good fundamental text for introducing program evaluation principles and practices. No prior knowledge of program evaluation has been assumed but, by reading the book, the novice evaluator is introduced to key terminology, tools, concepts, and the work of leaders in the field of program evaluation.

Spaulding begins from the defining premise that program evaluation is

conducted for decision-making purposes, whereas research is intended to build our general understanding and knowledge of a particular topic and to inform practice. In general, program evaluation examines programs to determine their worth and to make recommendations for programmatic refinement and success. (p. 5)

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In this regard, Spaulding echoes Michael Scriven, who defined evaluation as referring to the “process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process” (Scriven, 1991, p. 139), and Michael Quinn Patton to whom the following definition of evaluation has been attributed: “the systematic collection and analysis of information about program activities, characteristics, and outcomes to make judgements about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (Poth, Lamarche, Yapp, Sulla & Chisamore, 2014, p. 91).

The first third of the book, Part One, consists of three introductory chapters; the remaining two thirds, Part Two, consist of 11 chapters each focusing on a different case study. Throughout the book, Spaulding has highlighted an ABC of 78 key concepts including assessment of needs, baseline data, benchmarks, evaluation program theory, formative/summative distinctions, funding cycles, key informants, logic models, metaevaluation, outcomes, requests for proposal, reliability, stakeholders, triangulation, and validation. He has also made extensive use of tables, figures, exhibits, and boxes. The reference list is foundational, albeit short, including Fitzpatrick, Patton, Sanders, Scriven, Tyler, Worthen, and other evaluation leaders. However, the suggested reading section at the end of each chapter exposes readers to a broader range of sources to deepen their learning.

In the first chapter, Spaulding provides an overview of the typical sequence of events in an evaluation. In the second chapter, he introduces six common approaches for evaluation: objectives-based (Tylerian); goal-free; decision-based, including Stufflebeam’s content, input, process, and product (CIPP) model; participatory; expertise-oriented; and Scriven’s consumer-oriented evaluation. A detailed exploration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches is beyond the scope of this introductory-level textbook, as are other approaches such as adversary-oriented evaluation and developmental evaluation. The third chapter delves further into the objectives-based approach.

Spaulding’s case studies are intended to provide models of evaluation design for students in extended studies of program evaluation and vicarious experiences for students in shorter courses. Three examples of the evaluation case studies illustrate the practical nature of the cases for study in teacher education programs: (a) improving student performance in mathematics through inquiry-based instruction, (b) evaluation of a professional development technology project in a low-performing school district, and (c) evaluating the impact of a new teacher training program. Spaulding has used a framework for each case to introduce the evaluator, the program, the evaluation plan, and a summary of evaluation activities and findings. He has followed each case with final thoughts, discussion questions, and class activities. Some critics might question the need for 11 case studies following the same framework, but I believe the repetition is effective in comparing and contrasting a variety of evaluations and may contribute to the desired goal of any educator—mastery of learning.

For those who have read or used the original version of *Program Evaluation in Practice* (2008) for teaching purposes and want to know how the second edition

differs, Spaulding has identified the addition of four new sections: (a) a chapter on basic theories and approaches to program evaluation, (b) a chapter of objectives-based evaluation, (c) a section on ethics in program evaluation, and (d) a section on the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). He has also indicated that case studies, discussion questions, and class activities have been refreshed since the first edition.

One of the reasons I am so pleased to see this book come on the market for use as a textbook in the education sector is because I believe that the education sector is somewhat estranged from the broader evaluation field in Canada. Concurrent sessions delivered at the 2014 CES National Conference in Toronto reflected a paucity of presenters sharing their evaluative work in K–12 settings or in teacher education programs. Of the 120+ sessions listed in the program, only two specifically indicated a focus of this kind in their titles. Recent CES membership data indicated that only 10% of members joining or renewing CES memberships in the year from July 2013 to June 2014 identified education as the sector in which they worked. This compared with 29% who identified health as their sector. Has educational practice advanced as rapidly over the past 35 years as healthcare and epidemiology? Would evaluation in education be better served by greater representation? Ironically, the Program Evaluation Standards adopted by CES in 2012 were previously subtitled *How to Assess Evaluations of Educational Programs* (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994).

Program Evaluation in Practice is a very practical and engaging resource. Those new to program evaluation may find it helpful in synthesizing many core concepts of the field into a useful introduction. Instructors in undergraduate and graduate programs in education would be well advised to have a look at Spaulding's second edition for consideration as a course text. In my opinion, the integration of program evaluation in the formative stage of educators' professional training has great potential for systemic, incremental change for higher achievement in educational practice.

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