

RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE AND CONTEXT IN EVALUATION

JUDI VANDERHAAR AND BRITTANY CARPENTER

DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY, RESEARCH, AND PLANNING

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (JCPS)



ABSTRACT

•There is an emerging paradigm in educational research and evaluation aimed toward more culturally engaged quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The tendency of the mainstream of educational research has been to approach studies involving people of color from a deficit perspective (Tillman, 2002). A shift toward culturally responsive, culturally engaged research and evaluation is long overdue.

• An evaluator's values, beliefs & assumptions can influence the evaluation approach, data collected/ignored, interpretations of data; how conclusions are drawn and how they are presented (Thomas, 2007).

•An individual can move along a continuum toward heightened awareness and toward socially just and fair professional practices (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999).

•If the goal of our educational research community is to promote sound educational research and evaluation while ensuring attention to issues of equity, then it is imperative that evaluators are armed with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct culturally responsive research.

BACKGROUND

Being responsive to culture and context in educational research and evaluation requires a fundamental paradigm shift in the way we view traditional designs and processes associated with educational research.

•Evaluation efforts have typically failed to consider cultural background and context in their design, implementation, analyses, interpretation of results and recommendations.

•For purposes of culturally responsive evaluation, culture is considered broadly and is inclusive of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, social class, disability, language, and education level

•Culturally responsive evaluation includes and to some degree extends tenants of other evaluation frameworks/approaches including:

- Collaborative evaluation (Greene, 1998; Patton, 1997);
- Participatory evaluation (Cousins & Earl, 1995)
- Responsive evaluation (Stake, 1975; House, 2001);
- Empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001) and
- Inclusive evaluation (Mertens, 1999; 2003)

WHY?

"It is not possible to effectively derive evaluative meaning from educational programs, designed to serve culturally diverse students, unless the evaluation themselves are more culturally responsive" -Stafford Hood, 2007

•Values are the common thread between culture and evaluation. Value is at the core of the evaluation endeavor (stufflebeam, 2003) and evaluation is fundamentally the act of determining values, merit and worth (Scriven, 1991).

•Shift to more culturally responsive research can lead to increased advocacy and social betterment (Butty, Reid 7 Lapoint, 2004).

EVALUATION STANDARDS & RESPONSIVENESS

The practice of conducting high quality evaluation requires the evaluator to maintain responsiveness to culture and context throughout the entire process.

The table below illustrates how responsive to culture and context can be attended to when engaging in the Program Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee.

Standard	Intent	Significance to cultural responsiveness
Utility	Ensure that an evaluation will serve information needs of intended users	Supports non-discrimination, respect for cultural differences in communication, and considerations of power differentials among cultural groups.
Feasibility	Ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic and frugal	Supports inclusion of diverse voices, implicitly suggests respect for context and cultural consideration related to differences in perceived cost benefit evaluation.
Propriety	Ensure legal and ethical conduct in evaluation with regard for welfare of all involved	Culturally competent practice is supported by clear operationalization of "cultural sensitivity."
Accuracy	Ensure evaluation will reveal/convey technically adequate information that determine program worth & merit	Creates an implicit framework for examining culture. Offers potential action step for checking the cultural congruence of technical dimensions.

In addition to adhering to the program evaluation standards, a culturally responsive evaluator is a reflective practitioner who is engaged in an ongoing cycle of self-observation and thinking about values, beliefs, and assumptions that guide his or her evaluation practice (Thomas, 2008)

CULTURE & CONTEXT START TO FINISH

To what degree is your evaluation work responsive to culture and context?

Planning/Preparation

- Do I assess the sociocultural context in which the program is based before creating the evaluation design?
- Do I strive to ensure that the stakeholder group and evaluation team are representative of the population served by the program?
- When framing the evaluation questions, do I listen to questions relevant to the voice of all involved?
- Do I plan for a process of "judging" and "doing to" or "learning" and "doing with"?

Engaging Stakeholders

- Do I maintain sensitivity/awareness to differential power of stakeholders.
- Do I adjust to cultural differences in relational style?
- Do I encourage open and honest communication?
- Do I work co-constructively with them and give all participants voice in matters?

Design & Instrumentation

- Is my design appropriate to both evaluation questions and cultural context?
- Do I seek culturally appropriate methods that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches?
- Is the language and content of the instruments I use culturally sensitive?
- Have the measures been normed on a cultural group different from the program population? If not, do I pilot with like groups to establish validity and reliability?

Data Collection & Analysis

- Am I (and other data collectors on my team) trained and attuned to the cultural context in which the data will be collected? Does anyone have shared lived experience with the target group?
- Do I capture nonverbal as well as verbal communications during data collection?
- Do I disaggregate the data to examine diversity within the whole target population?
- Do I focus exclusively on the correlates of those who fail or do I examine successful outliers as well?

Dissemination of Results

- Do I give culturally and contextually relevant "voices" to the data I present?
- Do I disseminate the results to a wide range of individuals that have an interest/stake in the program (not just funders, program directors, etc.)?

DEFINITIONS

Culture: The ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion. (Nieto, 1999)

Context: Social, political, practical, economic, geographic and/or cultural elements associated with the program, specific needs of program participants, and the evaluation itself.

Responsive evaluation: fully considers culture and context of the program being evaluated, culture of participants, the evaluation processes and accounting for different value perspectives held by stakeholders (Butty, Reid & LaPoint, 2004)

Responsiveness to culture and context goes beyond cultural awareness. It denotes an individual's will and ability to effectively interact with and among others whose cultures and environments are different from your own. Responsiveness requires embedding inclusion into the evaluation process from beginning to end.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND MULTICULTURAL VALIDITY

Multicultural Validity refers to the correctness or authenticity of understandings across multiple intersecting cultural contexts. It focuses attention on how well evaluation captures meaning across dimensions of cultural (Kirkhart & Hopson, 2008).

"There are no culture-free evaluators, educational tests, or societal laws"

Applying Multicultural Validity

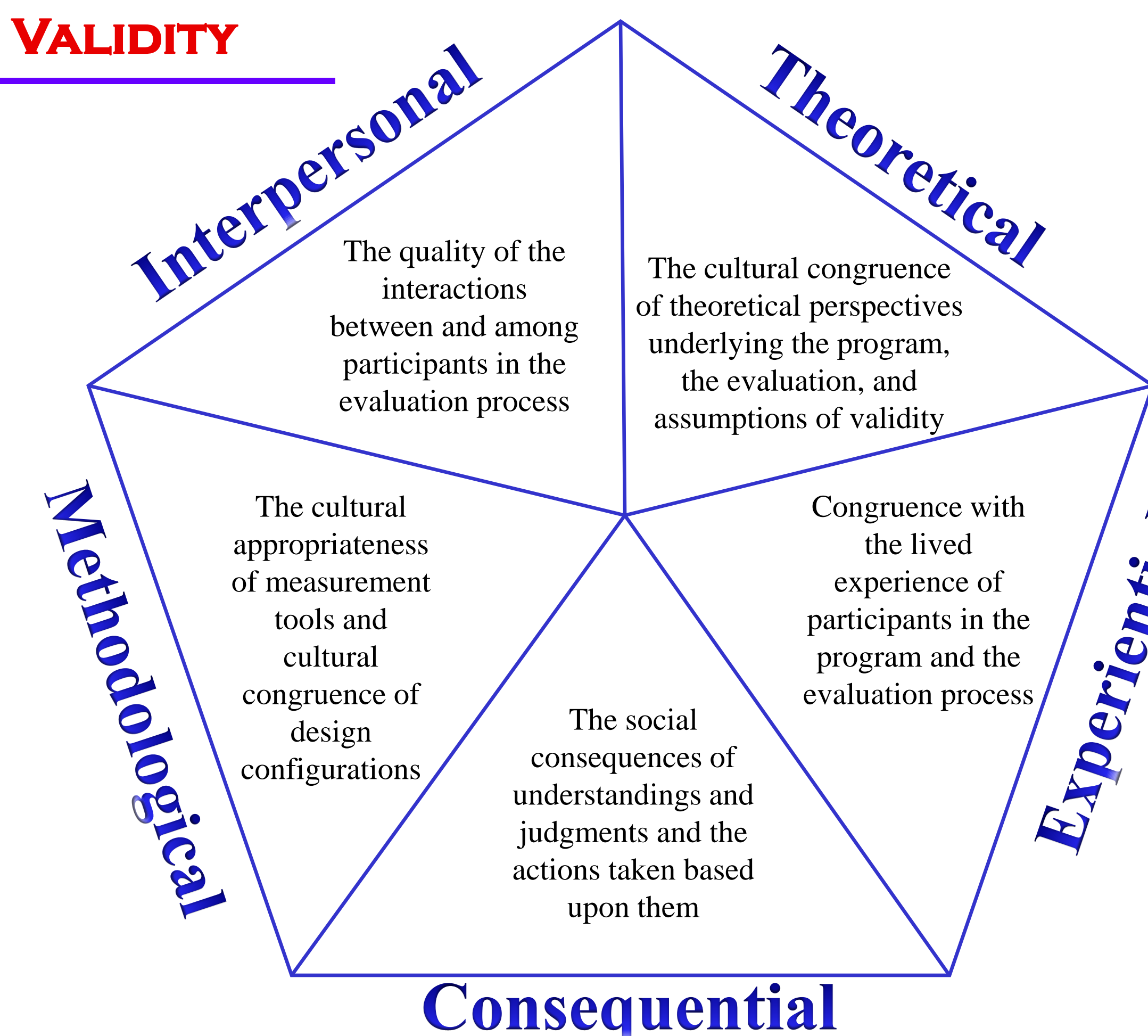
Interpersonal: consider/respect local norms when entering program context

Theoretical: selection of culturally appropriate evaluation theory to frame epistemology

Methodological: evaluation questions represent range of perspectives, values and interests; evaluation time frame appropriate to context

Experiential: local citizens contribute their wisdom to the evaluation process; employ cultural resources/guides to increase understanding of culture and context

Consequential: Evaluation can improve the ability of the program community to advance its goals and can promote social justice



Kirkhart & Hopson, 2008