Empowerment evaluation: A practical method for evaluating a school breakfast program

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Abstract

Over the past decade, empowerment evaluation has demonstrated its worth as a practical and valuable alternative to traditional program evaluation methodologies. Following an overview of the development of empowerment evaluation, we outline its ten underlying principles and the three key steps involved in conducting an empowerment evaluation. A preliminary case study on our use of this methodology to evaluate the Good Start Breakfast Club program is presented. The Australian Red Cross operates this program in nearly 100 primary schools around Australia with sponsorship and support from the Sanitarium Health Food Company and other organisations. This case study highlights the potential effectiveness of empowerment evaluation in improving and assessing the impacts of other public health and community-based programs in Australia and some of the lessons we have learned so far from using this methodology.

We discuss some of the strengths and limitations of empowerment evaluation and argue that a more critical approach is required to avoid the idealism that tends to underpin this approach. We suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to the communicative and relational dimensions of empowerment evaluation in order to increase its effectiveness.

Introduction

During the past twenty years, collaborative and participatory evaluation methodologies have been increasingly used to evaluate community-based programs in a range of fields, including education, health, rural development and social services. This has occurred as organisations began taking a more inclusive, social justice-based approach to the evaluation of community-based interventions. As a result, evaluation discourses shifted from those of the positivist social scientist to those of the empowerment-oriented critical adult educator and action researcher (Vanderplaat 1995, p. 83).

Participatory forms of evaluation aim to produce a range of empowering impacts and outcomes. They include broadened stakeholder participation in the evaluation process, increased community capacities in planning and conducting evaluations, and improvement of programs in ways that better meet the diverse needs and goals of community members and program stakeholders and funders. Used effectively, participatory evaluation methodologies can make significant contributions to the long-term sustainability and success of community development programs (Brunner & Guzman 1989; Diez 2001; Papineau & Kiely 1996; Rebien 1996).

Various forms of participatory evaluation emphasise different levels of community and stakeholder participation. Empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 2001; Fetterman & Wandersman 2005) is distinguished by its clearly articulated underlying principles and the extensive participation of program management and staff, funders, community members and other stakeholders in all stages of the evaluation. Over the past decade, empowerment evaluation has demonstrated its worth as a practical and valuable alternative to traditional program evaluation methodologies. Implemented effectively, this methodology can build evaluation capacities, give voice to a diversity of people involved in the evaluation, and enable open and honest discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of key program activities. It also enables collaborative planning of the evaluation and identification of the documentation or evidence required to assess the goals and strategies that evaluation

participants develop to improve key program activities. The aim is that evaluation eventually becomes a normal part of planning and managing programs, resulting in ongoing improvement and learning.

Following an overview of the development of empowerment evaluation, we outline its underlying principles and the three main steps involved in conducting an empowerment evaluation. We then present a preliminary case study on our use of this methodology to evaluate the Good Start Breakfast Club program. The Australian Red Cross (ARC) operates this program in nearly 100 primary schools with sponsorship and support from the Sanitarium Health Food Company and other organisations. This case study highlights the potential effectiveness of empowerment evaluation for improving and assessing the impacts of other public health and community-based programs in Australia and some of the lessons we have learned so far from using this methodology. To date, there has been no literature on the use of this methodology in Australia.

We discuss the strengths and limitations of this approach and argue that a more critical approach is required to avoid the idealism that tends to be evident in publications advocating this approach to evaluation. Like McKie (2003), we suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to the communicative and relational dimensions of empowerment evaluation in order to highlight both the intended and unintended impacts and outcomes of the use of this methodology and thus increase its effectiveness.

Overview of empowerment evaluation

David Fetterman from Stanford University in the USA initially developed empowerment evaluation in 1994 (Fetterman, Kaftarian & Wandersman 1996). Its roots are in community psychology, action anthropology and participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation. Fetterman (2005, p. 1) has described the rapid growth in the use of empowerment evaluation as a 'global phenomenon' and an extensive literature on this methodology now exists. Fetterman developed empowerment evaluation as a three step approach: (1) Developing a mission, vision or unifying purpose for the program, (2) Taking stock of the program, including its strengths and weaknesses, and (3) Planning for the future by developing goals, strategies to reach these goals, and identifying the evidence required to assess whether these goals have been reached. Subsequently, Wandersman and others developed a separate but related ten step approach called 'Getting to Outcomes' to assist practitioners obtain results from programs while demonstrating accountability (Livet & Wandersman 2005).

Wandersman et al (2005, p. 28) define empowerment evaluation as:

> An evaluation approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving program success by (1) providing program stakeholders with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program, and (2) mainstreaming evaluation as part of the planning and management of the program/organisation.

Community-based programs and organisations in the USA, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom and elsewhere have successfully used this methodology to improve programs and interventions in a wide range of fields. For example, empowerment evaluation has been used to:

- help make a children's hospital more family-centred;
- evaluate a school-based reading improvement program;
- institutionalise evaluation as part of a higher education accreditation self-study;
- develop and assess a $15 million Digital Village project; and
- foster organisational learning in a child abuse prevention collaborative.

In an empowerment evaluation, professional evaluators balance a number of roles, including those of facilitator, critical friend, coach, teacher and evaluation expert. They actively support the purpose of the program and openly want it to succeed. Unlike the traditional objective program evaluator, the position taken by the empowerment evaluator is therefore not neutral or impartial. Fetterman (2005, p. 12) argues that 'when evaluators have a vested interest in programs, it enhances their value as critics and evaluators. They will be more constructively critical and supportive of the program because they want the program *to work*, that is, to succeed'. The empowerment evaluator also helps program participants and stakeholders develop a rigorous and organised approach to evaluation, to establish baseline data, monitor interventions and document change over time, and to clarify their theories of change (Fetterman 2005, pp. 12-13).

The principles of empowerment evaluation

The ten underlying principles of empowerment evaluation, detailed by Wandersman et al (2005), provide the theories, values and philosophy that guide the decision-making and practices of empowerment evaluators. Wandersman et al (2005, p. 29) argue that while empowerment evaluation shares some values and methods with other evaluation approaches, 'it is the set of empowerment evaluation principles considered in their entirety that distinguishes it from other evaluation approaches'. The ten principles are:

1. Improvement: A key aim of empowerment evaluation is to improve people, programs, organisations and communities and to help them achieve results.
2. Community ownership: Program stakeholders, with the assistance of evaluators, take responsibility for designing and conducting the evaluation and putting the findings to use.
3. Inclusion: Participants, staff from all levels of a program or organisation, funders, and members of the wider community are invited to participate in the evaluation.
4. Democratic participation: Active participation by everyone in shared decision-making is valued; the processes used are based on deliberation, communicative action and authentic collaboration.
5. Social justice: A high value is placed on addressing the larger social good of practices and programs and achieving a more equitable society. The method is seen as a means to help people address inequities through capacity building.
6. Community knowledge: Community-based knowledge, information and experience is valued and respected and used to make decisions, understand the local context, and interpret evaluation results.
7. Evidence-based strategies: Value is placed on providing empirical justifications for action and drawing on other evidence-based strategies that have worked. This can save time and resources. However, it is recognised that strategies need to be adapted to the local environment, culture and conditions.
8. Capacity-building: Program staff and participants learn how to conduct their own evaluations. All people and organisations are seen as capable of conducting evaluations when provided with the appropriate tools and conditions. This often translates into program capacity building.
9. Organisational learning: Empowerment evaluation helps to create a community of learners. Continually reflecting on and evaluating programs and organisations is seen as making community groups or organisations more responsive to changes and challenges. Evaluation results are also used to guide improvement.
10. Accountability: Individuals and organisations are held accountable for the commitments they make. Funders are held accountable in relation to their expectations. Those involved make a commitment to results-based interventions and continuous improvement.

Fetterman (2005, p.213) states that 'The interaction among the participants and the principles results in a rising level of empowerment and self-determination'. He suggests that from the vantage point of his visual representation of empowerment evaluation, empowerment is 'a fluid form of social capital and capacity' (p.212). While the ten principles of empowerment evaluation provide a useful guide to conducting an empowerment evaluation, we suggest that a critical approach is required which openly questions underlying assumptions such as participation will automatically lead to empowerment. Other research suggests that, given the often complex nature of community-based programs and participatory forms of evaluations, these methodologies can produce unintended or contradictory effects (Gregory 2000; Lennie et al 2004; Lennie 2005; McKie 2003). These effects can result from factors such as differences in power, status and knowledge among those involved. As well as the intended, empowering effects, we therefore need to consider the potentially unintended or disempowering effects of an empowerment evaluation and the limitations of this methodology.

The three step empowerment evaluation approach

The three steps involved in conducting an empowerment evaluation, outlined in Fetterman (2001) are ideally conducted in a series of workshops with as broad a diversity as possible of program management and staff and other stakeholders. At least two experienced empowerment evaluators are usually required to facilitate these workshops.

Step 1: Developing a mission and vision

This involves developing key phrases that capture the mission and vision or unifying purpose of the program. This process is undertaken even when an existing mission and vision statement exists because existing mission and vision statements are often created without the input of all stakeholders. The process can also allow new ideas and divergent views about the program or organisation to emerge. The aim is to eventually reach

consensus on the statements, which are seen as representing the values of the group and the agreed purpose and long-term objectives of the program.

Step 2: Taking stock

This step has two parts. Part 1 involves brainstorming a list of 10 – 20 activities, which are considered by the workshop group as crucial to the functioning of the program. A voting process is used to prioritise the list and identify the ten most important activities to evaluate at this point. Part 2 involves participants individually rating how well the 10 key activities are doing on a 1-10 scale, without discussion with others, and then discussing the ratings in groups. In this discussion, participants provide evidence that supports the ratings they have given. This is recorded on butchers paper and provides baseline data on the program and its strengths and weaknesses. Participants may change the initial ratings following the group discussion.

Step 3: Planning for the future

This step has three key components. Firstly, participants brainstorm realistic goals for each of the key activities have identified. Next, participants develop lists of strategies that will help them reach these goals. Finally, they identify the forms of documentation or evidence that will enable them to monitor progress towards their goals (i.e. surveys, checklists, minutes of meetings, development of a website etc.). This last part is critical to the process since it forms the basis for planning the evaluation.

Once these three steps are completed, a series of meetings and workshops are held to plan and implement the evaluation in more detail. These workshops could involve the collaborate development of specific data collection tools and other evaluation methods. The aim is that empowerment evaluation becomes an ongoing cyclical process that is embedded into programs, leading to continual improvement, organisational learning, and change.

Empowerment evaluation of the Good Start Breakfast Club program

The empowerment evaluation principles and steps are now illustrated through an overview of its application to The Good Start Breakfast Club (GSBC) program.

A breakfast program run by the Australian Red Cross, called 'The Breakfast Club' has been operated by public schools in New South Wales since 1991. The Sanitarium Health Food Company has supported this program since 2001. Following increased sponsorship from Sanitarium, the program was renamed the 'Good Start Breakfast Club' and launched in December 2003. This initiative has now become a national program with clubs in nearly 100 primary schools in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. The program is run by school and community volunteers who are coordinated by ARC staff. Sanitarium, and other businesses in the local community provide breakfast supplies. The breakfast clubs are supported by over 1,400 volunteers who currently deliver over 300,000 breakfasts to children in need each year. Anecdotal evidence about the impacts of the program include that it increases student's ability to learn, and improves their social and behavioural skills and nutritional knowledge.

No evaluation has been conducted to determine the nutritional, social and educational impacts of the program on children. With support from ARC, Sanitarium therefore approached the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Wollongong to develop a practical research methodology and associated tools to evaluate the GSBC program. An Australian Research Council Linkage grant for this project was subsequently obtained in 2003.[1]

An extensive literature review identified empowerment evaluation as the most useful and practical methodology to evaluate the GSBC program. This methodology had demonstrated strengths and simplicity, and was congruent with the values and objectives of the GSBC program. To date, no other publications have been identified on the use of empowerment evaluation in Australia. A major outcome of the study will be a detailed case study on the impacts of the empowerment evaluation approach on the delivery of the program. A preliminary version of this case study is now presented.

Preliminary case study on the use of empowerment evaluation in the GSBC program

A number of events made it possible to begin the evaluation process with Good Start Breakfast Club program personnel in May 2005. In March, when Wayne was preparing his PhD proposal and attempting to become familiar with the empowerment evaluation approach, he made contact with June Lennie. June subsequently agreed to provide her services as an evaluation consultant to implement the empowerment evaluation model within the GSBC program and has collaborated with Wayne on the project since April 2005.

The assembly of 19 state and regional GSBC coordinators and managers for a two day GSBC forum at Red Cross House in Sydney in May provided an opportunity to begin the evaluation process with this important stakeholder group. Wayne had developed a good working relationship with the National GSBC Coordinator with ARC, and he agreed to make time available during the forum for a series of empowerment evaluation workshops. Prior to conducting these workshops, a questionnaire sent to GSBC teaching staff and volunteers in most regions. Useful baseline data were provided by 41 respondents (33 women and 8 men) comprising 12 from Sydney and Greater Western Sydney, 12 from Tasmania, 9 from Western NSW, 5 from Victoria and 3 from South Australia). These data included information on their mission and vision for the program, the activities they believed to be key to its success, their rating of these activities, and whether they would be willing to be involved in future evaluation activities. This information provided an early link with program staff working directly with participating children.

Ideally, if the empowerment evaluation principle of inclusion had been strictly followed, all key stakeholder groups including participating children and their parents or carers, and senior executives from ARC and Sanitarium would have been invited to come together in an open forum to begin the evaluation process. The logistics and associated costs ruled out conducting such a forum. The process therefore began with one group of key program stakeholders.

Workshop with GSBC coordinators and managers (May 2005)

Nineteen GSBC program personnel (15 women and 4 men) participated in empowerment evaluation workshops held in Sydney during May 2005. All were ARC employees with 10 being current or previous GSBC program coordinators, one assisted a coordinator, and 8 held various managerial positions within ARC. Personnel worked in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory.

Workshop participants were allocated to three smaller mixed groups for each step which were led by facilitators. Key data from the small group discussions were recorded on butchers paper for later presentation to the whole group.

Data obtained during the inaugural workshop included:
• Revised mission and vision statements
• A list of 10 key program activities and ratings of these activities (see Table 1)
• Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program
• Goals, strategies and forms of evidence for 10 key activities (see Table 2)
• Feedback about the empowerment evaluation approach and indications of willingness to take part in future evaluation activities, collected via questionnaires.

Activity	*Average rating /10*	*Activity*	*Average rating /10*
Provision of breakfast	8.6	Seeking sponsorship	6.2
Social interaction and life skills	7.6	Risk management – child protection, volunteers, health	6.1
Volunteer management and support	7.4	Data collection	6.1
Gaining community support	7.4	Nutritional education	5.5
Program design	6.7	Sustainability	4.6

Table 1: Key program activities and summary of ratings from workshops with GSBC coordinators and managers in May 2005

Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program

A comment about 'Social interaction and life skills' by a coordinator who gave the activity a rating of 9 out of 10 was: 'This is 'fantastic' – people relate on a 'first name basis' and older children help the younger children.' A manager who gave 'Data collection' a rating of 3 out of 10 is an example of a perceived weakness in this program activity, 'This is 'horrible' - the data that's collected is often 'inaccurate.'

Feedback about empowerment evaluation and willingness to participate in future evaluation activities

The majority of participants considered that the empowerment evaluation method was valuable for evaluating the GSBC program. Fifty percent of questionnaire respondents indicated that the method was 'very' or 'extremely' valuable. Comments included:

- *Empowerment evaluation method is very valuable. The model is definitely in line with the principles of our program and empowering the community.*
- *If implemented effectively and with an honest focus on self-determination and decision-making the empowerment evaluation method is most effective for this type of program.*
- *I think it is a very fair way to gain a vast overview of very different socio-economic areas and to consider all our opinions.*

However, there were some concerns about issues such as how the whole range of program participants can be dequately involved in the evaluation process. Most participants appreciated the opportunity for information sharing and group discussion. Several valued the small group work and the diversity of the groups. An ARC manager thought the small groups seemed 'to allow individuals enough time to discuss, reflect and consider'. A GSBC coordinator thought the workshops were a 'great opportunity for information sharing and collaborative problem solving '. However, some things did not work very well. Issues identified included: a lack of time to complete activities, time management, and problems with the mission/vision activity. Partially due to differences in views about the long-terms aims of the program, the group found it difficult to reach consensus on the mission and vision statements. As a solution, a working party was formed to continue working on the inputs from the three small groups to create mission and vision statements that the whole group agreed with.

Suggestions for improving the workshops included:
- Allow more time for various activities.
- Use better time management practices.
- Hold the evaluation workshops after the information sharing sessions.
- Provide clearer definitions of the terms 'mission' and 'vision'.
- Convert strategies into actions and identify teams to work on particular issues.

Goals	Strategies	Evidence
Social interaction and life skills Children know and follow social rules Mealtime behaviour and processes Personal hygiene General behaviour Respect for others (behaviour code)	Behaviour Code in place – supported by posters, role modeling by volunteers, Behaviour code for volunteers Behaviour code for parents	Children know and follow rules Posters available and utilised Volunteer training manual has relevant detail Playground and classroom behaviour improved
Data collection To collect and collate consistent data To collect relevant and useful data To change organisational culture of ARC to ensure decisions are based on evidence from data collected	National data package Training in data collection and analysis Check what data exists already and coordinate with other agencies	Package disseminated, used and supported throughout program Training completed Evidence-based decisions made by ARC

Table 2: Examples of goals, strategies and forms of evidence for 2 of the 10 program activities identified by GSBC coordinators and managers in May 2005

The National GSBC Coordinator subsequently reported that several of the goals and strategies and ideas for program improvement suggested at the workshops had been incorporated into a new ARC Strategic Plan.

Workshops with teachers and volunteers (July 2005)

Following the success of the workshops with coordinators and managers in May, planning got underway to conduct workshops with groups of teachers and volunteers who are directly responsible for the GSBC in schools. They were held in Sydney with six women and one man representing the Sydney and Greater Western Sydney regions, and in Dubbo with five women representing the Western region of NSW. en were volunteers in breakfast clubs, four were school coordinators of breakfast clubs and one was the school welfare contact. Four participants had various breakfast club positions, three had other paid occupations, while five were retired or worked as volunteers. The workshop participants represented breakfast clubs in eight schools – five in the Sydney and Greater Western Sydney region and three in the Western NSW region.

The evaluation team experienced some difficulty getting sufficient numbers from this stakeholder group to participate in workshops in both Sydney and Dubbo. Getting volunteers and teachers to commit to a one day workshop amidst the busyness of their other lives is a challenge that faces this type of evaluation. Offering to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses and providing teaching relief, while a challenge to the budget, was invaluable, as input from teachers at both workshop sites would not have been provided otherwise.

In response to lessons learnt from the May workshop, the format used was to discuss only four key activities with each group in the July workshops to allow more time on the Planning for the Future step. The Taking Stock step was able to be streamlined due to key activities having been previously identified by this stakeholder group in questionnaires. This helped to overcome the earlier time management problems.

Data obtained during workshops with these groups of GSBC volunteers and teaching staff included:
- Themes for revised mission and vision statements and comments on mission and vision statements suggested by the managers and coordinators and the existing statements from ARC
- A list of 4 key activities and ratings for these activities (see Table 3)
- Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program
- Goals, strategies and forms of evidence for the 4 key activities (see Table 4)
- Feedback about the empowerment evaluation approach and indications of willingness to take part in future evaluation activities.

Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the program

The following are examples of responses by workshop participants given during discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of the key activities. A volunteer from Sydney who gave a rating of 10 out of 10 for 'Providing a healthy breakfast to children in need and a positive start to the day' said, 'A brilliant program that runs really well.' A volunteer from Dubbo who gave a rating of 3 out of 10 for 'Recruiting and retaining volunteers' said, 'This is not so good. We are short of volunteers on some days. The program needs more publicity.'

Feedback about empowerment evaluation and willingness to participate in future evaluation activities

All of the participants considered that the empowerment evaluation method was valuable for collaboratively evaluating the GSBC program and sharing knowledge and experiences about breakfast clubs. Sixty-six percent though the method was either 'extremely' or 'very' valuable while 33% thought it was 'quite' valuable. Participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss the program, to interact with other volunteers and school staff, to better understand how other clubs operate, and to overcome common problems. A GSBC coordinator thought the workshops were a 'great opportunity for information sharing and collaborative problem solving', while a volunteer thought the workshop had been a 'good forum' for 'exchanging different experiences and perceptions'. Some participants found the workshop very interesting, enlightening and enjoyable. A volunteer commented:

> *Considering the many facets and stakeholders of the GSBC program, I feel the workshop was very productive and enlightening for volunteers who so often are limited to understanding the needs of their immediate environment. Everyone got a greater understanding of GSBC's diversity.*

Suggestions for improving the workshops included:
- Conduct as a two-day residential program.
- Make it shorter or slightly faster-paced.
- Have longer breaks.
- Involve more volunteers and schools.

Sydney/Greater Western Sydney		Western NSW	
Activity	*Average rating /10*	*Activity*	*Average rating /10*
Providing a healthy breakfast to children in need and a positive start to the day	8.7	Providing breakfast to children in need	9.6
Sustainability of the program	7.5	Learning nutritional skills through providing healthy eating examples or habits	9.4
Having adequate and reliable resources and variety of food	7.0	Interaction/relationship between children and volunteers (providing opportunity for informal welfare contact)	9.0
Understanding and providing a healthy food model	7.0	Recruiting and retaining volunteers	4.6

Table 3: Key program activities and summary of ratings from workshops with GSBC volunteers and teaching staff from Sydney, Greater Western Sydney and Western NSW in July 2005

Goals	*Strategies*	*Evidence*
Providing a healthy breakfast… Adequate support from volunteers and teachers to be able to provide breakfast Regularity and consistency from volunteers **Recruiting and retaining…** More volunteers are recruited and retained	Talk to teachers at staff meetings Clarify process involved in recruiting volunteers Contact Volunteering Australia (VA) Encourage corporates and others to get involved Raise awareness by volunteers speaking at school and business forums Provide support, make them feel comfortable , part of a team, appreciated – give out certificates at assembly Gatherings of volunteers every year to share experiences	ARC coordinator talks to teachers at staff meetings ARC coordinator contacts VA and VA shows awareness of GSBC Increase number and diversity of corporates that become involved in the program Communication has happened – notes or minutes of meetings Volunteers have received certificate of appreciation or other methods (morning tea brought by teachers) Gathering takes place – story in local newspaper

Table 4: Examples of goals, strategies and forms of evidence for 2 of the 9 program activities identified by GSBC volunteers and teaching staff from Sydney, Greater Western Sydney and Western NSW in July 2005

Most participants in both the May and July workshops reported that their knowledge and understanding of participatory program evaluation was enhanced, even those with a high level of prior knowledge. This indicated that the method is effective in building some evaluation capacity in a relatively short time. The majority of respondents in all workshops were also willing to engage in future activities related to the evaluation of the GSBC program. However, a key learning was that sufficient time, resources and notice are required to facilitate the participation of volunteers and teaching staff in future workshops.

Next steps

We now plan to undertake further intensive work with volunteers and teachers who participated in empowerment evaluation workshops in July, regional GSBC coordinators, and interested school and community members to undertake more detailed planning of the evaluation of key program activities identified during the workshops. Workshops will be conducted with program personnel at six pilot sites (three urban and three rural) that operate a GSBC. Once this pilot work is completed, a practical, user-friendly Evaluation Toolkit will be developed that can be effectively used by GSBC coordinators and school and community volunteers. This would be published on the GSBC website and in hard copy format for implementation across the whole program.

During a meeting in early September with the GSBC research management group, comprising senior executives from ARC, Sanitarium and the Adventist Development Relief Agency, there was a call for an empowerment evaluation workshop to be conducted with that group and other key senior personnel with an interest in the program. This was due to some members of this stakeholder group feeling that they should have more input into the evaluation process, since others involved in the program now had a stronger input than themselves. A key

learning from this is that steps should be taken to include senior personnel from funding oganisations at the earliest possible stage of the evaluation process to obtain their support for the empowerment evaluation process and thus ensure greater success.

Strengths and limitations of empowerment evaluation

Based on this case study, our critical reflections on the empowerment evaluation methodology, and relevant literature, the strengths and limitations of this methodology have been summarised in the following table.

Strengths	Limitations and issues
The methodology can be effective in building evaluation capacities and can eventually help to create a culture of evaluation based on continuous improvement, accountability, and community and organisational learning.	The full commitment and support of senior management and provision of sufficient resources is essential to successful implementation (Smith, 1998). It can take considerable funding, time and resources to train staff and community members to effectively plan and conduct evaluations and build a culture of evaluation. Effective strategies and adequate resources are required to involve groups such as teachers, community volunteers and school children.
The methodology is robust and responsive and has been shown to be effective in improving community-based programs and helping to achieve collaboratively agreed goals and outcomes.	Some people may initially resist taking part in the evaluation because they see evaluation as a judgmental process that could affect program funding or jobs, rather than one that enables ongoing learning and improvement.
The evaluation is collaboratively designed and controlled by program management and staff, funders, community participants and other stakeholders. They take greater ownership and responsibility for the sustainability and success of the program and its ongoing monitoring and evaluation.	The potentially conflicting agendas, values and perspectives of program management and staff, funders and community participants and the power relations involved need to be carefully managed. Evaluation consultants require significant skills in facilitation, negotiation, and conflict management.
The various steps and processes involved are highly participatory and aim to be inclusive of a broad diversity of people involved in or affected by the program.	Effectively planning and conducting evaluation workshops requires significant time, energy and resources that are not always available in community-based programs. It can be difficult to actively involve a broad diversity of program staff and community participants over a long time.
The methods and processes used aim to be democratic, action-oriented and empowering for participants.	Participatory evaluations can have unintended or disempowering effects, as well as empowering effects (Lennie 2005). A more critical approach to community participation and empowerment is therefore required. The theories and assumptions of empowerment evaluation need to be continually questioned.
The knowledge, skills and experience of program staff and community participants are valued and used to design and implement more effective evaluations and impact assessments that take community needs and the local context into account.	Using the methodology to assess the impacts of national community-based programs such as the GSBC program can be a complex undertaking that requires a detailed knowledge of the many different communities and contexts in which the program operates.
The various participation processes used can enable more open and honest dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of a program. They also enable mutual trust and understanding to develop between those involved in the evaluation.	Only the program staff and community members who participate in evaluation workshops develop a better understanding of the program and the diverse perspectives of those involved. In large-scale programs, not everyone can participate.
The methodology encourages the ongoing collection of reliable, evidence-based data, using strategies that are adapted to the local culture and conditions.	The time and effort of community volunteers involved in undertaking data collection and analysis needs to be appropriately recognised and compensated.

Conclusion

Empowerment evaluation has several strengths that makes it a practical and valuable methodology for improving and assessing the impacts of community-based programs such as the GSBC program and increasing their long-term sustainability and success. However, several limitations and issues need to be considered before deciding to implement this methodology. They include the funding, time and resources required to build evaluation capacities and include a diversity of program staff and community members in designing and conducting the evaluation. To be effective, a strong commitment is required to the principles of empowerment evaluation by senior management, staff and community participants and adequate resources are required (Smith 1998).

A more critical approach is required to avoid some of the idealism that underpins the theories and philosophies that guide this methodology. The effective management of potentially conflicting agendas, values and power relations, and finding appropriate ways to train and involve community volunteers as well as paid program staff in the evaluation, are other key issues that need to be considered.

McKie (2003) suggests that more attention should be paid to the communicative and relational dimensions of participatory evaluations that can affect their outcomes in unintended ways. Based on the case study presented, attention to these dimensions of empowerment evaluations would increase the effectiveness of this methodology by improving participation and communication processes in ways that better meet the diverse needs and goals of the people, communities and organisations involved.

Notes

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