

THE ART OF EVALUATION: A HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS

Tara Fenwick and Jim Parsons. (2000). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 244 pages.

The Art of Evaluation is a comprehensive introduction to the evaluation of learning in a variety of adult education contexts. The first five chapters locate evaluation within a discourse of beliefs and values of education, including purposes, philosophy, teaching and learning, the curriculum, epistemology, adult learners, and criteria and strategies for evaluation. Within this context, three different evaluation approaches are grounded—conceptual, technical, and relational—and discussed in chapters six through ten. In chapters 11-13, "...the passion and heart of the book" (p.146), the authors argue for dynamic and authentic evaluation throughout the teaching-learning process based on a learner-centred perspective. Learners' self-assessment and continuous assessment are seen as cornerstones of dynamic and authentic evaluation. Reflective practice, the final chapter, brings the reader full circle; it emphasizes the context of evaluation, that is, beliefs, values, and philosophy of education to foster and encourage educators', practitioners', and learners' reflective self-evaluation and authentic teaching and learning. A final section on techniques and strategies for evaluating learning concludes the chapter.

Intended for educators, practitioners and learners, *The Art of Evaluation* aims to foster, develop, and integrate reflective self-evaluation into the teaching and learning process, and ultimately lifelong learning practices. This goal is framed in values, beliefs, philosophy of education, and a learner-centred perspective to teaching and learning, and crafted through appropriate references to the literature and scholarly writings on evaluation that are integrated throughout the discussion. The authors build on these writings; elaborating the purposes of evaluation, including a learner-centred purpose, making explicit a definition of evaluation that is congruent with the learner-centred perspective, and providing numerous evaluation techniques and strategies drawn from the works of scholars in the field. These sources are also listed in the references at the end of the book.

The authors' analysis of scholarly writing on evaluation is supplemented by their descriptions of innovative strategies, perspectives on learner-centred evaluation, and development of the concepts of authentic and dynamic evaluation. Authentic evaluation is not only "...thoughtful, reflective and considered" (p.16) but also congruent with the purposes and methods of evaluation, the judgements of the process of evaluation, and philosophy of education.

Based on their own extensive knowledge and experience in the field, the authors provide ample references to the literature to support and expand both the theoretical and practical aspects of the book. Chapter Ten, "Evaluating Relational Skills," provides a unique perspective and specific strategies on how to evaluate these difficult-to-define outcomes. Relational skills are viewed within the broader context of behaviours, values, culture, self-identity, emotional intelligence, and practical knowledge. The strategies proffered (e.g., performance observation, peer assessment, video assessment, learners' self-assessment, journals, portfolios, and small group feedback) also appear to be congruent with these outcomes.

The learner-centred perspective is integrated throughout the text and made explicit in the core section of the book on dynamic and authentic assessment, an empowering alternative to traditional assessment methods. Although the language of the learning organization and its concepts (i.e., continuous learning philosophy, risk taking, innovation, systems thinking, and reflective practice) are integrated within the discussion, a critique of this language and its application to education would have provided a balanced view. Within the learner-centred model, a compelling argument is advanced and appropriate strategies offered for a shift to formative and on-going self-evaluation from summative evaluation and, concomitantly, a balance in the power and control relationship between instructor and learner in the teaching-learning process. The teaching-learning process, however, is inherently a site of conflict that calls into question the fine balance between learner's empowerment (learner independence and responsibility for their own grades) on the one hand, and teacher's responsibility and accountability on the other. Whether the power and control balance is realized may be evident only within practice. Nevertheless, problematizing the site of conflict is a step in the right direction.

In this learner-centred model, the authors suggest that practitioners, educators, and trainers must be empathetic and have listening, coaching, and counselling skills. The implication is that facilitators also need to be counsellors and counselling skills take time to develop. Nurturing and caring, however, are proposed as alternatives to these skills. While "mattering" (i.e., nurturing and caring) is an essential component of the teaching-learning process, it certainly is not a proxy for effective instruction and evaluation practices.

The major strength of this book lies in its integration of theory with concrete strategies and authentic anecdotes from practice. The authors provide numerous relevant techniques and strategies (highlighted in dialog boxes) throughout the text as well as in separate sections called "Toolboxes." Explanations of the appropriate use of the tools are provided and questions are suggested to help both novice and experienced practitioners examine and reflect on their own beliefs, values, and assumptions about the teaching-

learning process. Guidelines for planning evaluations are also provided for novice practitioners. However, the information contained in the dialog boxes, while extremely helpful, often interferes with the flow of the discussion. This structural difficulty aside, *The Art of Evaluation* has the potential to improve the practice of beginning educators, trainers, practitioners, and consultants as well as help experienced facilitators add to their toolbox of strategies and expand their perspectives.

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