Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice

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A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION PRACTICE

Culturally Responsive Uses of the Systems Evaluation Protocol (SEP)

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Over the last few years, the field of evaluation has witnessed increasing discourse related to culturally responsive evaluation or *CRE* (Madison, 1992; Manswell-Butty, Reid, & LaPoint, 2004; Mertens, 2009; SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004; etc.). However, as a relatively new area of evaluation, many professionals still struggle with basic definitional questions such as, "What is culturally responsive evaluation?" and with practical questions such as, "How can I be culturally responsive in my own work?"

To date, responses to these questions as presented in evaluation literature are varied, and for the individual professional, this variation can be overwhelming. Professionals wanting to learn more about how to be culturally responsive in their practice are in need of an organized way to conceptualize CRE and clear protocols for practicing CRE. Though it is undoubtedly counterintuitive to suggest that we address cultural context through guiding practice protocols, this is precisely the argument that needs to be engaged. This chapter suggests that systems approaches to evaluation, like the *Guide to the Systems Evaluation Protocol or SEP* (Trochim et al., 2012), provide a much-needed framework for thinking about and implementing culturally responsive evaluation. Aligning CRE principles, including considerations of cultural context, with systems evaluation activities in the SEP will advance the systematization of CRE practice.

An obvious question is How are systems approaches to evaluation and culturally responsive evaluation related to one another? Or perhaps, Why would approaches like the SEP be a logical choice for operationalizing CRE practice? There are two potential responses to these questions: The first is that systems approaches to evaluation recognize and attempt to address the complex nature of evaluation environments. However, though these approaches emphasize complexity in evaluation contexts, they do not necessarily focus on *cultural* context (e.g., Fredericks, Deegan, & Carman, 2008; Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010). On the other hand, CRE focuses specifically on the complex nature of *cultural* factors in the environment.

The second is that research regarding a systems approach to evaluation and research regarding CRE practice (Casillas & Trochim, in preparation), though existing in isolation from each other, have followed a similar strategy for attending to the complexity of contextual factors in evaluation work (Casillas & Trochim, in preparation). For example, within the SEP, a systems approach to evaluation has been presented as a set of *systems heuristics*, which provide a framework for thinking about evaluation planning from a systems perspective. These heuristics are used to create a protocol which is partially systematized but exceedingly flexible in application across evaluation contexts. Similarly, proponents of culturally responsive evaluation have referred to CRE as a "stance taken" (AEA, 2011) or as a *way of thinking* about evaluation, that is, as a framework for thinking about evaluation from a perspective of cultural respect. Granted, the SEP has provided a more cohesive set of heuristics representing decades of conceptualization by scholars of systems theory from multiple disciplines. However, in recent work by Casillas and Trochim (in preparation), a concept-mapping study revealed a set of CRE principles representing an initial step toward organizing concepts around evaluators' "way(s) of thinking" in CRE. Though these are not *heuristics* as in systems theory, these CRE *principles* can serve a similar purpose.

But there is more to be said regarding the notion of systems perspectives from a developmental orientation. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development adapts a similar *systems* approach to positioning a person's development in his/her environmental context and provides additional logical evidence for the link between systems approaches to evaluation and CRE. In the current discussion, the perspective offered by Ecological Systems Theory is relevant for multiple reasons: First, programs are often created to affect the developmental trajectory of their participants on some specific dimension (e.g., increase participant interest and affinity for the sciences). Second, programs themselves, especially as presented in the SEP, are undergoing developmental processes. Third, cultural context would be considered a macrolevel system with varying influences on individuals as participants in a program and on the program itself. Thus, treating *culture* and context as systems variables is not new, and treating them as systems variables from an evaluation perspective is consistent with theories of human development (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Thelen, Smith, Karmiloff-Smith, & Johnson, 1994).

Additionally, unpublished evidence from the Cornell Office for Research on Evaluation that produced the SEP suggests that approaches to the complex nature of organizational and, possibly social systems, *can* be successfully addressed with a protocol in order to conduct evaluations that properly contextualize programs and program stakeholders. If it is possible to systemize an approach to complex systems, and the SEP successfully does so, it would be prudent to extend its reach to the complexity of cultural influences on an evaluation and its participants for all of the reasons discussed thus far. In the following section, we draw a conceptual parallel between specific systems heuristics and specific culturally responsive principles, positioning a future discussion on the adaptation of activities in the SEP to aid in the field-wide struggle to operationalize culturally responsive practices. We argue that because there is overlap between the systems heuristics and CRE principles, examples of activities provided in the SEP will be well suited for making CRE principles actionable.

Systems Heuristics and Culturally Responsive Principles: Review and Overlap

The Systems Evaluation Protocol is an evaluation approach framed by systems thinking and is articulated in *The Guide to the Systems Evaluation Protocol* (CORE, 2012). The SEP represents the most clearly outlined attempt to identify and apply systems-thinking heuristics to evaluation. Eleven systems heuristics and their potential for framing evaluation work are

summarized and then operationalized through steps and activities in the SEP. These heuristics are outlined below.

- *Part-whole relationships.* Systems are "wholes" composed of "parts," and part-whole relationships are central to systems thinking. In dynamic systems, systems are often thought to be more than the sum of their parts. Additionally, there should be emphasis on the relationships among the components within the system and the resulting system with each of its components. In terms of evaluation work, this conceptualization draws focus to where a program "fits" in relation to the organizational system to which it belongs.
- *Local and global.* Thinking of local and global levels of scale is a way of conceptualizing relationships in a system hierarchy. When applied to evaluation, this heuristic most often refers to the position of the program being evaluated. Positioning the program as local or global entails considering things such as is this program operating at the county level (local), state level, national level (global), and so forth.
- *Boundaries.* Systems are bounded. Sometimes the boundaries are clearly identifiable, and sometimes the boundaries are less distinguishable. In terms of evaluation work, systems theory urges us to define what activities and outcomes fall within the scope of a program or within the boundaries of a program.
- *Complexity and simple rules.* Complex systems or phenomena result from individual agents operating by simple rules and receiving feedback from the environment. In terms of evaluation practice, this heuristic has a primary driver for the creation of the SEP. The SEP is, after all, a set of simple rules that can be flexibly used to evaluate complex systems.
- *Static and dynamic processes.* Static and dynamic processes have to do with the predictability of an object or subject. This is often exemplified as the difference between throwing a bird and throwing a rock. As a static object, the trajectory of the rock is predictable to various degrees. However, the trajectory of a complex system, such as a bird, is influenced by many things and is less predictable. An evaluation may fall anywhere on a continuum between static and dynamic processes, requiring your evaluation approach to be adaptive, reflexive, and iterative.
- *Ontogeny and phylogeny.* Ontogeny concerns the evolution of an organism through its lifespan. Likewise, an evolutionary systems perspective suggests that we consider the developmental phases of a program and of an evaluation and their life cycles. The SEP goes further in promoting alignment of a program and its evaluation regarding their respective life cycles.

- *Symbiosis and co-evolution.* This is the idea that certain organisms evolve together and assist in one another's survival and development. For evaluation work, this heuristic helps us to focus on the relationship between evaluation and programs as one in which both are necessary for the other's survival.
- *Causal pathways.* This describes the ideas that causal chains exist within a system and that causes have effects, and feedback may exist on the chain of events. This has direct relevance to the underlying logic of a program in which certain activities are expected to result in certain outcomes. This is typically captured in a logic model, although the SEP goes beyond this to utilize causal pathway models. Evaluations are often a process of feedback for a program's cause-and-effect logic.
- *Feedback.* Feedback is the idea that a process or system requires information about whether process components are working. Evaluations are feedback mechanisms for programs.
- *Evolution and fitness.* In evolutionary theory, organisms (thought of as complex systems) persist relative to the extent that they are adaptive. The point is that not all organisms survive. This could also be true of programs. Evaluations can help programs to adapt and survive to their contexts, but not all programs will or should persist.
- *Multiple perspectives.* A system can be perceived as many things depending on whose point of view you take, and it cannot be fully understood unless you view it from all perspectives. This is directly applicable to an evaluation in which gathering as many perspectives as possible will provide the most accurate view of the program being evaluated.

The list of culturally responsive evaluation principles compiled by Casillas and Trochim (in preparation) is somewhat shorter. These principles were systematically compiled using a concept-mapping procedure in which evaluators and program staff were asked to complete a statement about practices that they engage in in order to be culturally responsive. Participants were recruited online through the American Evaluation Association and represented a national sample of evaluators and program staff. At least half of the sample worked in educational evaluation settings and half worked in health care and other sectors. The participants also varied greatly in their experience. The number of participants varied in each of the three phases of the study from 19 to 47. The study resulted in 7 overarching principles and 12 subprinciples, whose organization was informed by both the concept-mapping study and by the extant literature on CRE. The resulting list of principles represents a preliminary attempt to organize how CRE is

being conceptualized by practicing professionals. This provisional and still-evolving list of CRE principles is summarized below.

- *Understand and recognize the larger context for programs or projects.* This principle refers largely to the community within which a program is embedded. Within this principle, three other subprinciples were identified that further emphasize cultural factors and clarify ways to understand the community context: Research and learn about the cultural group, be aware of cultural labels and historical context, and identify potential historical inaccuracies.
- *Design evaluation with participants in mind.* The idea that an evaluation should hold participants at the center of planning and decision making has some overlap with principles below pertaining to stakeholder involvement. However, it recommends that participants specifically, and not stakeholders in general, be emphasized. Specifically, there are three subprinciples that further characterize this idea: be culturally specific in design, use a multifaceted approach and appropriate methods, and collect data in culturally responsive ways.
- *Allow for self-determination by stakeholders and program participants.* This principle includes engaging directly with a wide range of participants through discussion and in other culturally appropriate ways and engaging diverse stakeholders in general planning and in theory development.
- *Build trust and facilitate communication.* Although one could argue that communication and trust are essential in any evaluator-program relationship, the subprinciples identified for this overarching principle make clear that the CRE emphasis is on diversity: Allow for representativeness, build the diversity of the organization/evaluation team, access diversity from external sources, and be inclusive of diversity. These subprinciples suggest that trust and communication will only occur if the evaluator/evaluation team is representative of the members that constitute the program context.
- *Understand the evaluation audience and help the audience to understand the evaluation purpose and process.* This principle focuses on the needs of the evaluation audience as a way to frame dissemination of evaluation information. This includes information that introduces evaluation work to the community, encourages input and communication, and shares evaluation results.
- *Make the evaluation accessible to a variety of stakeholders.* Accessibility of the evaluation is central to this principle and includes using the majority language in a community, being present at culturally appropriate community venues, and using appropriate technologies for differently-abled community members when possible.

- *Understand evaluator attributes that may affect professional practice.* Another important emphasis regards the interpersonal attributes and qualities of the evaluator. This principle encourages an evaluator to reflect on his or her own position of authority and the dynamics of power relevant to his or her own cultural position when entering a new evaluation context.

At first glance, some major differences exist between the two theoretical approaches, systems thinking, and culturally responsive evaluation. For example, systems thinking, as applied in the SEP, emphasizes structural and institutional dynamics. In contrast, CRE is highly interpersonal, reflective, and reflexive at the level of individual professionals. Additionally, systems heuristics are clearly influenced by technical and computational fields (Midgley, 2003), whereas CRE is influenced by conceptions and representations of race, indigenous frameworks, and social agenda/advocacy models in evaluation (Hopson, 2009). Despite these differences, the utility for adapting a systems perspective in CRE is explored in the following section.

The Intersection of CRE and Systems Theory

There is considerable conceptual overlap between the ideas represented by systems heuristics and those represented by culturally responsive evaluation principles, and an initial point of convergence resides in how a systems perspective is implicit to a view of "culture." From a cultural psychologist's perspective, it is necessary to have an understanding or a definition of culture if you are to work at the intersection of culture and research (Matsumoto & Juang, 2013) or at the intersection of culture and evaluation, as the case may be. This concern opens an initial discussion on the connection between systems and CRE.

Defining culture.

One impactful issue an evaluator faces is that of how to define culture and position in a way that is relevant to one's work. The endeavor to construct a definition of *culture* is by no means a new one and has been tackled in many social science and service delivery domains (e.g., Gay, 2002; Kreuter & McClure, 2004; Lee, 2001; Thomas, Fine, & Ibrahim, 2004; etc.). Culturally responsive evaluators have looked to these efforts for guidance. The result is a plethora of possible definitions from which any given evaluator can choose to frame his/her work, and this decision is relevant for how he/she comes to implement CRE. For example, Heine (2008) defines culture as "any idea, belief, technology, habit, or practice that is acquired from others" and "a particular group of individuals...who are existing within

some kind of shared context" (p. 3). Another definition suggested in the literature is that culture is "an [*sic*] historically created system of meaning and significance" (Parekh, 2006, p. 143). Both of these examples present a vague and neutral construal with little indication of the implications for how culture might be a meaningful construct to practicing evaluators. Kirkhart (2010), on the other hand, espouses that culture "refers to a set of beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills that collectively creates identity. Cultural understandings and commitments may be shared across cohorts or generations, often passed on as assumptions about 'what is' or 'how things operate'" (p. 401). Conceptualizations of culture vary greatly in the extent to which they are elaborated to include many complex dimensions or remain simple and "quantifiable" indicators of a social address.

At present, the term *culture* within the evaluation field, as in related social science fields, functions as a placeholder in discourse about social differences onto which professionals project a definition or perception of their choosing. On the one hand, having an amorphous understanding of *culture* allows evaluators to adapt a personalized framework for understanding and working with cultural sensitivity. However, another way to think about having a "placeholder" for *culture* is that the field has not reached a consensus on how our profession should treat the concept, leading to insufficient guidance for what *culture* as a factor means to our evaluation work. Another possible implication is that evaluators can choose to practice without adopting a definition of *culture* at all, a choice which was observed in a recent literature review of 52 empirical studies on culturally responsive evaluation (Chouinard & Cousins, 2009).

Not only is it necessary to develop a definition of *culture* to guide professional practice, it must be done in a way that creates relevance between the often esoteric dimensions of culture as an academic construct and the practical implications of cultural characteristics for everyday evaluation practice. Systems theory can be used to inform the theoretical framework in which an evaluator positions his/her understanding of *culture* for application in evaluation settings and is well suited for this purpose. The many definitions of culture available converge on the notion of culture as a dynamic, ever-changing set of concepts and activities that surround individual and group development (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Systems theory appropriately addresses this dynamism and helps professionals to think of culture as a complex system akin to an organism. From this perspective, an evaluator may gain sufficient appreciation for the complexity of cultural factors, which can help a professional to understand why, for instance, it is important to use mixed-methods approaches and choose appropriate research designs. Without a properly situated understanding of cultural factors and how they may potentially influence evaluation results, an evaluator may find it difficult to accept CRE theory and approaches. Thus, rather

than simply prescribe steps and activities, a systems perspective provides a framework for thinking about and defining culture as a factor of relevance in evaluation work.

Overlapping principles and heuristics.

In addition to the overlap between systems theory and cultural theory, there are specific points of intersection between culturally responsive evaluation principles and systems heuristics. For instance, understanding the context in which a program is embedded, as proposed in the list of CRE principles, resonates with the systems heuristics of *local-global scale* and *boundaries*. Cultural psychologists have long struggled with issues of the boundaries between individual characteristics and group characteristics and between subgroup and group characteristics (Cole, 1996). For evaluators, a similar struggle can be described using the language of the systems approach in the SEP. The global scale characteristics of a cultural group may be those general descriptors associated with, for example, Mexican American groups in general. Some of these characteristics might be based on a statistic that Mexican Americans have a higher incidence of diabetes in the United States or participate more actively in the religious traditions of Catholicism, which emphasize family values. However, the extent to which these descriptions are accurate for and relevant to any particular local Hispanic community in which a program is embedded is a different concern. Thus, while one CRE principle, *understand and recognize the larger context for programs and projects*, reminds us to understand the context of an evaluation, the systems *local-global scale* heuristic encourages us to differentiate between the local and the broader contexts.

Another conceptual overlap resides in the idea that the reality of how a program operates and what outcomes are achieved is based on the perceptions of numerous stakeholders with various expectations, or in *multiple perspectives*, as the systems heuristic holds. This heuristic emphasizes the mutually constituting perspectives of individuals and holds that a program cannot be fully understood without understanding these *multiple perspectives*. Additionally, a CRE principle, *allow for self-determination by stakeholders and program participants*, encourages professionals to empower stakeholders, and participants specifically, with the idea that they are best positioned to understand the program and thereby should tell professionals how they perceive it, what they hope to gain by participating, and whether it meets their expectations. A related principle encourages professionals to *make the evaluation accessible to a variety of stakeholders*. This expands on the systems idea that *multiple perspectives* hold value for defining the program and evaluation scope and aid in evaluation planning. However, these perspectives are also affected by the information that is redistributed as a result of an evaluation.

The complex nature of programs and evaluations in context is further characterized by systems theory, which draws attention to the differences between *static* and *dynamic processes*, as well as by a conceptualization of changing individuals in changing contexts through a discussion of *ontogeny* and *phylogeny*. These two heuristics overlap with the CRE principles that focus on interpersonal skills like *build trust and facilitate communication* and *understand evaluator attributes that may affect professional practice*. Firstly, the idea that programs and evaluations are *dynamic processes* stems not only from the nature of a program embedded in a system with other programs, but from the fact that programs are constituted by humans. It is a human who designs programs and evaluations, humans who interact to implement and receive services, and humans who constitute nearly all other aspects and actions of program development and evaluation. These humans and their relationships to one another in a program context are continually changing and, hopefully, developing. Whereas the systems heuristics remind us to attend to the complex relationships between programs and among levels of a system, CRE principles focus on the relationships between individuals and the systems in which they are embedded. Using these two theoretical orientations of CRE and systems allows a professional to navigate the complexity of relationships within a system along various levels of a hierarchy, as presented in Figure 2.1.

In general, the conceptual overlap between CRE principles and systems heuristics can be characterized by a question of scope, where systems theory in evaluation focuses on the structural characteristics of a system and
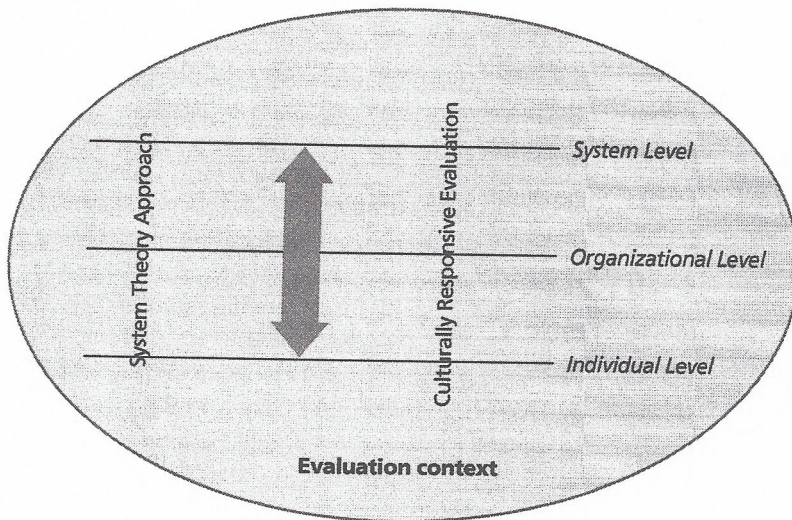

Figure 2.1   Navigating system hierarchy levels in program evaluation.

culturally responsive evaluation approaches focus on interpersonal aspects of individuals embedded within an organizational system. It is through the application of interpersonal skills and relationships that structural components are addressed in CRE. Additionally, because CRE emphasizes interpersonal relationships in an evaluation and/or program context, it extends discussion of context to include social systems which may affect these interpersonal relationships. However, by using systems and CRE approaches together, there is more potential to move freely through the levels and components of a system, to include both structural and social system components.

ADAPTING SEP ACTIVITIES FOR CRE PRACTICE

The conceptual overlap between systems heuristics and culturally responsive evaluation principles is theoretically interesting and important for understanding why the application of the SEP makes sense for CRE practice. However, the most important facet of the integration of these ideas is that of operationalizing CRE practices by using selected steps and activities in the SEP. Armed with a practice-relevant definition of culture and an understanding of the relationship between systems heuristics and CRE principles, we review selected SEP steps and activities which lend themselves to CRE practice. For a comprehensive review of the SEP, please refer to *The Guide to the Systems Evaluation Protocol: Phase I Planning* (CORE, 2012) in its entirety.

The Preparation Stage

The SEP begins with the preparation stage of an evaluation (see Table 2.1). In this initial step, an evaluator enters the evaluation or program system, creates a Memorandum of Understanding describing the scope of the work and an agreement on expectations, and makes general assessments regarding history and capacity for evaluation within an organization.

The preparation stage is of particular importance to culturally responsive evaluators. This is evident in the most comprehensive articulation on how to implement a culturally responsive evaluation approach to date, "A Guide to Conducting Culturally Responsive Evaluations" (Frierson, Hood, Hughes, & Thomas, 2010). Table 2.2 provides a compilation of typical evaluation activities as may be present in any basic evaluation approach and enriched further by suggested activities in the Frierson et al. (2010) chapter. It is apparent that in preparation for an evaluation, culturally responsive evaluators engage in many activities to learn about and attend to cultural and contextual factors of an evaluation. How this is achieved, though, varies substantially among professionals, and for some professionals, remains

TABLE 2.1 Summary of SEP Stages, Steps, and Activities

Preparation Stage		Modeling Stage		Evaluation Development Stage	
Steps	Activities	Steps	Activities	Steps	Activities
Create a shared understanding of expectations		Introductory presentation	Launch Meeting (includes a variety of activities related to each of these steps)	Introduce evaluation plan	Question-Claim Match-Up, Stakeholder Review
Assess capacity	Complete Evaluation Capacity checklist	Stakeholder analysis	Stakeholder affinity diagram	Develop evaluation questions	Peer evaluation plan brainstorm
		Program review	Program history	Develop sampling plan	Finalize evaluation plan
		Program boundary analysis	Evaluation history	Identify or develop measures	
		Lifecycle analysis	Lifecycle alignment review	Develop evaluation design	
		Initial logic model draft	Logic and pathway model peer review	Develop analysis plan	
		Pathway model	Mining the model: Parts 1 & 2	Develop evaluation reporting plan	
		Program system links	Stakeholder interview	Develop evaluation Schedule/implementation plan	
		Evaluation scope		Finalize evaluation plan	
		Program/Logic model synthesis			

Note: Adapted from Trochim et al. (2012), *The Guide to the System Evaluation Protocol.*

TABLE 2.2 Basic and Culturally Specific Activities in Evaluation Planning

Typical Evaluation Activities	Culturally Responsive Activities
Prepare for evaluation	Analyze context
	Explore communication styles
	Consensus on evaluation purpose
	Assemble evaluation team
	Acquire foundational knowledge
Identify purpose of the evaluation	Process evaluation
	Progress evaluation
	Summative evaluation
Frame the right questions	Determine appropriate type of evidenc
	Critically question evaluation questions
Design evaluation	Identify appropriate design
Select/Adapt instruments	Decide to identify, develop, and/or adapt existing measures
	Pilot test for appropriateness to population
	Translate when necessary

a mystery. We offer an interpretation of how these CRE behaviors may be realized as an evaluator progresses through steps of the Preparation stage in the SEP.

Enter the system.

Every evaluation begins with the introduction of an evaluator to the program he/she will evaluate. In the SEP, entering the evaluation system is about the interpersonal introductions that must take place between evaluator(s) and program representatives. For the culturally responsive evaluator, entering the evaluation system also requires becoming acquainted with the social and cultural context of an evaluation, especially if the context is an unfamiliar one. Since a culturally situated program is embedded in socially relevant systems and not just in an organizational system, entering the social system requires researching and learning about the cultural group and community that the program targets. It also requires a certain amount of reflexivity on behalf of a professional negotiating a relationship and program context. Guidance on how to enter the system is limited within the SEP, but well informed by the extant literature on CRE. Whereas the SEP may describe simple introductions among colleagues, other CRE practices encourage identifying and then learning about the cultural group with whom an evaluator will be working, for example, through a key informant. When using the SEP, activities that CRE professionals engage in early on are appropriate at later stages of the evaluation.

For example, an important activity upon entering the evaluation system involves an assessment for capacity within the organization and the program. The Organization Evaluation Capacity Checklist in the SEP can be used to assess an organization's capacity to enact CRE principles by including relevant items on the checklist. For example, a resources question such as, Do you currently have staff who are versed in the cultural characteristics of the target population or who have shared lived experiences with the target population? could be included. An important training question would be, Do you have regular cultural competency trainings? or What methods does your organization utilize to access cultural knowledge relevant to the target population? Relevant to evaluation policies, one might ask, Does your organization implement any specific policies for working with diverse populations? When integrating such questions, the facilitating evaluator should provide guidance and explanations of what each question is intending to elicit for the context of the program in question.

Responses to the Organization Evaluation Capacity Checklist not only demonstrate an organization's capacity to conduct an evaluation, but by including additional suggested questions can also determine an organization's capacity to conduct a *culturally responsive* evaluation. By knowing what resources, training, and policies are available to a program, an evaluator can make decisions about how to include diversity in the evaluation process moving forward, how to engage stakeholders who have a cultural stake in planning, how to learn further about the cultural context of the program, and more. For example, *building trust* and *facilitating communication through inclusion of diversity* can be achieved through the use of a cultural informant or by hiring multicultural staff. The capacity assessment may reveal that the option to hire multicultural staff is feasible and desirable as compared to communicating with a cultural informant.

Create MOU.

The second major step identified in the SEP involves creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Each component of the MOU should be considered from a culturally responsive perspective insofar as it is possible to do so. For instance, in outlining evaluation project goals, evaluators and program representatives that inform the MOU process should go out of their way to identify perspectives that may be traditionally overlooked and consider what the goals of the evaluation may be from those perspectives as well. Additionally, the composition of the evaluation partnership working group needs to be representative of multiple perspectives. To date, the typical working group in implementation of the SEP has been composed of program staff and administrators. From a CRE perspective, important members of the community with a stake in the program should also be invited to participate. When considering the costs and budget within

the MOU, evaluators and program representatives should also factor in a budget for cultural-competence training or other culturally responsive activities. For instance, if the evaluator will engage with community members through a cultural event, budget should be planned accordingly.

The Modeling Stage

The Modeling Stage within the SEP represents the bulk of collaborative activity among evaluator(s) and program staff, administrators, and/ or stakeholders and therefore holds the most potential for realizing CRE practice. This stage consists of several steps and activities that culminate in a draft-logic model and pathway model for a given program. Traditionally, most activities presented in this stage (see Table 2.1) are included in a 2–3 day workshop or planning meeting referred to as the Launch Meeting. Though there is flexibility in how the launch meeting is implemented, it is not necessary to complete all suggested activities during this one meeting. In this chapter, each step is addressed individually and whether steps and activities are grouped into a Launch Meeting is left to individual practitioners. However, they are often discussed in the context of group work that would take place as such a meeting.

Evaluation Cafe.

The Evaluation Cafe is an activity designed to develop a definition of evaluation. It is also a good opportunity for the working group to voice concerns or apprehensions regarding evaluation. In the SEP, this activity is suggested through the use of prompts which group members answer in small groups and then share out to the workshop at-large. From a culturally responsive perspective, we suggest using a prompt to encourage thinking about the cultural context of the evaluation. Some social groups may have less than positive perspectives and experiences with evaluation in their communities, so this activity provides opportunity to surface what those apprehensions may be and how they are positioned in stakeholders' culture. The SEP, as most evaluation methodologies, includes an assessment of evaluation capacity in the preparation stage. In the SEP, this assessment is conducted with a formal checklist of resources, training, information technology resources, and evaluation policy components (CORE, 2012). As part of the CRE principle related to building trust and communication, practitioners suggest building diversity of the evaluation team and accessing diversity from external sources.

Boundary analysis.

Another activity in the systems-evaluation protocol is a boundary analysis, which is related to the system concept of identifying boundaries of system

components and the system itself. This is a facilitated discussion in which program staff make decisions about what activities or components define the program in question and which are "outside" of program boundaries. In this way, the SEP facilitates a "birds-eye view" perspective of the program in context while clarifying the defining components of a system. However, this activity does not explicitly focus on the cultural system(s) in which a program may be embedded. This exercise can be expanded to address CRE principles related to understanding the cultural context of a program and its participants. From Casillas and Trochim (in preparation.), the principle of *understand(ing) cultural context* is expanded to include being aware of cultural labels and histories, understanding possible inaccuracies of those labels, and learning about the participant group. A boundary analysis activity, guided by these principles, can facilitate an exploration of program staff knowledge and attitudes related to the program target population. It can also lead evaluators and program staff through a decision-making process about which cultural characteristics are relevant to the evaluation.

Evaluators would begin, simply, by drawing a large circle on a whiteboard or chalkboard. Much like in the original SEP methodology, this circle will represent the program and its boundaries. Then the staff and evaluators would work together to create a list of all the characteristics of this participant population, such as age, gender, socioeconomic position, racial/ethnic identification, and anything else that may be relevant to the group. Additionally, discussion about what is believed to be true about these characteristics would be added to the list, for example, *our population is an immigrant Asian population and may speak a language other than English or is bilingual.* Ideally, a multicultural evaluation staff will facilitate discussion about which cultural characteristics are accurate or inaccurate while also making decisions about which of these characteristics belong inside the circle and which belong outside. Characteristics placed inside the program circle, or the program boundary, are those that the group decides are likely to have the most impact on the program and its evaluation. Other items of potential impact but less importance for the current evaluation scope could be listed outside of the circle and marked with an asterisk for future discussion or consideration. Such an exercise allows for the systematic exploration the groups' assumptions about the cultural context of the evaluation and brings individuals into agreement about what considerations are important.

Stakeholder affinity diagram.

In a systems approach to evaluation, multiple stakeholders at varying levels of a system represent multiple perspectives from different positions in the system hierarchy, which can translate into various program goals, diverse ideas about program implementation, and disagreements or misunderstandings in general (Trochim et al., 2012). Thus, an important step in

a systems evaluation is identifying various stakeholders and locating their position in the system relative to the program. The CRE principle *engage stakeholders in general* resonates with this SEP goal in that stakeholders must first be identified before they can be engaged. In the SEP, identifying and locating stakeholders is achieved by constructing a *stakeholder map*. In order to bring this CRE principle into alignment with SEP methodologies, the stakeholder-analysis activity needs to be expanded to identify stakeholders who represent the intersection of stake in the program and stake in the cultural context of the program.

In a stakeholder map, a program is represented as the center in a diagram surrounded by other increasingly larger circles, appearing similar to a target. Program staff and evaluators work together to generate a list of possible stakeholders and place them at various levels of the map. Stakeholders central to the evaluation or program are placed proximal to the program center and stakeholders with less stake are placed distal to the program center. Culturally responsive evaluators must encourage participants to decide which stakeholders are culturally relevant to a program and place them on the map as well. For instance, perhaps a given program is targeted to middle school students and is a single-site program. Students are placed central to the program on the stakeholder map. The program may not be targeted to the family of students, though they generally influence how a student performs in a program, so family is placed on the periphery of the stakeholder map. However, perhaps family is a particularly prevalent value in the surrounding community, which leads mothers to regularly be present at program activities even if they do not participate in any particular way. The presence of mothers at program activities could affect program outcomes, and neglecting to consider the cultural value of *family* would result in placing "family" further away from the program center on the map. At a later stage in the evaluation, having identified mothers as central to the program could lead to a valuable data collection opportunity. Thus, when facilitating a stakeholder analysis, evaluators must challenge program staff to think about the roles stakeholders may play from a culturally accurate perspective and not just from a program perspective.

Each of these Preparation and Modeling Stage steps, when properly examined from a culturally responsive perspective, is key to informing the products of these stages: the Logic and Pathway Models. Most logic models, which portray the underlying logic of a program, contain some space for "context" or contextual factors drawn as an arrow that follows across the entirety of the model. The approach described herein, by in-depth discussion and guided consideration and diagramming of cultural issues, can better inform this space in a logic model. Creating an increased focus on culture with these activities may dimensionalize *culture* and *context* in the minds or

professionals beyond the limited representation of an arrow under a logic model diagram.

The Guide to the SEP was used as an illustrative example of how a professional may take existing methodologies and protocols, apply a philosophical understanding of CRE principles, and create a relevant and pragmatic CRE practice. This text, however, is not a comprehensive guide for all the ways in which steps in the SEP can be made actionable, as that is beyond the scope of the current goal. Instead, this chapter offers an example of how theoretically grounded approaches, like systems approaches, that have an existing guide or protocol for practice, like the SEP, can be used to operationalize the sometimes vague principles of CRE practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Noteworthy efforts of evaluators arguing for culturally responsive approaches have successfully led professionals and researchers to seek innovative and appropriate ways of practicing CRE. The work of evaluators such as Frierson et al. (2010) represents a much needed step toward organizing a cohesive vision of CRE practice and provides an important foundation on which to anchor other approaches. However, there is a great deal of flexibility in how evaluators may choose to implement CRE and little guidance on how to access and best use the inherent flexibility of culturally responsive approaches. As such, we reviewed another malleable approach, systems thinking in evaluation, which fits well with CRE theory, and expanded upon the potentiated utility of both frameworks when used in conjunction. Though this is an imperfect marriage, it illustrates the potential for developing methodological approaches with pragmatic suggestions for implementing CRE practice moving forward.

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