

Background on Empowerment Evaluation

Purpose

Empowerment Evaluation is a tool developed by Dr. David Fetterman at Stanford University and documented in the book Foundations of Empowerment Evaluation, by Dr. David Fetterman. This tool is often used in educational settings and in community based settings to evaluate programs with multiple stakeholders. It has the benefit of soliciting broad input from multiple people in discussion with each other, allowing the participants to set the terms of the discussions, and giving participants the impetus to begin making changes immediately. While it is an excellent evaluation tool, it also can be viewed as an important piece of the transformation process.

In congregational education settings in particular, it allows parents, teachers, educators, and students the opportunity to have a thoughtful and truthful discussion about education programs, while staying positive and forward-thinking.

Methodology

Step One: Review the mission of the program. Participants brainstorm phrases that they believe would be part of a mission statement for the program. The ensuing discussion is to clarify meaning and gain a reasonable level of agreement. The actual mission statement is not written at this time. The purpose of this step is to get agreement on what you are evaluating. It is also an easy way to help participants have an explicit discussion about the mission of the program – something they may not otherwise take the time to think about. To focus the brainstorming, ask participants to start their ideas with the phrase “the purpose of this program is to...”

Step Two: Brainstorm “critical activities.” Participants list the activities that they and the program must do well in order to achieve its mission. These could be things that the program is doing well, not doing well, or not doing at all. This allows the participants to define the parameters of success. Participants should refrain from “telling their stories” at this point and simply list out the activities. To focus the brainstorming, ask participants to start their sentence with a verb.

Step Three: Rank the critical activities. Once the list is complete, participants vote on which activities they think they would most want to talk about in the session. They do not necessarily vote for the things that need the most improvement, but rather things that they want to discuss that day. The top 10 are chosen for further discussion.

Step Four: Rate the critical activities. Participants are asked to rate the top 10 critical activities on a score from 1-10. A score of 1 indicates that there is nothing that could be made worse about the program. A score of 10 indicates that there is nothing that could be made better about the program. Participants post their ratings. If participants do not have direct experience with an activity, they are asked to rate it based on their perception.

The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE)—

A Project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles

The work of the ECE is made possible by generous grants from many funders. www.eceonline.org/funders

Step Five: Discuss ratings. The participants are then asked to explain their ratings. Go through the activities one by one. Vary whether you start with a person who gave a high rating or a low rating or a medium rating. Make sure to get people involved who don't voluntarily raise their hands.

Step Six: Solutions. Participants are broken into small groups and the activities are divided among them. They are asked to provide ideas for making each activity better.

Using Empowerment Evaluation in Your Congregation

Empowerment Evaluation can be an extremely helpful tool to use in your congregation. It affords a way to have a structured discussion with parents, teachers, educator(s), students and other stakeholders that:

- Helps them develop a deep understanding of the mission of the program
- Generates priorities for improvement
- Generates ideas for improvement
- Further develops enthusiasm for the program

It is rare that a congregational has the minimum of 8-10 hours to complete a full Empowerment Evaluation. Experience shows that modifications can be made to ensure success in 2-3 hours:

- Start with the existing mission of the program and ask participants to talk about what they would add, subtract, what surprised them. You can send this out ahead of time to save time during the evaluation session.
- Ask your facilitator to be very careful not to allow discussion during the time when you are brainstorming critical activities. There will be plenty of time to discuss stories after the activities have been ranked and rated.
- Save the improvement ideas discussion for a follow-up session with interested participants. You can invite additional people to this session who could not make the evaluation session.
- Give people 5-10 minutes at the end of the evaluation to write down any thought they had that they didn't get a chance to discuss during the session. This could include ideas about activities that were not ranked high enough for discussion or improvement ideas.

A few other tips:

- Use a facilitator with excellent facilitation skills to moderate this session. It should be someone with some understanding of your program or of congregation education, but someone who is not invested in the program itself.
- Use text study to start and set the tone. Participants can often start the session with a high level of anxiety about offering criticism directly to people who run programs. The text study can help ease this concern.
- Do it regularly and do it for all of your education programs so that it becomes part of your culture

Empowerment Evaluation Text Study

Pirkei Avot 6:3: "Whoever learns from another, one chapter or one law or one verse or one word or even one letter, is bound to (must) accord the teacher honor (kavod)."

It s"jæt eUxP It s""jææt vfk£v It s"jæt eærP lrc£j¥n s
¥nIK©v
slcF IC d"j±bk Qh:irm s""jæt ,It UKp£tlt s"jæt rUC!s

"Reprove your kinsman, but incur no guilt because of him." Leviticus 19:17

t§y¥j uhkg t"¬i,-tO±u Wα,ln
g-,æt ©jflT

Discussion questions:

- What do these texts tell you about Jewish values regarding giving and receiving feedback?
- Based on these values, what should you keep in mind during this evaluation?