Practical methods to evaluate school breakfast programs: a case study

P. Wayne Miller
University of Wollongong

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PRACTICAL METHODS TO EVALUATE
SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

A CASE STUDY

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

P. Wayne Miller

Bachelor of Education (Avondale College)
Master of Human Movement Studies (University of Queensland)

SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES
2009
I, P. Wayne Miller, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Health Sciences, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

(Signature)

October 2009
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who have contributed to and made completion of this work possible. It is really a journey that started when the decision was made to enter academia in 1981 ten years after leaving school. Thanks Yvonne (Woodberry) for taking the time to reignite literary skills and to prepare me for mature age exams. Thanks Jim (Hanson) for stirring the passion for living life to the full and for taking me as a student to the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane and the Australian Council for Health Physical Education and Recreation Conference at the University of Queensland. Your unique brand of mentoring set in motion the rich and rewarding career I have enjoyed as an academic.

I also thank the administration of Avondale College for their support through my Master of Human Movement Studies degree at the University of Queensland and through this doctoral program. A combined ten years of financial support and release from full-time duties bears testament to their belief in the professional development of staff. To the staff of the Faculty of Lifestyle Education and Visual Communication at Avondale where I served as Dean from 1999–2008, I thank them for entrusting me with the position and particularly for their patience during these last five years when I was often distracted by the research project.

A huge thank you goes to my principal supervisor Associate Professor Heather Yeatman and co-supervisor Professor Tony Worsley. Their professional support and personal encouragement for this wayward student throughout the entire life of the project has been exemplary. To Heather particularly, your contribution to the outcome is immense. To partner investigator Dr John Ashton, I give my thanks and sincere appreciation for allowing me to make the project mine and for supporting the new direction that entailed.

During the project I have had the privilege of working directly with some 120 program personnel committed to the delivery of the Good Start Breakfast Club program. I thank the children at participating schools who completed surveys and talked to me about their breakfast clubs. I am in awe of the community volunteers and teachers who turn out before school each day, when many of us are still brewing our morning coffee, to feed hungry children and maybe just as importantly to connect as people who care. Not enough that they volunteer their time to serve breakfast regularly to energetic children, about 90 gave freely of their time to complete surveys, attend full-day workshops (some more than once) and to talk to me about the evaluation process and particularly to share their thoughts about empowerment evaluation. I am also indebted to the 20 or so state and regional Red Cross managers and their breakfast club coordinators who by their attendance at our inaugural empowerment evaluation workshop held over two days in 2005 at Red Cross House in Sydney, contributed so much to the direction of
the evaluation. To the three who went on to be intensively involved throughout the project I am particularly indebted. I offer sincere thanks to the executive personnel from Red Cross, Sanitarium and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency who initially, somewhat tentatively, came with me on the empowerment evaluation journey, who demonstrated their emerging acceptance of the approach by engaging in a half-day workshop, and provided additional funding at crucial times during the project.

To Dr June Lennie, a private evaluation and research consultant, who collaborated with me as ‘evaluation expert’ for the 10 empowerment evaluation workshops conducted during the project and who encouraged and gave me confidence to submit abstracts to conference convenors and to refereed journals I offer my sincere thanks for her assistance with the project and for her enormous contribution to my professional life.

To my immediate family, thanks to all for your love and support. Your contribution over the years has been steadfast. To my parents in-law and to Mum and Dad, thanks for modelling behaviour constants that are a true inspiration. Your encouragement throughout the journey is much appreciated.

Finally I dedicate this work to my wife Jennifer, the love of my life. Jen, words cannot express the depth of gratitude I have for the inevitable sacrifices you were called on to make. There is a new day ahead and I look forward to life with you unconstrained and undistracted by less important pursuits.
PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE THESIS

The following publications and presentations have arisen directly from the work conducted for this thesis.

Publication in Refereed Journal


Publications in Conference Proceedings


Additional Conference Presentation

ABSTRACT

This study reports the use of empowerment evaluation with a national school breakfast program in Australia known as the Good Start Breakfast Club (GSBC).

The project comprised two key aspects. First, the empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 2001) approach was used as the framework to develop a ‘practical’ methodology desired by the program managers (Australian Red Cross) and major sponsor (Sanitarium Health Food Company at the time of the study) to evaluate their program. Good Start Breakfast Club personnel engaged in a process of self-evaluation and, in so doing, a suite of ‘practical’ evaluation tools was developed. During the application of empowerment evaluation the researcher served as facilitator and evaluation ‘coach’, offering evaluation expertise throughout the process. Second, the impact that empowerment evaluation has had on the delivery of the GSBC program is reported in this case study. These impacts were examined at two main levels: first on the capacity of program personnel to contribute to the evaluation, and second on changes that occurred in relation to program delivery as a result of the empowerment evaluation.

Eighty Good Start Breakfast Club personnel took part in ten empowerment evaluation workshops during 2005 to: identify key program activities for investigation; gather baseline data about the strengths and weaknesses of the activities; suggest goals and strategies to monitor and improve the activities identified; and to develop evaluation tools designed to provide evidence of success.

The empowerment evaluation approach was successful in generating a high level of cooperation and commitment from workshop participants to the on-going evaluation process. It was also effective in building evaluation capacity in the relatively short period of the study with participants reporting having had their knowledge and understanding of participatory program evaluation enhanced. Nine evaluation instruments were trialled during 2006 with respect to four key program activities: providing a healthy breakfast to children in greatest need; positively changing or influencing the eating habits of children; improving the learning capacity/learning environment of children attending the GSBC; and social interaction in the GSBC environment.

The research project makes a significant contribution to the field of evaluation practice on at least two fronts. First, early versions of the case study have contributed to the professional field of program evaluation with presentations made at three international conferences of the Australasian Evaluation Society, one at the annual conference of the American Evaluation Association and a paper published in the Evaluation Journal of Australasia. It is advancing
knowledge about a contemporary program evaluation approach and about a community-based program of significant public interest in Australia. Second, evaluation methods and associated tools were prepared and implemented at trial sites by non-specialist program personnel in preparation for widespread use across the Good Start Breakfast Club program. Three survey instruments were subsequently rolled out across the program in three Australian states. It is envisaged that the findings of this study and the results derived from the on-going evaluation of the Good Start Breakfast Club, while of particular significance to the program’s sponsors, will be applicable to sponsors of school breakfast and other community-based programs throughout the world.
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<td>Adventist Development and Relief Agency</td>
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