Cultural Respect in the Evaluation Process: Lessons Learned from the Field

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Introduction. Traditionally, researchers have used the term “cultural competence” when referring to the expertise needed to work with minority populations or populations outside the researcher’s realm. The presenters in this carousel round table discussion wish to move the dialogue beyond cultural competence to focus on the more attainable and preferable practice of cultural respect. Practitioners are coming to the realization that it is impossible to be culturally competent in all cultures, but it is more realistic to think about the work we do, specifically as evaluators, within the context of cultural respect.

Method. Evaluation experiences of the presenters and participants will be discussed to highlight those methods and approaches that facilitate or obstruct culturally respectful evaluation. Methods to be discussed include stakeholder involvement and the Tribal Participatory Research model (Fisher & Ball, 2002).

Major points.

*Cultural respect incorporates the concepts of cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and cultural awareness.

*Culturally respectful methodologies consist of programming, evaluation, and research that are compatible with the values, intentions, and skills of members of the community and the researchers.

*It is useful to think about “culture” more broadly while conducting evaluation research. For example, consider not only race and ethnicity, but also other contexts such as socio-economic status, literacy, age, rural/urban setting, organizational environment, country culture, majority/minority status within region, religion, etc.

*While it is impractical for an evaluator to be competent in every setting, given the multiple contexts in which evaluation occurs, an evaluator can attain a satisfactory level of cultural respect by creating a process that is as inclusive as possible.

*Involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the evaluation process provides opportunities to collectively check the knowledge, sensitivity, and awareness of survey questions, and other appropriate methodologies.

Lessons learned. Presenters will summarize lessons learned from their experiences with projects in Zimbabwe, India, Brazil, Portugal, U.S. Native American Nations, and the U.K. Participants will be encouraged to contribute to this discussion with examples from their experiences.

Educational importance. Much of the theory and practice concerning cultural competence has been generated through the field of medicine and, in particular, nursing. However, culturally respectful evaluation should be a concern for all researchers, including those evaluating nutrition programs, community building projects, and agricultural enterprises. Sharing ideas and experiences, as well as participating in dialogue involving multiple fields of practice, is an important part of the scientific process and a valuable opportunity for Extension professionals.