

THE ART OF EVALUATION
A Handbook for Educators and Trainers

About the Authors

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Tara has published numerous articles and book chapters in the areas of adult education, teaching, and learning. She has been adjunct professor or visiting faculty member at the University of New Brunswick, the University of Calgary, St. Stephens' Theological College, and Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C. She is a consulting editor for the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, a member of the Board for the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, and co-Chair of the Canadian Commission of Professors of Adult Education.

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A HANDBOOK FOR
EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS

Tara J. Fenwick and Jim Parsons

University of Alberta



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List of Sample Rating Scales and Evaluation Activities

INSTRUCTOR'S MATERIALS: These rating scales and evaluation activities are available in electronic form to instructors using this book as required text in a course of study. In these files, the background is clear and the page may be readily photocopied or made into overhead transparencies for classroom use. The files may be viewed and printed using the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is free from www.adobe.com. To obtain the Adobe Acrobat (PDF) files for these pages simply, instructors should email the publisher with course details: publisher@thompsonbooks.com.

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Introduction

What This Book Is All About

Evaluation is an integral part of learning. In this age of accountability, assessment of learning outcomes has become a critical, albeit daunting, responsibility for many educators. We are supposed to develop clear criteria for learner capacities that are frequently emergent, unclear, and constantly changing. We are supposed to report comprehensive and realistic measurements of highly complex and often invisible human understandings and abilities. Above all, presumably, we hope to honour learners and their individual processes and keep their growth and their own understanding of their development at the centre of our evaluation purposes.

This book is intended as an introduction to learner evaluation in various contexts of adult education. We have attempted to address issues and provide examples that would fit the interests of students of adult education, new college and university teachers, trainers in business and government and consultants whose work involves learner evaluation. Every educator works within a unique context of learners, purposes, structures, and cultures. Every reader, therefore, needs to be critical and selective when choosing among the materials offered in this book. Some of it will suit you, some may not fit your philosophy or your situation, and some will need adaptation to be useful in your work.

Primarily, the book is intended for use as a practical manual. This is why we have included many activities and a Toolbox section offering specific strategies – the nuts and bolts of evaluation methods. Sample forms are provided, such as checklists and rating scales, which we encourage you to modify to adapt effectively to your

own contexts and preferences. (These forms are available and can be downloaded for your use.) We hope that the book becomes a useful reference for beginning educators and trainers, and perhaps even for experienced instructors looking for some new strategies and perspectives.

Celebrate what you want to see more of.

— Tom Peters

Our focus here is the learner and instructor, rather than the program. Of course, all evaluation of learning must be considered within the total context of the program and institution. However, program evaluation seeks different purposes, resolving different questions than learner evaluation. For this reason we have touched only briefly upon issues of program evaluation, and only insofar as these affect learner assessment.

We start with the basics. In Chapters 1 through 5 we encourage readers to examine carefully fundamental issues in evaluation purposes, planning, developing criteria, and choosing strategies for evaluation. In Chapters 6 through 10 we explore different evaluation approaches for assessing conceptual growth, technical skill mastery, and relational skills. For instructors working within an institution, we have included a chapter about the meaning of grades and grading practices. You will see our bias towards integration of authentic assessment into all parts of learning and life in Chapters 11, 12, and 13. These are crucial chapters for us, offering arguments and suggestions for making assessment “dynamic,” and

for focusing most on learners' self-assessment and continuous assessment as an ongoing integral part of education.

And finally, the book ends the way it begins: with a chapter encouraging readers to reflect deeply upon their own practice and philosophy in evaluating learners. We believe that the richest growth opportunities for us as educators are embedded in our own dilemmas of everyday practice and the selves which emerge in them. When we are able to confront these dilemmas knowledgeably, lovingly, critically, and courageously, we can begin to work through them. Only then do we begin doing what this book suggests that we help learners to do—integrate reflective self-evaluation into the fabric of our lives.