

## Review EJA

*Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation* - A. Christson Adedoyin, Ndidiama N. Amutah-Onukagha, and Chandria D. Jones, Editors.

### Introduction

This book is an edited collection consisting of 16 chapters. Culturally responsive and equitable evaluation (CREE) is the focus of this edited collection. Culturally responsive and equitable evaluation is an approach that should underpin evaluation incorporating demographics, cultural, socio-economic aspects of different minority groups and so much more as this book canvasses. The book also includes the theoretical and philosophical underpinning and ideas on how to approach CREE and the need for experiences, sensitivity, and an awareness of historical aspects, for example, colonisation, bias, and trauma that are so-often not even acknowledged in traditional evaluation practices and training.

This book aims to inform, educate, and encourage evaluators to see things through different lenses and to be better able to incorporate issues of equality, diversity, respect, and dignity in the way evaluations are undertaken. What is commendable is the authors of this edited collection include people from culturally diverse and different backgrounds and experiences.

### Summary

Part One of the book canvasses a range of conceptual and theoretical frameworks which underpin CREE recognising an acknowledging diversity of opinion that sits within these contexts.

Part Two examines practical implications of CREE in evaluation. Some of the Chapters discuss use of CREE using case studies from different settings and key reflections. The book presents different approaches designed to improve evaluation practice, to reflect the quality, diversity and culturally informed awareness and processes.

The book is 216 pages long with 16 Chapters. Some of the chapters have up to 10 authors each, many of whom come from diverse backgrounds which lends a powerful lens to the discussion. Therefore, this review will only explore some of the key chapters and signpost readers to some helpful tools or guides in the text so that if they wish to explore CREE in their work or study and its implementation, they can utilise these tools.

There is a lot of content and discussion of different styles and approaches. The Chapter titles are also long. This means the book, is at times very dense in its content. It is therefore useful to have the panoramic view of the chapters in the helpful 'Contents' pages as a reference point to guide a reader and to refer to. This helps a reader can just need to 'dip in and dip out' as, not all chapters will be relevant to all settings. The strength is that a number of different settings are discussed. This includes education, training, program evaluation, stakeholders, and professional development in CREE. Because of the nature and complexity of the discussion, without this reference point to go back to, it could be overwhelming.

Chapter One 'Transformative Evaluation and Culturally Responsive Equitable Evaluation Approaches: Building from Theoretical Frameworks (Mass et al.) discusses the importance of unpicking assumptions that are made in evaluation practise and a greater need to respond to the needs and strengths of marginalised communities. It discusses the importance of making more informed methodological choices when understanding the theoretical and philosophical frameworks. To do this, it suggests explicitness about our own assumptions, the need for reciprocity, being ethical in what we do, how we do it, our processes and in our findings and their dissemination. The Chapter stresses the need for evaluation to address inequality. That this must be grappled with, rather than ignored, as traditional evaluative techniques can do. This chapter sets the scene: that there are multiple versions of reality for difference and diverse populations with perspectives and the need to be explicit about these. This is reiterated throughout the whole book. CREE also requires a commitment to enhancing social justice and identifying system drivers. This includes unpacking history and movement towards transformative evaluation.

Chapter 2 'Positionality, Reflexivity, and Strengthening the Process of Conducting Culturally Responsive, Racially Equitable Evaluation of Practitioners of Colour' (Mirandar- Hartsuff et al.) (discusses how by using a CREE approach to evaluation shifts the power to the individual most likely to be impacted by the results of the evidence. This chapter canvases the critical need to name 'race' and 'racism' and for racism to be understood and for people who experience it to experience healing that can be part of good CREE evaluation practice. Even where the evaluator is white, Miranda & Martens advocate the need to unpack honestly and transparently how this whiteness can lead to bias and effect honesty and authenticity. The chapter also stresses the importance of understanding trauma, not only from the point of view of the evaluator, but by funders of programmes and evaluators. This is key a preparedness to support projects, such as this in terms of self-care and the support that may be required for those who are undertaking evaluations who come from diverse backgrounds due to any psychological distress that can be caused (page 43).

Chapter 9 'Considerations and Strategies for the Application of Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation' (Moss et al.) also has a useful discussion of community led evaluation (page 93) and provides a good set of questions to consider for CREE. Although this chapter is in a discussion of an educational setting it has transferability to other contexts. The authors also warn that a CREE approach to evaluation requires time, resources, and an adequate budget.

Chapter 12 'Applying a Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation Lens to Evidence Based Interventions in Child Welfare Settings' (Lorthridge et al) draws out the need for recognition in CREE evaluation that there are multiple identities, intersectionality and matters of race ethnicity and linguistic difference. A case study of a clearinghouse assessment of children and families in the USA was used to explore how CREE was applied to an assessment tool that was being evaluated. This chapter lists some useful guidance on preparing and integrating CREE through evaluative efforts (page 124). It makes the important point that there are differences between 'culture' and 'race' and the need for transparency and understanding of those differences. It also reiterates a theme, in some of the early chapters in the book, about the need to be intentional, that evaluation can be a tool for social justice by addressing these through the planning, scoping, methodology and process so that outcomes address power differentials. This chapter provides a set of useful questions (page 126) with Table 12.1 that is helpful for evaluators interested in applying CREE and seeking guidance on how to approach it.

Using evidence-based reviews of CREE and some case studies where after a new evaluation, there was reflection about whether they did it well means there are some key learnings. Chapter 10 'Communities of Practice: Learning Spaces for Integrated Experiential Knowledge, Intersectionality, and Innovative Approaches that Promote Culturally Responsive Equitable Evaluation (Garcia et al. et al.) also provides a discussion of the role of community practise for underrepresented populations in the evaluation sector (Garcia et al). Silva et al in Chapter 11, 'Learning Opportunities for Culturally Responsible and Equitable Evaluation: A Review and Case Study' discuss the role of professional development to develop CREE capability in evaluators doc just in an educational context but also through internships, fellowships, and practicums and through active mentoring of people in practise contexts.

## Highlights

Chapter 3 'Visions and Voices of Emerging Scholars Grounding Community in Strategic Learning' (Bledsoe et al.) was the highlight of the book. This chapter challenges us, as evaluators, to constructively disrupt traditional evaluation paradigms which limit understanding. They place the evaluator as an 'expert' or 'leader' rather than as a learning partner. The reviewer liked the way Bledsoe et al posit that CREE evaluation requires a learning process where people are central and with community as the focus. Bledsoe et al. talk about the role of empowerment, listening and learning. They also advocate the role of peer organisations in evaluation work and the requirements of multi-level listening and trauma awareness. Bledsoe et al. call on the need for all evaluators to be authentic and honest and realistic in their agendas. Reciprocity is identified as key alongside the inclusion of communities and well thought through engagement processes that build trust. They argue such approaches encourage endeavours to commit to understanding what the programme is doing well and where and why you are doing it and that also foster capacity building, reflection, and

participatory process. This Chapter discusses the value of being a 'learning organisation.' To affect this, a useful list of tools is identified for CREE evaluations (page 51).

Chapter 4 'Seven Directions of Equitable Evaluation: Voices, Kinship and Visions of Indigenous (Kwe) Women Evaluators' (Bowman et al.) is another highlight of the book. It challenges the white evaluator and suggests a greater valuing of a range of other things in evaluation techniques including a respect for oral traditions, narrative, stories, linear process, and notions that we are not the owners of things such as the earth, water, air plants, consideration of kinship and cultural correctness. Bowman et al. discuss seven teachings which include: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth (page 57) as important underpinnings in CREE evaluation. The chapter may be confronting to some readers as it calls for disclosure around privilege and patriarchy and a willingness to examine westernised approaches that permeate a lot of evaluation techniques ends encourages us to use any de-colonisation lens and to respect diversity. Similarly, in Chapter 9 (Moss et al. above) see the authors critical of 'placation' and 'consultations' that are the hallmarks of traditional evaluation practice. This is particularly where an evaluation is being funded by an external body and centred around a set of appraisal standards that maintain the social inertia and inequality (pages 90-91) rather than, uncovering these and the causes. Moss et al. discuss the values of self-reflection, acting intentionally and acknowledging that what traditions to evaluation a problematic in a conflicted world where things do not occur in a linear way and where there is complexity and denial of voice.

Many of the chapters in this book include case studies of programmes that have been evaluated or that are about to be evaluated are explored. In this case study a very honest account was provided about the harsh dissonance in terms of what is considered professional, conformity and consideration of white competency. On page 59 Bowman et al. (See Chapter 4 above) suggest that the role of mentors can help us navigate this for white evaluators. Others section of the book advocate mentoring of and recruitment of a more diverse range of evaluators into the sector. Bowman et al challenge us to do more research centring around indigenous epistemologies and ontology and the need to recognise that indigenous methods are not invalid. Bowman et al. challenge us to dismantle an unpack how we normalise this reduction of different cultural practice and devalue them in doing so. We can be explicit about colonial ideologies and be proactive about approaching things in a strength-based way to shift power dynamics.

### **Evaluation**

Many of the chapters do not shy away from the challenges of conducting a CREE evaluation. However, as becomes evident in Chapter 7 'In Search of Culturally Responsive and eEquitable Evaluation in the What Works Clearing Standards and Procedures (Lopez), just because evaluators purport that the process or the way they conducted a CREE evaluation does not mean that it is (page 94). This chapter was a reflective piece highlighting how in retrospect, an evaluation was not CREE and that factors should not be reduced to simplistic outlines or comparison groups.

There was much that was useful in this book that will help evaluators consider new ways to evaluate particularly where they are working with diverse communities and where there are power imbalances.

### **Recommendations**

This reviewer did find the book very United States-centric. However, there are certainly some universal themes that can be utilised for evaluators, stakeholders, funders, programme developers, and evaluators in ensuring that evaluations are better able to understand client contexts and new ways of assessing that consider diversity and inequalities, cultural difference. Critically is important that CREE approaches create safe environments for participants and new emerging diverse scholars to develop improve CREE practices in evaluation.

### **Contributions to the discipline of evaluation**

Unless and until we challenge and exam in our own practice as evaluators and our own biases - conscious and unconscious, the role of privilege in what we do and how we do it -we can never really develop a service-learning model. By doing so, we as a community of evaluators can ensure that our

evaluation of programmes leads to a better world and informs change for the better. This book is to be commended for endeavouring to tackle this and the complexity that it entails.

*20 June 2024*