
Reportage

An Academically Energising Experience A visit to North America

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A fourteen member team went on a study tour to North America. The team comprised of members of faculty from National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), selected

the visit were participation in the Canadian Evaluation Society's (CES) International Conference at Victoria, Canada, interactions with faculties from Universities of Ottawa, Western



State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs), representatives from State Project Offices of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The major activities during

Michigan, Kalamazoo (USA), California and Los Angeles (USA) in the area of Programme Evaluation for essential inputs for the four evaluation studies which have been undertaken in a

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**Discussions with *Prof. Devendra Choudhary*, *Pro Vice Chancellor*, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and *Dr. Jayshree Oza*, *Lead Consultant*, Technical Support Group (TSA) are acknowledged and *Dr. Swarna Gupta*, *Reader*, Department of Elementary Education.

collaborative manner with the involvement of State project Officers of SSA and the concerned SCERTs. The Technical Support Agency (TSA) played a positive role in identifying the institutions for the study visit as well as the top evaluation professionals to guide the studies in the Advisory Committee and Peer Review Committee.

It was a splendid experience to be a part of the 426 delegates of the CES conference from various countries across the world. The pre and post conference sessions in the workshops gave an opportunity for exposure, reflection, learning and also de-learning. These were conducted by experts in the area of programme evaluation. The presenters focused on both theoretical as well as practical applications, techniques such as logic models analysis, reporting.

The formal inauguration of the Conference by 27 year old Simon Jackson was unbelievable because in our country we are used to having inauguration of conferences of this level by established senior people of high stature! Jackson is the founder of a youth organisation, **'Save the Spirit Bear'**. It was spectacular to listen to him and how from the age of seven he worked to save the Spirit Bear, a species that was nearing extinction. He did everything possible by sharing his concerns with any and everyone to create awareness to save it. The discussion was healthy and meaningful. The strong messages which came across were; one can face odds, create a team if one is passionate and can dare to dream. Not only has Simon succeeded in establishing his organisation but has also got a film made on the Spirit Bear. For the first time one

realised that there is a healthy and powerful relationship between environment and evaluation.

All the sessions were very well organised in terms of information, which was shared and materials, which were distributed, panel discussions and ceremonies. Every session was taking place as per schedule in an extremely relaxed environment. No judgements or remarks, which would demean or demotivate a delegate or a presenter were ever made. No one gave dirty looks to those who walked in late or left early. The sessions were participatory in nature. There was a lot of scope to interact with the presenter as well as with fellow delegates. Everyone felt welcome as participating delegates were treated with dignity during group work, tea breaks and lunch breaks. Whoever and whenever a delegate expressed his/her views were listened to carefully with patience.

All the panelists were high achievers, multifaceted, but down to earth in their presentations and interactions. The sessions were meaningful and were a great learning experience. The entire committee, each member worked in complete coordination with the other. It was yet another learning experience. Every panelist and presenter was respectful and sensitive to the fellow panelists and each and every delegate and responded to every delegate's curiosity / intervention / enquiry in a most dignified manner. Each panelist felt proud and happy of the other panelist's achievements as if they were his/her own. It made us feel that in order to make ideas/institutions/organisations work, each one had to play a positive role. No one can sit laid back

and wait for things to go wrong and then to participate in the blame game.

It is the duty and responsibility of the seniors to nurture the young evaluators talent was a strong message of the CES Conference. This was exhibited of the first day by its inauguration by a dynamic youth and then during the course of the conference by keeping space/slot for '**on the spot competitions**' for the young evaluators/ research students.

The ocean cruise was an opportunity to see beautifully lit Empress Hotel and buildings of Parliament of Victoria, the Greater Victoria Inner Harbour and the Coastline of Vancouver Island. We interacted with many delegates on academic, social and cultural issues.

The ceremony of handing over the CES Conference flag to the organisers of the next CES Conference at Edminton was an experience which exuberated a sense of collective joy and pride. I was amazed at the mental, physical and emotional coordination of the organisers of the Conference at Victoria who passed on the flag with a sense of pride and

satisfaction of a task well accomplished, to the next organisers who were happy as they were considered worthy to organise the next conference in 2011. Both had expressions of joy.

Experiences of Ottawa University

It was a good opportunity to revisit issues of evaluation at the CES Conference and in Canada with Prof. Brad Cousins who was very good in his discussions as always.

Important issues were discussed during his lectures. Our knowledge about issues of evaluation at the CES Conference and participatory evaluation acquired better understanding. One had more clarity about participatory evaluation as we could all the time relate to Brad who talked a lot of practical wisdom which made his lectures meaningful.

The rest of the sessions were generally useful in some ways. We were able to relate to those. The visit to the Assumption School was interesting. The Principal and the other teachers worked with a purpose to improve the



performance of poor children. Many children from this school had achieved distinction. The school and the Provincial Board worked in unison for assessing children and helping each child to do better.

The other presentations provided an opportunity to think and relate to issues of several kinds.

The session on Leading with Emotional Intelligence made one realise why one needs to be positive in presentations as this one presentation was particularly not a positive presentation. I felt restless during this lecture. One also realised that it is critical to have some background of the audience. Never start and over emphasise negative examples was something that we picked up naturally.

Marielle Simon's lecture on assessment was good as there was scope to agree on certain issues and disagree with the rest. It was a healthy academic interaction.

We were informed of the activities of the Center for Research on Educational and Community Services during our visit to the Center. We felt good when presentations on NCERT's four studies were being made before a warm send off reception. Many faculty members joined the reception. It was a good interaction both at academic and social levels. We became familiar with the kind of work the faculty and researchers in Ottawa University were engaged in.

Western Michigan University

We were overwhelmed on our arrival at Evaluation Center of the Western Michigan University. We felt privileged

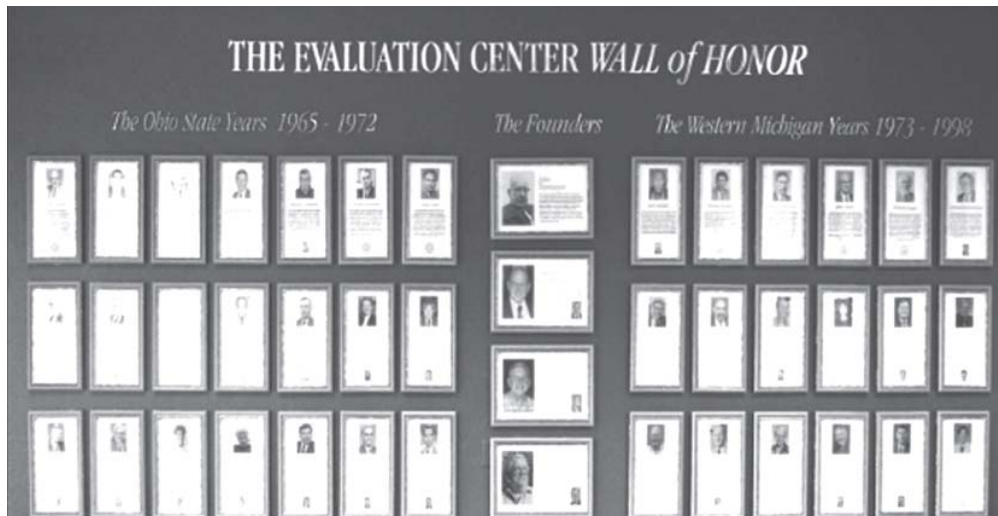
and elated to be at the oldest evaluation center in the world, to hear and see the names of all those who contributed in a big and meaningful way to making evaluation what it is and how evaluation can make a difference in the lives of institutions and human beings in a positive manner. One was also made to believe that evaluation is difficult. To listen from established persons on evaluation that one was never late for it was encouraging. That it was a possibility for anyone to pick up if one wished was discovered during the visit to the center. It was reassuring. There has been a strong desire ever since this visit that we need to have a National Level Evaluation Centre in the NCERT which would gradually but surely acquire a special status of Centre of Excellence.

The wall of Honour

It was a treat to the soul to see again and again 'The Wall of Honour' at the Evaluation Center. It sent across a powerful message that one needs to acknowledge those who have contributed. There is no need to over project oneself. For those who are young could dream to have their names on the wall if they worked with commitment. Space would never be a problem. There are always ways to find it.

I was delighted to listen to the History of Evaluation from Dr. Chris Coryn. It was nice to revisit the basics of evaluation in a simple but lively way. The following discussions with Chris were useful:

The purpose of a Formative Evaluation is to improve, of Summative one is to determine disposition and accountability – fixing responsibility, monitoring – to assess implementation



and gauge progress towards desired end. Ascriptive evaluation is done merely for the sake of knowing. It was an immense gain in terms of academic understanding to go through the foundations of evaluation with Chris. It provided an overview of both past and contemporary perspectives of evaluation theory. Critical thinking, active and participatory learning made up for making understanding easier.

There was adequate focus on programme theory, evaluator roles, core competencies required for conducting a high quality professional evaluation. Issues, methods and practice in evaluation were discussed in details. Whenever Chris needed a breather, the team leader, Prof. Vashishtha, took over. The team felt a sense of pride that the team leader's understanding on issues related to evaluation were frequently acknowledged by Chris. An introduction to Assessment to Learning was interesting.

It was a satisfying experience to see that Research students being treated with respect and dignity. They are given opportunities to grow. Healthy relationship of senior faculty with Research students was throughout exhibited in practice.

It was difficult to believe that a comic could be there to convey messages for evaluation. I brought up in one of the sessions with Chris that how one wished that something simple and interesting was available on evaluation. I shared in the meeting how Richard P. Finnman, a Nobel Laureate used to teach a difficult subject like Physics jokingly. The book '**Surely You Must Be Joking Mr. Finnman**' gives an idea how understanding became easier for Finnman's students because the subject was not taught seriously in a serious environment. Lectures were delivered in a relaxed and happy situations. The next day Chris distributed a few copies of Eva-

the Evaluator. For someone like me who is new in the field and has a certain degree of difficulty in understanding the concepts, Roger Miranda's *EVA – the Evaluator* (Learningham Press, New York, 2009) comes as a relief. It suddenly gives a feeling that things are not so difficult and that you can make a beginning, continue to learn and overcome the unfounded fears. Powerful messages have been delivered in a comic/story form.

These are on qualities/role of an evaluator. People find it hard to understand what an evaluator is. The following gives simple ideas as to what an evaluator is and what he/she does:

**Adapted from Roger Miranda-
Brigit Stadler, *Eva-the Evaluator*,
Learningham Press, New York, 2009)**

Meeting Prof. Danial Stufflebeam in the Center brought in so much of excitement and sense of pride. It was a

An evaluator

- tries to help people by looking at things to see if they are working well as they are supposed to
- is like a doctor who treats the problems after diagnosis, fix the things that they work on
- is called when people work on difficult project and need help to put pieces together, to find out how they can do it better
- is like a carpenter, he/she asks questions who helps to fix it something is broken or missing
- is like a counselor who listens to people to understand what people find frustrating. An evaluator interviews people, asks for opinions, do research to understand what has happened and how to provide help
- **is somewhat like a journalist – his/her work is sometimes in news, but he/she is not a reporter, as he/she has to follow a lot steps, even prepare a kind of an experiment before he/she completes the assigned task, has to work hard– lot of formulas and numbers to go through**
- works like a scientist who works with data. He/she has to be **careful about bad data**–wrong numbers and information etc. Bad data can be hiding, it jumps up suddenly.
- has to be careful about 'misuse' for example if somebody changes what an evaluation reports, in a situation like this, he/she must make an effort to stop tampering
- has to find out from numbers how something is working and determine its merit. He/she has to make judgments **not about people but only programmes to find out 'what is going on'**.
- tries to solve things, make suggestions on the basis of what has been discovered. He/she looks everywhere to find answers.
- is like an explorer who explores ideas of how things work, get to travel and interact.
- has to play different roles switching from a scientist to a counselor to a judge and so on

Even children can evaluate–the meal that has been prepared by a parent or a lesson that has been transacted by a teacher.

dream come true to meet him. He had a happy and contented face in spite of his amputated leg and other problems. He was immaculately dressed. He came before time on his wheel chair with a bag full of materials. We learnt he had driven his battery driven car from his farm house to the Evaluation Center. After seeing his photograph on the **Wall of Honour** under the category of Founders, all of us were proud to see him. Each one of us had great reverence for him. At the Evaluation Center, one of the colleagues asked him how he was, he answered with a smile 'alright, but I am falling apart'. There was so much to learn from him. 'One needs to manage and keep commitments in spite of odds and difficulties. He insisted on meeting us as 'he did not want to be a coward' was an underlying message that came across clearly and resoundingly.

Prof. Stufflebeam is known as one of the founder of evaluation. He has been in the chair of Joint Evaluation Committee for almost twenty years. He is known for developing standard for evaluation. These were revisited in 1994 and have again been reviewed in 2010 to strengthen these. These are under publication. He discussed meta evaluation, formative, summative, evaluation, standards/criteria, information, documents and informants. Prof. Stufflebeam spoke patiently but firmly on issues of evaluation. "*We need to follow standards for programme evaluation*", said Prof. Stufflebeam. These are updated. These need to be used in NCERT's studies as well. He said "he applied Evaluation criteria/standards to NCERT's studies". The following were focused on during the presentation:

Approach – description and judgment
 Timeliness – important
 Professional development
 Reports – printed/oral/dialogue
 Elements of logic model

Basic elements

- Resource Inputs by which the progress operates
- Activities
- Actions taken/desired
- Outputs
- Immediate results of an action.

The entire team was humbled by the humility of Prof. Stufflebeam who did not forget to acknowledge and appreciate the presentation of the team leader, approving the approach that all the four studies had followed and the progress made in an unbelievably short a period. He also appreciated all the four presentations and each and every input of every team member by way of interventions. It was learning for the team that even after reaching the top in one's field, one needs to be grounded and that one should not forget to acknowledge efforts of others, however big or small. Motivating new comers as well as those who are struggling to achieve the highest is also the duty of those who have reached the highest in the field. Another lesson that we learnt was that one needs to visit and revisit one's own work and never ignore the views of others.

University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

It was a soup to the academic soul to listen to **Christina Christie's** wonderful presentation and interactions and visual treat to see The Evaluation Theory Tree. These were engaging and interesting and

conveyed a lot of useful as well as innovative ideas. Her presentation was unique as she actually made us realise that if evaluation/presentations are monotonous they not only tire the evaluator mentally and visually but also the users of the evaluation. It gave us an idea that one could make presentations different and pleasant. One has been generally seeing a lot of tables, flow charts and diagrams in evaluation/presentations/reports which many a times go on adding to the monotony as well as to visual pollution. What made me happy was to see the Evaluation Theory Tree – Use, Method, Valuing and also its power to show names of so many evaluators who have

walked to fame in this field by their unparalleled contributions with perseverance. They are revered in the field because of their dedication. References to Prof. Michael Scriven, Prof. Daniel Stufflebeam, Prof. Michael Patton, and several others increased my level of comfort and my belief in self that with commitment and continuous effort, I will be more confident of my ability to do something different but meaningful.

The Evaluation Tree helped us to relate to major theories and models discussed in the Canadian Evaluation Society Conference, Ottawa University and Western Michigan University.

We were as a group amazed at Christina’s comfort level, understanding

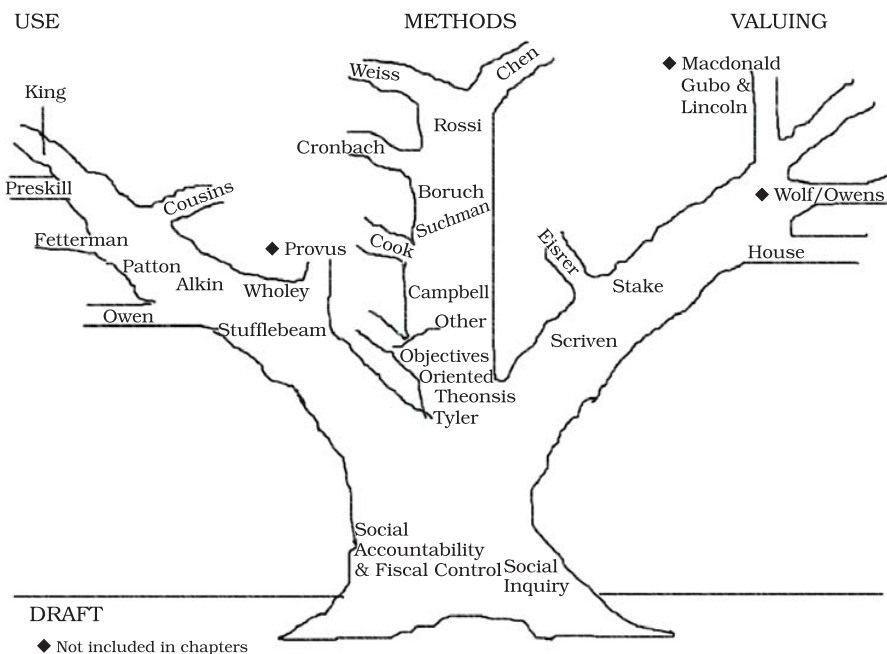


Figure 1

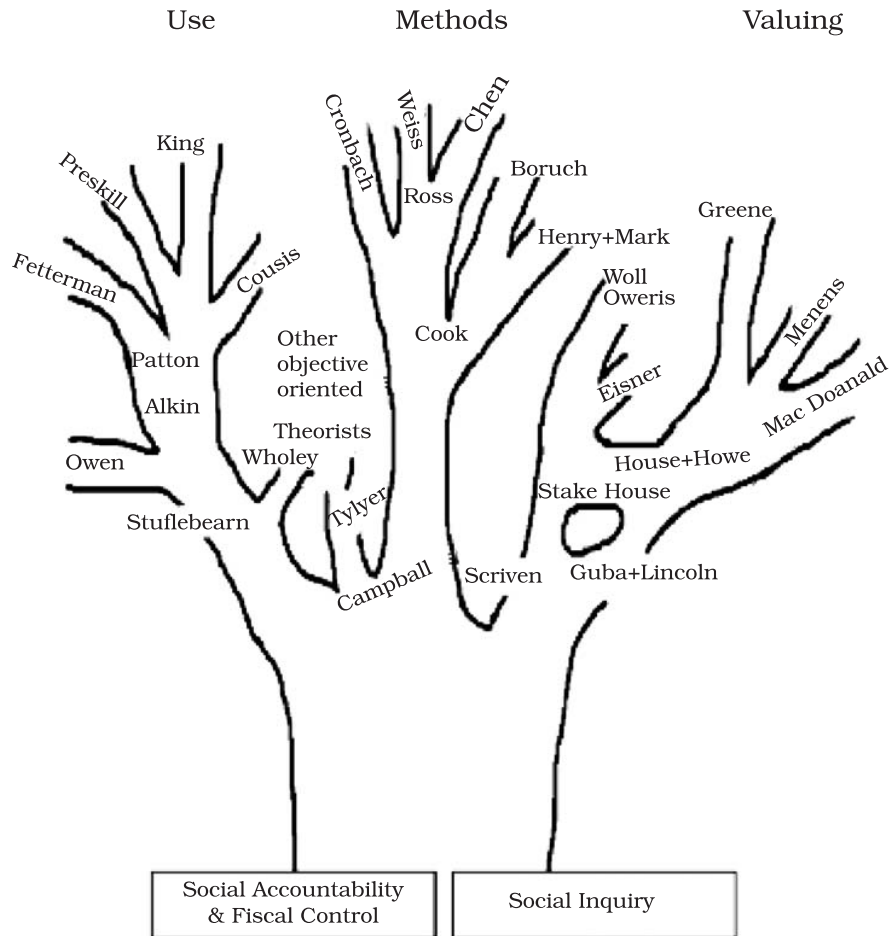


Figure 2

and capacity to discuss the use, method and valuing with the original and the revised version of Evaluation Theory Tree. The Tree would be revisited by the authors, Alkin and Christina now for the third time. She was impressed by the Team Leader's inputs which could be considered during the revision of the Evaluation Theory Tree. He suggested

that democracy should come on the trunk of the Tree and the roots need to be shown as well with originators of the Programme Evaluation. The idea of rearranging the branches has also been a matter of reconsideration as these three branches appeared not to be totally independent. The suggestion made on behalf of the team was that the value comes first, methods

second and from both emerges the utility. The Evaluation Theory Tree needs to accommodate this idea.

It was a joy to visit the UCLA Campus, see the oldest six buildings and the new ones, hundreds of beautiful flowers, fountains and happy students.

I have become somewhat familiar with evaluation concepts, theories and related issues. So much so that I was able to specially note the following in the two books that I am reading now:

The Placebo Effect was proved after evaluating patients who had actual knee surgeries and those who had faked ones. The surgeon made the fake surgeries' patients feel as if they were actually undergoing surgery. While the ones with actual surgery improved, the others with fake surgeries showed a lot of improvement. (Dr. Wane W. Dyer, *Stop the Excuses*, Hay House Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2009, India).

Dr. Arnold Fox got selected in an interview where 19 others who had more knowledge about obscure diseases got rejected. On finding out later, he was told

that he was the only one who did not give memorised answers. The others had knowledge, **but did not know how to evaluate, diagnose or treat ordinary patients.** (Arnold Fox M.D. and Barry Fox Ph.D., *The Miracle of positive Thinking, wake up! You are alive!* Jaico Publishing, Mumbai, 2009).

Both of these evaluation situations being used for proving 'made to believe effect' and also 'using of evaluations for benefit of patient's treatment'.

The conclusion, therefore, emerges that Programme Evaluation, a new emerging discipline, needs to occupy centre stage in all fields particularly, the social sectors including education where public money is being spent for larger good of one and all.

I would like to share the surprises of human goodness as well which I experienced in unexpected situations in the Air Canada and American Airlines. These airlines had introduced a strict policy of Canadian and American credit cards to be used by the passengers for purchase of eatables and drinks.

- The first one was on Vancouver – Ottawa flight on May 6, 2010. The flight in-charge responded positively to my request of getting something to drink and eat in a five hour flight after the complementary tea/coffee/juice and a small snack had been digested. She quietly brought chocolates and cashews and said *"I am taking up this issue with the authorities so that visitors to our country who cannot have credit cards for a short duration do not have to go hungry"*.
- The second one was on Ottawa – Halifax Flight on May 8, 2010. I had a cup of tea and a banana at 5.00 a.m. before leaving for the flight. I was suddenly hungry at 8.30 a.m. as no complimentary snack or drink was served. On my request, the Canadian flight in charge brought his own breakfast. I refused saying that I would feel guilty. He said 'if I did not, he would feel worse'!
- The third incidence was on Halifax – Ottawa flight on May 9, 2010. Similar pangs of hunger around 8.00 p.m. I requested for something to eat. The Carribean flight incharge did not say a word to my request. Helplessly, I tried to sleep. I was woken up by the flight in-charge who brought a packet of cashews "This is my treat to you". I was touched to the core by all the three experiences which I would like to treasure.