An Interpersonal Skills Learning Taxonomy for Program Evaluation Instructors

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ABSTRACT
Anyone who trains others in the practice of program evaluation should be aware of how necessary it is for the practitioner to maneuver the interpersonal dynamics within a program evaluation setting. This paper discusses why interpersonal skills are an invaluable tool for any program evaluator, which interpersonal skills are most important, and how instructors can integrate these skills in classroom activities and assess student learning. In fact, how instructors choose to use interpersonal skills as an objective in their program evaluation classrooms influences the level of skill development acquired by the student. This work merges a combination of Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1980) five-stage skill development model and Glaser’s (1983) behavioral approach with Bloom et al.’s (1956) taxonomy of cognitive learning objectives to construct a taxonomy of interpersonal skill competence for program evaluators that bridges the gap between theory and practice.

Both sets of professional standards in the field of program evaluation, The Program Evaluation Standards and Guiding Principles for Evaluators, recommend stakeholder involvement in evaluations (American Evaluation Association, 1995; Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994; S. Taut, 2008). Further, many evaluation textbook authors also heavily emphasize how important it is for the evaluator, whether internal or external, to foster and maintain good relationships with stakeholders (Bamberger, Rugh, & Mabry, 2006; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2009). Stevahn and King (2005) found that particularly when using participatory approaches (collaborative evaluation, stakeholder evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, empowerment evaluation, democratic deliberative evaluation, responsive evaluation, etc.), “the effectiveness of evaluators will be inextricably linked to the effectiveness of their interpersonal skills” (p. 423).

Mastracci, Newman, and Guy (2010), suggested that as instructors during the 21st century, attention to people skills and service orientation is crucial to preparing students to become practitioners in the field (p. 132). Similarly, Lee,
Wallace, and Alkin (2007) suggested that instructors “need to make certain that students have developed appropriate interpersonal skills that permit them to navigate the relationships and interactions that guide an evaluation process” (p. 537). Some have even suggested that interpersonal skills be included as a core competence area for any program evaluator (Ghere, King, Stevahn, & Minnema, 2006; King, Stevhan, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001; Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005a). Accordingly, instructors should teach students about the interpersonal dynamics of program evaluation not solely because the standards call for stakeholder involvement in evaluations but also because evaluators are more than technicians whose work goes beyond the technicalities by using non-technical skills to navigate the relationships and potentially ethical interactions that take place during an evaluation.

Despite the documented need of interpersonal skills for program evaluators, the lack of a framework to assist instructors in bridging the gap between theory and practice continues to be felt. Program evaluation instructors have limited time and resources to incorporate fully both the technical and non-technical skills in the traditional program evaluation classroom. This article provides instructors with the tools to incorporate interpersonal skills and other such “soft” skill attainment in their program evaluation classrooms while simultaneously teaching the technical skills. To do so, it requires instructors to explicitly identify skill-related objectives, choose the appropriate stage of skill development to match what they believe is attainable in their classrooms, and use Glaser’s (1983) shaping sequence as a guide to develop appropriate learning and assessment activities. By doing so, program evaluation instructors can narrow the gap between theory and practice in their classrooms by integrating both the technical and non-technical skills needed to complete a program evaluation successfully.

As an illustration, Fenger and Homburg (2011) presented the studio approach to public administration to address the challenges of incorporating various disciplines as well as introducing students to real-world challenges in an interdisciplinary public administration curriculum. In these workshop sessions, held twice weekly, students were given the opportunity to participate in simulations, case studies, puzzles, and other such activities in order to “organize learning experiences that confront students with the need to disassemble and reassemble real-world phenomena using key concepts, skills, and lines of reasoning that are presented with them in various disciplinary courses” (p. 395). Fenger and Homburg (2011) argued that the studio approach aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by arming students “with the academic and professional skills to better deal with various (sometimes diverging) disciplinary perspectives on real-world societal problems” (p. 387). All of which sounds similar to what is being put forth in this work at the individual course level. Similarly, these authors also use both cognitive and practical approaches to skill attainment in describing the learning objectives of the public administration...
program. However, these works differ in that their efforts appear to be at the macro level and put the brunt of the micro-level development in the hands of lecturers, instructors, and coordinators. To illustrate their emphasis at the macro level, they found that the development of professional skills in the studio classrooms did not meet their expectations; students did not develop these skills in a manner similar to their development of the academic components of the curriculum. To remedy the issue, coordinators assigned specific professional skills to specific studio courses, where coordinators were “awarded the task of developing exercises and assignments for different skills” (p. 398). Using the framework of the interpersonal skills learning taxonomy presents a tool that professors—and, in Fenger and Homberg’s (2011) case, coordinators—could use to develop learning activities and assessments for targeted professional skill development.

Which Interpersonal Skills?

Taut and Alkin (2003) advocated that training in evaluation should incorporate skill building in the human aspect area. At the very least, every program evaluator should be equipped with good communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork skills—some of the basic skills that employers want (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1988). King and associates (Ghere et al., 2006; King et al., 2001; Stevahn et al., 2005a) have over time advocated for a set of evaluator competencies that emphasize the “salient knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to function as an effective evaluator” (King et al., 2001, p. 231). Their 2001 study identified four main competency domains (systematic inquiry, competent evaluation practice, general skills for evaluation practice, and evaluation professionalism); 16 competency categories; and 49 competency items. Of the four main competency domains, the one of most interest for this work is the general skills domain (later renamed the interpersonal competence domain in Stevahn et al., 2005a). This domain stresses people skills used in conducting program evaluation studies as four categories: communication, negotiation/conflict, collaboration/teamwork, and cross-cultural skills.

Communication

As long as you listen and respond, share information, discuss your intentions, and obtain feedback, clarify expectations, provide clear and useful reports in a timely manner, and maintain an open evaluation process, the evaluation seas should be smooth. (Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005, p. xi)

The communication category calls for an evaluator to be efficient in written communication skills and verbal/listening communication skills (Stevahn et al.,
According to Garnett (1996), communication involves the sharing of meaning using verbal and nonverbal channels. Throughout the program evaluation process, communication takes place through many avenues and participants: face-to-face communications during meetings with members of the evaluation team, stakeholders, and interested participants; written communication to stakeholders for data request, project updates, or the dissemination of results. All of which serves to relay (verbal and written communication) and receive (listening communication) information about problems and procedures to those involved in the program evaluation project. According to Patton (1997), many of the failures that occur in program evaluations occur because of misunderstandings and communication problems.

Sanders and Sullins (2006) stated that three good aspects of a good program evaluation study are “communication, communication, communication” (p. xi). Torres et al. (2005) held that “effective communication and reporting facilitates learning among stakeholders and other audiences” (p. 2). This is such an important skill in program evaluation that Torres et al. (2005) have written a guide to assist evaluators in communicating throughout the stages of evaluation.

**Conflict Resolution/Negotiation**

“Conflicts, both major and minor, are a fact of worklife” (Carnevale et al., 1988, p. 14). With the inclusion of stakeholders in an evaluation, one of the goals is to represent the needs of those who have a “stake” in the program being evaluated. Some may think that those who make the decisions regarding the program are the stakeholders; others believe that those who are on the receiving end of the program, either directly through participation or indirectly through the implementation of the program, are the true stakeholders. Such broad terms can lead to evaluations including stakeholders of various numbers. If this is the case, the stakeholders represented in the evaluation will be very diverse and all represent differing views about the program. Naturally, conflict could arise out of such situations.

Specifically, Stevahn and King (2005) used the following examples to illustrate instances where conflict could arise in an evaluation setting:

like the time the program director exerted political pressure to “finish the project quickly,” putting at risk the evaluator's ability to collect needed data from a range of diverse stakeholders. Or when evaluation sponsors insisted on launching a survey that the evaluator knew would not adequately meet the information needs of the service providers who would use the findings. Or the time when the evaluator facilitated a participatory evaluation planning session that ended in frustration because committee members could not agree on the underlying purpose of their evaluation, much less on evaluation questions. (p. 415)
They further stated that by focusing on conflict strategies theory and constructive conflict resolution theory, we will see the important role interpersonal relationships play in determining the course of conflict. According to Carnevale et al. (1988), the key to overcoming such situations is to train all employees in negotiation skills.

“Training in this skill includes techniques for separating people from the problem, focusing on interest not the positions, inventing options for mutual gain, and insisting on the use of objective criteria” (Carnevale et al., 1988, p. 14). Effective conflict resolution techniques ensure that the evaluator views conflict as a natural event requiring them to be respectful of the views expressed and making a plan to stick to a resolution once the conflict has been resolved. Stevahn and King (2005) believed conflict resolution to be one of the most important skills an evaluator could learn. In their view, evaluators should learn how to structure positive interdependence in an evaluation’s tasks, resulting in conditions conducive to resolving conflict constructively.

More important, these authors outlined a set of skills evaluators should have to negotiate cooperatively: (a) expressing cooperative intentions; (b) mutually defining the conflict; (c) stating wants; (d) expressing feelings; (e) explaining underlying reasons/interests; (f) reversing perspectives to communicate understanding; (g) generating multiple integrative solutions that attend to all interests; (h) reaching agreement on a mutual solution; and (i) evaluating the effectiveness of the problem-solving process (p. 422). Unfortunately, many public administrators have not been adequately trained in this field, since most programs have very limited course offerings in conflict resolution (Lan, 1997). Even so, instructors can incorporate these specific conflict resolution/negotiation skills into any evaluation course’s objectives.

Teamwork/Collaboration

“Whenever people work together, successful interaction depends upon effective interpersonal skills, focused negotiation, and a sense of group purpose” (Carnevale et al., 1988, p. 14). Perrin (2005) noted that teams rather than individuals conduct most evaluations. Further, evaluators and managers often work in situations where they are expected to work as a part of a team (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006). A team is composed of individuals with various skills and talents that the evaluator should be aware of to accomplish the evaluation’s goals (Carnevale et al., 1988). Thus the evaluator should inventory the skills and information access of all group members and harness these resources to solve a particular problem. One of the best ways to do so is to treat the stakeholders and other interested parties as part of the evaluation team (even if they do not have an active role in the evaluation). Patton (2002) would argue that this is essential in ensuring the utilization of an evaluation.
Although the evaluator might have the technical expertise to carry out the evaluation, the other members of the stakeholder group might have skills and information without which the evaluation would not proceed. “An evaluation team member, for example, who misses meetings and never responds to voice-mail or email messages not only blocks the evaluation process, but also creates distance and distrust” (Stevahn et al., 2005, p. 418). Such behaviors break down the good communication and information sharing that are essential to successful teamwork (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006).

**Cross-Cultural Skills**

According to SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson (2004), cultural competence in evaluation involves “active awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the context at hand, and it uses responsive and inclusive means to conduct evaluation” (p. 12). Mainly, it is

a systematic, responsive inquiry that is actively cognizant, understanding, and appreciative of the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place; that frames and articulates the epistemology of the evaluative endeavor; that employs culturally and contextually appropriate methodology; and that uses stakeholder-generated, interpretive means to arrive at the results and further use of the findings. (p. 13)

Chouinard and Cousins (2009) expanded this definition by defining this skill as a part of the process of evaluation. They call it cross-cultural evaluation, which

highlights the social relations among stakeholders in evaluation (Abma, 2002) and acknowledges that program evaluators do not always (or often) share cultural similarities (i.e., ethnicity, gender, social class) with program participants [citation omitted], though they do work collaboratively toward common ends. (p.460)

Anderson-Draper (2006) expanded the definition a bit further by suggesting that it involves considering the uniqueness of each group by planning and designing appropriate measures and standards to reflect this uniqueness. All of these definitions require the evaluator to be both responsive and inclusive to the values that those of differing cultures bring into the evaluation of programs.

As argued by Chouinard and Cousins (2009), cross-cultural evaluations are still relatively new to the field of evaluation. Evidence of this is documented by the level of discord among evaluator ratings of cross-cultural competencies in King et al.’s (2001) taxonomy. The importance of this type of skill within an evaluation is paramount as multiculturalism grows as a global phenomenon.

**How Do We Teach These Skills?**

Public administration instructors should strive to make the proper connections between theory and practice in the classroom (Broadnax, 1997, p. 392). For example, Glaser (1983) suggests that an individual cannot attain interpersonal competence by understanding theory alone, because translation of classroom learning to the real world is not automatic (p. 221). This view would suggest a need in the field for practical hands-on experiences (Lee et al., 2007; Trevisan, 2004). Trevisan (2004) recommended that students be exposed to the intricacies that take place in the real-world setting, such as (a) negotiating and evaluating; (b) handling incomplete data; (c) dealing with clients that don’t communicate well; (d) thinking creatively and flexibly to take into account resource, organizational, and political constraints (p. 256). However, due to various constraints built into the academic environment, it is not easy to achieve such practical, hands-on experience.

To overcome the hurdles associated with true “hands-on” experiences, instructors can adapt approaches advocated by Stevahn et al. (2005b) by embedding non-technical competencies in our courses and across all courses in a program as framing objectives. Stevahn et al. (2005b) believed that doing so would highlight the need for training in these areas and focus faculty and students on targeting interpersonal skills for professional practice. A sample of such objectives for interpersonal skills competence could include (adapted from Stevahn et al. 2005a) the following:

- Apply appropriate conflict resolutions skills to diffuse conflict.
- Apply appropriate communication with clients throughout the evaluation process.
- Investigate and apply negotiation techniques with clients before the evaluation begins.
- Critique peer and expert use of interpersonal skills in program evaluation settings.
- Assess your use of interpersonal skills in program evaluation settings.
- Describe the importance of cross-cultural skills in modern program evaluation studies.
- Compose a role-playing activity exhibiting the proper uses of interpersonal skills in the program evaluation setting.
Using a Behavioral Approach

Glaser et al. (1983) advocated using a behavioral approach to teaching interpersonal skills in the classroom because it relies on *shaping*, which requires instructors to divide the target competency into its basic components and introduce each component at increasing levels of difficulty until a student is able to master all of the skills within the competency area. For example, using Stevahn et al.’s (2005b) interpersonal competency categories, instructors would begin with the most attainable competency area and continually increase the level of difficulty in the interpersonal competency area until they reach the highest level. For example, the instructor could begin by teaching students how to communicate, which would be the most attainable competency. Once students achieve that competency, instructors can then move to the next competency level and teach students how to work on a team, continuing this pattern until students achieve the highest competency level.

This shaping sequence includes direct instruction, written practice, self-monitoring, modeling, rehearsal, and in vivo practice of target behaviors. Next is an illustration of the shaping sequence, along with examples of learning activities and assessments for each (Glaser, 1983):

1. **Direct instruction.** The instructor defines, explains, and illustrates the target skill. (Lecture)

2. **Written practice.** The instructor provides students with a specific situation that displays the target skill. The student is then required to write a statement that represents an effective response to the situation. (Writing prompt)

3. **Self-monitoring.** The instructor provides students with a specific situation identifying actual life situations that call for the use of the target skill. Students then are required to describe the appropriate skilled response they would have in the situation. (Case study)

4. **Modeling.** The instructor invites others from the evaluation field or experts in the area of interpersonal competence to come to the class to perform a role-playing exercise where they exhibit effective usage of the target competency. While observing this role playing between experts, the instructor asks students to record specific verbal and nonverbal components of the expert’s behavior describing what they say/do and how they say/do it. (Expert-centered role playing)

5. **Rehearsal.** This activity is broken into two parts: covert rehearsal and behavioral rehearsal. (Student-centered role playing)
   - **Covert rehearsal.** Instructors give students an incomplete role-playing exercise and ask students to practice actual dialogue covertly by planning what they will say/do, how they will say/do it, and how others might respond to the situation.
   - **Behavioral rehearsal.** In this component, the instructor has students work in pairs to implement their covert rehearsal.
6. **In vivo practice.** While in the evaluation setting, students use the target competence in relevant situations. As an illustration, instructors could ask students to initiate conversations with stakeholders to determine their perspective on the goals and objectives of the program or of the evaluation, in general. (Immersion approach using a real or simulated evaluation environment)

**Implementing a Five-Stage Development Model**

In 1980, Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus began an endeavor to create a five-stage model of the mental activities involved in skill acquisition. Over time, as solidification of their framework became popular, their work was accepted as one the most influential works in skill acquisition with the publication of *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer* (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). Their model emphasized a linear progression in skill development moving from the reliance on rules to the more experienced “know-how.” Specifically, at the novice and beginner levels, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) emphasized the learner’s reliance on rules; however, as skills advance from competent to expert levels, learners rely less on rules and more on experienced-based know-how. This know-how has accumulated through the learner’s experiences at the lower stages of skill development such that knowing what to do eventually becomes intuitive, indicating higher levels of skills acquisition.

Here are Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1980) five stages of skill acquisition:

- **Novice.** Learners rely quite heavily on rules they have been instructed to apply in given situations. “the instruction process begins with the instructor decomposing the task environment into context-free features that the beginner can recognize without the desired skill. The beginner is then given rules for determining actions on the basis of these features, just like a computer following a program” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980, p.177).

- **Advanced beginner.** They apply both explicit rules and context-specific rules with examples. “As the novice gains experience actually coping with real situations and begins to develop an understanding of the relevant context, he or she begins to note, or an instructor points out, perspicuous examples of meaningful additional aspects of the situation or domain. After seeing a sufficient number of examples, the student learns to recognize these new aspects” (p. 177).

- **Competent.** Learners choose a plan for when and how to apply rules. “to achieve competence, people learn, through instruction or experience, to devise a plan or choose a perspective that then determines those elements of the situation or domain that must be treated as important and those that can be ignored” (p. 178).

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*Interpersonal Skills Taxonomy*
• **Proficient.** Learners use intuition to judge new situations based on their experiences. “At this stage, the involved, experienced performer sees goals and salient aspects but not what to do to achieve these goals” (p. 179).

• **Expert.** Over time, learners have accumulated a vast number of experiences in a specific situation such that they can almost simultaneously think of solutions as they are diagnosing the problem. “The expert not only sees what needs to be achieved; thanks to his or her vast repertoire of situational discriminations, he or she also sees immediately how to achieve this goal. Thus, the ability to make more subtle and refined discriminations is what distinguishes the expert from the proficient performer” (pp. 179–180).

Although widely lauded, there are some criticism against Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1986) skills acquisition model. Specifically, Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2006) call into question the stepwise progression (linear) approach used by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) as actually masking the understanding and assessment of skillful performance. They argue that by focusing on the stepwise progression to skill attainment, we may lose track of what these skills are actually preparing the learner to do—practice in the profession. At some point, in addition to measuring their skill attainment using this model, instructors should also assess the learner’s understanding of what these skills mean to the practice of their profession. In particular, they called for a “substantial shift away from a traditional focus on transfer of knowledge and skills to developing understanding of, and in, professional practice” (p. 401). In other words, instructors should use caution when employing such stages models, to ensure that we are emphasizing the skill in context of the professional practice. Adding this stages model to Glaser’s (1983) behavioral approach and ultimately to Bloom’s Taxonomy allows for such emphasis and provides an answer to Dall’Alba and Sandberg’s (2006) criticism of stage models.

**Using Bloom’s Taxonomy**

*Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* developed a classification system of the cognitive domain of student learning (Bloom et al., 1956). Each classification within the hierarchy demanded the mastery of skills and abilities that were lower in the classification order. Progressing from lower-level skills to higher-level skills, Bloom’s Taxonomy presents cognitive development as the achievement of higher order abilities as the learner moves from knowledge to evaluation.

Bloom’s is one of the most influential taxonomies to date, but during the 1990s one of Bloom’s former students, Lorin Anderson, revised the original taxonomy to include both a cognitive process and a knowledge dimension.

The knowledge dimension includes (L. W. Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 29) these components:
• **Factual knowledge.** The basic elements students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it.
• **Conceptual knowledge.** The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function altogether.
• **Procedural knowledge.** How to do something, methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods.
• **Metacognitive knowledge.** Knowledge about cognition in general as well as awareness of and knowledge of the individual’s own cognition.

On the other hand, the cognitive dimension focuses on the student cognitive processes that should be associated with the learning objectives.

• This dimension includes (L. W. Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 29) the following components:
  • **Remember.** Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory.
  • **Understand.** Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication.
  • **Apply.** Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation.
  • **Analyze.** Break material into constituent parts, and determine how parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose.
  • **Evaluate.** Make judgments based on criteria and standards.
  • **Create.** Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure.

L. W. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) suggested that learning objectives include both knowledge and cognition processes that can be easily transferred to this new two-dimensional taxonomy. Ideally, instructors could take an objective—such as that students should be able to use appropriate conflict resolution skills to diffuse conflict within program evaluation settings—and, using both the knowledge and cognitive dimension scales, determine where this objective would fall on the revised taxonomy. Doing so results in classifying this objective into the **procedural knowledge** component of the knowledge domain and the **apply** component of the cognitive processes domain. By integrating Glaser’s behavioral approach, Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s five-stage skill development model, and the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy, instructors can ensure that at the very least students obtain an interpersonal skill competence in both theory and practice.

**Integrating Behaviors, Skills, and Taxonomy**

Table 1 represents the completed Interpersonal Skills (IPS) taxonomy as an integration of Glaser’s (1983) behavioral approach, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) skill development approach, and Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy (2001) and their application to Stevahn et al.’s (2005) evaluator competencies as objectives.¹

Let us focus on the novice stage of skill development as presented in this integrated taxonomy. The direct instruction method (the first stage in Glaser’s behavioral
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approach) makes the evaluator-in-training aware of what interpersonal skills are, their uses, and the consequences of using them for the field of program evaluation. At this level, lecturing is the most basic form of direct delivery; storytelling and brainstorming are other examples. Here students should be able to clearly define and recognize the interpersonal skills most used by evaluators. Such tasks correspond to the remember cognitive process domain and the factual knowledge process domain of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy. As such, the most basic form of assessment would be a quiz testing a student’s ability to recall and define the interpersonal skills most used by program evaluators.

Table 1.
*Integrated Interpersonal Skills Taxonomy*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice, first level</td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>Direct instruction</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice, second level</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>Written practice</td>
<td>Writing prompt</td>
<td>Writing prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Beginner</td>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Self-monitoring</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Case study analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency, first level</td>
<td>Analyze/Evaluate</td>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Expert role play</td>
<td>Critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency, second level</td>
<td>Analyze/Evaluate</td>
<td>Rehearsal</td>
<td>Student role play</td>
<td>Critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency</td>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>In vivo</td>
<td>Real or simulated fieldwork</td>
<td>Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Creating</td>
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<td>Real or simulated fieldwork</td>
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Note. Realistically, instructors may achieve up to the competency skill stage in any given single-semester program evaluation course. However, the other higher stages of proficiency and expertise may not be attainable within a semester but may be better served in a program evaluation degree or certificate program.

In another dimension of the novice skill stage, students should be able to illustrate situations where they could use their interpersonal skills in program
evaluation practice. Such behaviors correspond to the understand level of Bloom’s Taxonomy, where students are asked to explain how they expect to use these skills in program evaluation practice. As a learning activity, instructors might give students a writing prompt outlining a short example of a specific skill or set of skills and ask students to respond by explaining how they would use their interpersonal skills in each situation. Instructors might create a comprehensive prompt to address all interpersonal skills or a prompt for each skill, all of which correspond to Glaser’s written practice sequence, for which the writing prompt serves as an assessment.

The advanced beginner skills stage may require a two-part sequence to achieve self-monitoring. The first part requires a situational analysis, in which the instructor assigns case studies (or similar activity) where students have to decide which interpersonal skills will be most relevant in a given situation by analyzing the context of the situation (such as organizational or political aspects). The second aspect would go beyond the context-specific consideration to recognizing how students would apply these skills in given situations in program evaluation practice. By requiring an in-depth analysis of the case study, instructors are able to assess students’ application of each interpersonal skill within Stevahn et al.’s (2005b) competency framework.

The competence skills stage allows students to determine the context in which the situation occurs and take an inventory of the skills available to assist them in resolving the situation. Brown (1985) describes the competency stage as one where the learner “integrates past learnings, current misgivings, and new experiences emotionally and cognitively” (p. 163). Upon reaching this stage, learners are able to appreciate the complexity involved in completing a program evaluation.

At the competence skills stage, students should be able to analyze and evaluate the appropriate uses for interpersonal skills in program evaluation practice. This analysis and evaluation can take place using role-playing learning activities. One type of role play is expert-centered role play, where the instructor invites experts in the field to class to demonstrate the proper use of these interpersonal skills in practice. The instructor then asks students to evaluate the expert’s usage of the skill performed. On the other side, instructors can use the rehearsal shaping sequence to conduct a student-centered role-playing activity in which students act out a scenario where they can demonstrate the appropriate uses of interpersonal skills in evaluation practice.

The last two skills stages, proficiency and expertise, may be unattainable in a single-course program evaluation setting but may be more useful if implemented in a program evaluation degree or certificate program. At this stage, students should be able to demonstrate the usage of these skills in real-life evaluation settings. Students should have the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning of the program evaluation practice and generate hypotheses about observed behaviors while engaging others using appropriate interpersonal behaviors. Lee et al. (2007) argued that the best way for students to acquire hands-on learning is to engage in
a practicum and train within the context of doing a real evaluation. Trevisan (2002) stated that the only way to obtain a grasp of the non-technical issues involved in a program evaluation is through practical experiences. Practical experiences allow the student to “effectively learn, understand, and appreciate the challenges in such aspects of evaluation work” (Trevisan, 2004, p. 256). The best way to accomplish this task would be an internship or class-based evaluation where the students conduct a program evaluation throughout the course of a semester. Campbell and Tatro (1998) offer an impressive framework whereby instructors may use a single semester course to enable students to gain insightful field experience.

Despite this framework and despite the usefulness of hands-on experiences, there is not enough time in a semester to complete a full evaluation. Additionally, Sanders (1986) stated, “the development of competence in evaluation requires more than a one-semester course” (p. 23). Alkin & Christie (2002) suggested that in addition to time constraints, real evaluation settings could be somewhat “high risk” for novice evaluators because everything is happening in real time. Furthermore, instructors need substantial resources such as time, course releases for faculty, and a time and financial commitment from the evaluation sponsor to complete a practical program evaluation experience (Trevisan, 2004). In the absence of field experiences, Morris (1994) advocates the use of case studies because they simulate the type of learning that takes place within the field. Lee et al. (2007) would also advocate problem-based learning methods, since they situate learning through meaningful tasks. These authors made the case for combining case studies and role playing, because it combines “what is good about case-based methods (introducing students to complex nuanced case examples) and role-playing (pushing students beyond verbal hypothesizing and into real-time decision making) while encouraging an in-depth process of inquiry and supporting self-directed learning” (Lee et al., 2007, p. 538).

**Conclusion**

Despite the likelihood of evaluators being co-opted when in close relationships with evaluators (Scriven, 1996), dating back to S. B. Anderson and Ball’s (1978) work, there are clear justifications for fostering a collaborative relationship with stakeholders. For practical reasons, these authors suggested that since program personnel are distrusting of evaluators, it would be wise to keep them involved in discussions to avoid their rejection of the evaluation’s results. Patton (2001) recommended involving stakeholders in the evaluation not only to increase its utilization but also to narrow the range of possible evaluation questions, resulting in a better-focused evaluation. With such an emphasis on stakeholder involvement, it is essential that evaluators have the necessary skills to foster and maintain relationships with stakeholders. As such, the role that interpersonal dynamics plays in program evaluation is critical.

A study of “derailed executives” reported that those who failed often did so because of an interpersonal flaw rather than a technical inability (Gibbs,
This finding is also true in the field of program evaluation, where non-technical interpersonal skills are just as valuable as the technical skills required in the profession. However, instructors often overlook or skim over these skills in the traditional classroom settings due to “time, training, experience, or willingness” (Jaeger, 2003, p. 616). To illustrate, Mastracci et al. (2010) found that graduate students often cite their training as inadequately preparing them for the human aspect of public administration despite being proficient in management, analytical skills, and policy. Evaluators do not readily learn such skills in traditional program evaluation courses; yet, program evaluation practice relies on them quite heavily. Thus students and new practitioners acquire such skills in the workplace on their own (Mastracci et al., 2010). The concern for instructors is finding a way to use less drastic techniques to embed interpersonal skills competencies in their existing evaluation courses, thereby minimizing the effect of the sink-or-swim approach common in most “real-world” evaluation settings.

Since few university programs have formal training in interpersonal skills, this paper presents a less drastic technique by illustrating the need for the explicit teaching of interpersonal skills in the program evaluation classroom. Moreover, it demonstrates how instructors can link the teaching of these skills by using a learning taxonomy as a framework. Stevahn et al. (2005) noted that without explicitly identifying these competencies in the classroom, instructors run the risk of leaving some students without a full complement of skills needed in the field. By linking course objectives directly to interpersonal skills competence, instructors are now able to gauge the level of skill development and the appropriate learning activities and assessments used to achieve them.

Fenger and Homberg’s (2011) research illustrates the case where their studio model has potential for successfully merging the technical with the non-technical skills. But without further guidance at the micro level on how to integrate practical skills in the classroom, the innovation of this technique could soon become lost. The interpersonal skills taxonomy will fill the gap left by Fenger and Homburg’s (2011) macro-level research by giving instructors the proper tools to develop academic and professional skills simultaneously within their courses. Through borrowing and adapting knowledge from other fields (Taut & Alkin, 2003), the integration of this taxonomy allows instructors to call on expertise in various fields and apply them to the effective learning of interpersonal skills in the program evaluation setting. It also illustrates how readily instructors can incorporate these skills and other “soft” skills in their existing classroom settings, thereby reducing the gap between technical and non-technical skill attainment in the field of program evaluation, all within a semester-based program evaluation course.
Footnote
This method is an expansion of Baizerman’s (2009) approach.

References


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