



Program Evaluation

Questions for evaluating attitude & behavior change among youth

PA EXAMPLE

33

Pre - Post

PROGRAM TEAM

Jill Cox, M.S., R.D., Extension Associate for Physical Activity & Nutrition

Beth Van Horn, Ph.D., C.F.L.E, Extension Educator

Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Ph.D., Program Evaluation Specialist

CHALLENGE

Youth educators face many challenges in designing a program evaluation when youth are the target audience and the program's objectives focus on something other than a change in knowledge. Research on evaluation surveys with children has centered on standardizing the tools after the evaluation has been put into the field with a program, the working assumption being that the children understand the questions as intended and understand those questions (Collins, 2003).

While hard to believe, in-depth research has only begun to focus on a theory of children as responders, to unlock the 1) types of questions that pose problems, and 2) question characteristics that affect data quality in predictable ways.

A SOLUTION

In our research over the past year with eight-year-olds from varied socio-economic and achievement levels in 10 fourth-grade classes in school districts in central Pennsylvania, we pre-tested 10 impact questions in an evaluation using cognitive interviews for *Up for the Challenge* program. The questions evolved based on the cognitive interviews. The questions, designed to measure the program objectives found in core lessons selected for use in programming to youth in low-income populations, are designed to be given before and after the nine-unit program. Selected below are two questions that evaluate two areas of impact that are often difficult to measure, attitude and behavior change. Aside from other features the children could handle in the questions, the children were able to differentiate the increased intensity or ordinal nature of the answer categories, something essential for attitude and some behavior questions.

In cognitive interviews, children explain what the question and the answer categories mean to them. The answers are then compared to the intended meanings to see if the children comprehend the question and answer categories as intended (Collins, 2003). If their answers don't match the intended meaning, the questions are changed, sometimes engaging the children to reformulate the question. The questions are then tested again in the field. We used a cognitive interview protocol developed in earlier research by John Byrnes and Nancy Ellen Kiernan to evaluate questions and answers with children in Philadelphia, a project in which Lynn James was also a co-principal investigator.

The questions below offer youth educators a model for developing and testing evaluation questions in your own programs.

Other questions, measuring knowledge change in younger children, and pre-tested using cognitive interviews, are found in PA EXAMPLE #25, Measuring Impact on School Age Students, <http://extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX25.pdf>.

ATTITUDE QUESTION

Physical activity is helpful for some things. How helpful is physical activity for each of the following? Circle one answer in each row.

Keeping you healthy	NOT SURE	NOT HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	MODERATELY HELPFUL	VERY HELPFUL	EXTREMELY HELPFUL
Keeping you from getting sick	NOT SURE	NOT HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	MODERATELY HELPFUL	VERY HELPFUL	EXTREMELY HELPFUL
Having more energy	NOT SURE	NOT HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	MODERATELY HELPFUL	VERY HELPFUL	EXTREMELY HELPFUL
Looking better	NOT SURE	NOT HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	MODERATELY HELPFUL	VERY HELPFUL	EXTREMELY HELPFUL
Feeling happy	NOT SURE	NOT HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	MODERATELY HELPFUL	VERY HELPFUL	EXTREMELY HELPFUL

BEHAVIOR QUESTION

When doing the following activities, how often do you wash your hands? Circle one answer in each row.

When preparing food	HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
After using the bathroom	HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
After blowing your nose	HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
When you come in from playing	HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
After playing with an animal	HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS

REFERENCES

Collins, D. (2003). Pretesting survey instruments: an overview of cognitive methods. *Quality of Life Research*. 12(3), 229-238.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the evaluation, please contact Beth Van Horn bev1@psu.edu or Jill Cox jnc14@psu.edu.

Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, nekiernan@psu.edu

The Pennsylvania State University © 2010

The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.