

# LEARNING TO VALUE EVALUATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## A. Dealing with change in language education

### 1. Concerns with the value of language teaching and learning

- “Language crises” and the “failure” of language teaching
- Standards, policies, and language education
- Diverse learners, diverse needs, diverse instructional demands
- What is the role of language teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

→ Language education is undergoing fundamental and inevitable change in response to societal, intellectual, and other forces—how should language educators respond?

### 2. Why worry about evaluation? Determining the value of language education

- Increasing demands from a variety of quarters to assess and evaluate
- Implications of the accountability movement for language education
- Widespread culture of evaluation misunderstanding and misuse
- Impact of evaluation on language teaching, teachers, and learners???

→ **POTENTIAL NEGATIVES:** Evaluation and related processes can exact considerable negative consequences on teaching, learning, and professional survival, if left unheeded or left to others.

**BUT...** “We have a social and moral responsibility towards our students and towards society at large to state as clearly as we can what it is that we do for them and why what we do is valuable.” (anonymous survey respondent)

→ **POTENTIAL POSITIVES:** Evaluation and related processes can provide an effective means for dealing with change, offering empirical bases for deliberation, demanding clear thinking, sharpening our understandings of program successes and value, and empowering educators with evidence.

### 3. Basic premise: Evaluation as change agent

Evaluation plays a decisive role in changes that occur in language education at micro (program-internal) and macro (institutional, societal) levels. How we act

now via evaluation will condition the nature of change. By *learning to see* our programs through evaluation (and by enabling others to see), we can demonstrate the educational/social good that we do, reflect on exactly what that good should be, and articulate/improve our practices to ensure we continue to achieve it.

☞ To what extent are language teachers, programs, and the professions prepared to utilize evaluation in dealing with change?

## B. Traditions, trends, and the status quo in language program evaluation

### 1. Our evaluation inheritance in language teaching

- From JIJOEs to a cult(ure) of measurement

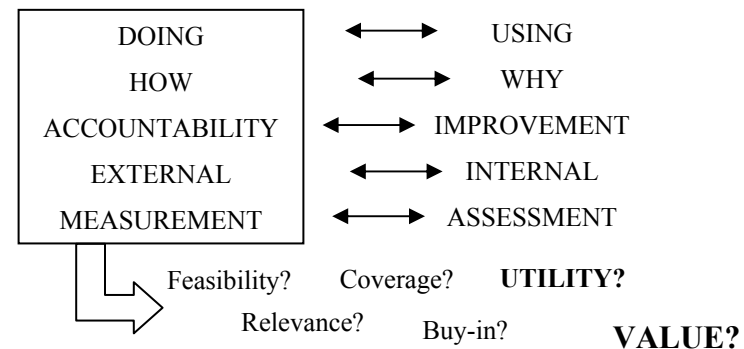
Swender (2002): “After all, if teachers do not know how to **measure** what students can do with language, how will they be able to determine whether their students are **measuring** up to the expectations of the 21st century?” (p. 591)

### 2. Some current trends to evaluate in education

- Outcomes and accreditation
- Accountability testing
- Received/perceived view of evaluation:

Barrington (2003): “To design and administer (intellectually honest) assessment plans that will **measure** such capabilities with a dozen or more standardized ‘learning objectives’ is next to impossible” leading to “pestilent repercussions” for the truly valued learning objectives that constitute the liberal arts, in that it “discourages teaching such skills because they are difficult to **measure**” (p. 31).

### 3. The status quo in language program evaluation?

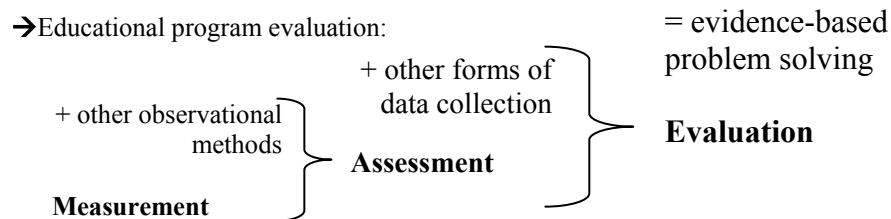


☞ If evaluation is intended to support educational programs and improve student learning, in response to crises/change, how should the status quo evolve?

### C. Re-envisioning evaluation in language education

#### 1. Resolving terminological confusion

- **Measurement**: “the consistent elicitation of quantifiable indicators of well-defined constructs via tests or related observation procedures; emphasizes efficiency, objectivity, and technical aspects of construct validity”
- **Assessment**: “the systematic gathering of information about student learning in support of teaching and learning... may be direct or indirect, objective or subjective, formal or informal, standardized or idiosyncratic... provide locally useful information on learners and on learning to those individuals responsible for doing something about it”
- **Evaluation**: “the gathering of information about any of the variety of elements that constitute educational programs, for a variety of purposes that primarily include understanding, demonstrating, improving, and judging program value... brings evidence to bear on the problems of programs, but the nature of that evidence is not restricted to one particular methodology” (Norris, 2006c, p. 579)



#### 2. The nature of useful evaluations

- (a) the individual intended users of evaluation participate in evaluation processes, from asking questions to designing methods to collecting data to making recommendations for change;
- (b) evaluation is pursued as a process, not an end-game;
- (c) sufficient time and resources are allocated and evaluation activities are feasible and focused on the problems at hand;
- (d) the evaluation produces interesting, credible, and immediately relevant findings;
- (e) findings are reported in a timely fashion and communicated in a way that can be readily understood and applied by intended users; and
- (f) interpretations and recommendations are contextualized to the specific program setting and variables (see Patton, 1997)

- Emerging visions of evaluation:

“[A] process of evaluating and improving current programs, encouraging innovations, and then evaluating each innovation’s effectiveness. The key step is systematic gathering of information for sustained improvement. And always with an eye toward helping faculty or students work more effectively.” (Light, 2001, p. 224)

“Evaluation is a way of appreciating the art of teaching. Evaluation creates an awareness of the richness, the creativity, and the philosophies of the people involved.” (Cumming, 1999, p. 1)

“If evaluation in English Language Teaching is to be effective, we will see a stronger integration of evaluation within practice, as part of an individual’s professionalism, and an increase in collaborative activity where teachers (and other relevant participants) are actively engaged in the monitoring process.” (Rea-Dickins, 1994, p. 84)

☞ If evaluation is going to happen, one way or the other, and if we want it to perpetuate and extend the valued learning that occurs within language programs, how do we get there? How do we make evaluation useful?

#### 3. How does useful evaluation happen? Realization + Proceduralization

→ **Multiple purposes**: holding ourselves accountable, but also diagnosing needs, improving teaching, articulating courses, revising curriculum, illuminating degree value, developing programs, justifying expenditures, etc.

#### ↑ ARTICULATION & ALIGNMENT ↓

→ **Multiple methods**: self-assessments, standardized assessments, performance assessments, journals, portfolios, surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, document analyses, etc.

#### Procedures:

- Identify, involve program stakeholders and intended users
  - Prioritize challenges, problems, evaluation questions
    - Select methods, design instruments/procedures, gather evidence
      - Analyze, understand, interpret evidence *in situ*
        - Report findings to users, stakeholders, audiences
          - USE findings as basis for deciding and acting
            - Generate new priorities for evaluation

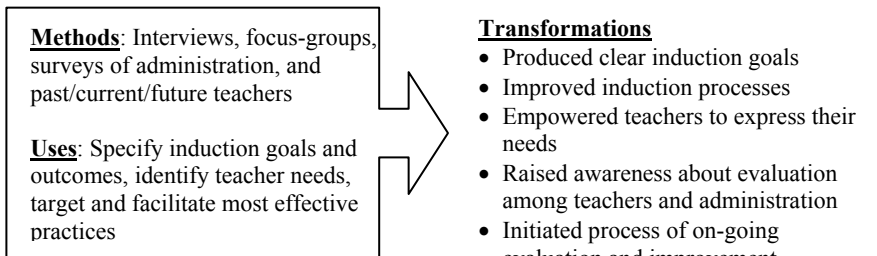
## D. What does it look like? Value added by evaluation in diverse settings

### 1. TEACHER-LED INTERNAL EVALUATION

Yang, W. (in press). Evaluation of teacher induction practices in a U.S. university English language program: Toward useful evaluation. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(4).

#### → English Language Institute, Teacher Induction Program

Q: How can teacher induction practices better prepare teaching assistants?



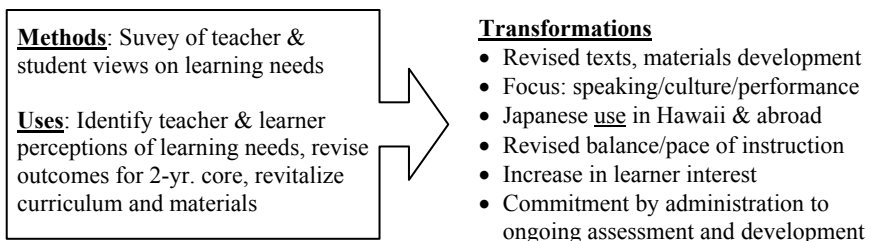
“The evaluation empowered the ELI teachers, since their thoughts and ideas about teacher induction were heard and highly valued, and their suggestions taken. The fact that the evaluation focus was proposed by two teachers out of our internal concerns added to the empowerment of teachers.” (p. 28)

### 2. TEACHER-RESEARCHER COLLABORATION, NEEDS ANALYSIS

Iwai, T., et al. (2000). *Japanese language needs analysis (1998-1999)*. Networks #13. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i, National Foreign Language Resource Center.

#### → University of Hawaii Japanese Program

Q: What do students need to learn, and how does that match our curriculum?



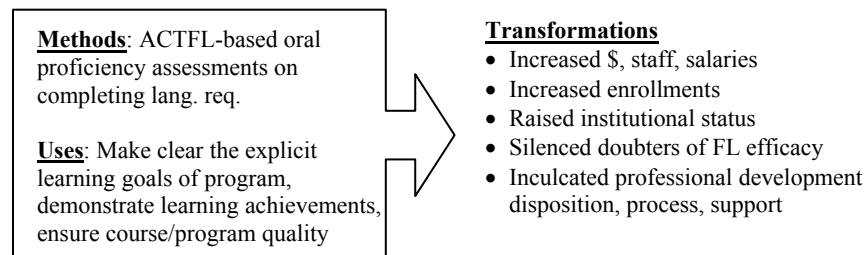
“Future efforts to incorporate teachers’ and students’ perceptions of students’ needs into the program will help to improve all the interconnected and dynamic components of curriculum development...” (p. 73).

### 3. PROGRAM-DIRECTOR INITIATIVE, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Bernhardt, E. (2006). Student learning outcomes as professional development and public relations. *Modern Language Journal*, 90(4), 588-590.

#### → Stanford University Language Center

Q: How do we justify and perpetuate our FL programs?



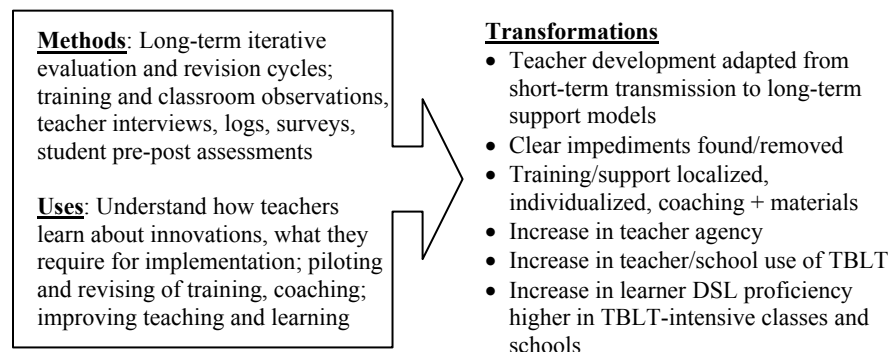
“...I believe it is the direct result of the visibility of the learner assessment program that was initiated in 1995” (p. 602).

### 4. EDUCATIONAL CENTER, NATIONAL INNOVATION PROJECT

Van den Branden, K. (2006). Training teachers: Task-based as well? In K. Van den Branden (ed.), *Task-based language teaching in practice* (pp. 217-273). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

#### → Dutch Second Language Education in Belgian Schools

Q: How do we train and support teachers in task-based innovation?



“The results...deepen our insight in the potential and the limitations of teacher training, particularly with regard to the implementation of task-based language teaching.” (p. 218).

## E. Learning to value evaluation

“Capacity for change” is exactly what program evaluation provides, if we learn to see it as a practice of our own devise, in the service of our own programmatic and professional values, and in response to the needs of students and teachers.

→What can we do about it? *Learn to see* evaluation as useful and essential:

1. Clarify roles for assessment & evaluation in language programs
2. Encourage, enable, and engage in professional development; make a professional space for evaluation in language programs
3. Generate and share examples, participate in the discourse
4. Hold evaluation accountable to language programs, teachers, learners
5. USE it or lose it...

## F. References and Resources

### Key Resources for Articles/Chapters on Language Program Evaluation

1. For a regularly updated and comprehensive annotated bibliography of publications on the topic of language program evaluation (including references from today’s talk), consult: Watanabe, Y., & Norris, J. M. (2007). *Foreign language program evaluation: An annotated bibliography of resources for foreign language educators*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, National Foreign Language Resource Center.  
<http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation/biblio/index.cfm>
2. For two recent collections of articles addressing language program evaluation topics, consult:  
Special issue of *Language Teaching Research*, 12(4), 2008: Understanding and improving language education through program evaluation.  
Perspectives section of *Modern Language Journal*, 90(4), 2006: The Outcomes of Collegiate FL Programs: Specifications, Assessment, Evaluation.

### Particularly Useful Resources from Mainstream Program Evaluation

- Free and practical online journal: *Practical assessment, research, and evaluation* <http://pareonline.net>
- Good book: Patton, M. Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation: The new century text* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Another good book: Fetterman, D.M., & Wandersman, A. (2005). *Empowerment evaluation principles in practice*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Important professional standards: The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). *The program evaluation standards: How to assess evaluations of educational programs* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

### A Few Professional Evaluation Organizations

- Japan Evaluation Society: <http://www.idcj.or.jp/JES/>
- American Evaluation Association: <http://www.eval.org>

- International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation: [http://ioce.net/members/eval\\_associations.shtml](http://ioce.net/members/eval_associations.shtml)
- Hawaii-Pacific Evaluation Association: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~hpea/>

### Key Texts on Language Program Evaluation

- Alderson, J. C., & Beretta, A. (Eds.). (1992). *Evaluating second language education*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Birckbichler, D. (Ed.) (2006). *Evaluating foreign language programs: Content, context, change*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Foreign Language Publications.
- Brown, J. D. (1994). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. New York: Heinle & Heinle.
- Brown, J. D. (2001). *Using surveys in language programs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coombe, C., Al-Hamly, M., Davidson, P., & Troudi, S. (eds.) (2007). *Evaluating teacher effectiveness in ESL/EFL contexts*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kiely, R., & Rea-Dickins, P. (2005) *Program evaluation in language education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lynch, B. K. (2003). *Language Assessment and Programme Evaluation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lynch, B. K. (1996). *Language Program Evaluation: Theory and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, J. M. (in press). *Validity evaluation in language assessment*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Rea-Dickins, P., & Germaine, K. (1992). *Evaluation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rea-Dickins, P., & Germaine, K. P. (Eds.). (1998). *Managing evaluation and innovation in language teaching: Building bridges*. London: Longman.
- Weir, C., & Roberts, C. (1994). *Evaluation in ELT*. Oxford: Blackwell.

### A Few Language Program Evaluation Web Sites

- **University of Hawai’i Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project** <http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation> [Lots of resources and links here]
- Center for Applied Linguistics, Testing and Assessment <http://www.cal.org/ta>
- National Foreign Language Resource Centers (central web site for all LRCs) <http://nflrc.msu.edu/>
- University of Bristol, Center for Research on Language and Education: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/education/research/centres/creole>

### Professional Development Opportunities in Language Assessment and Evaluation

- Ongoing: Graduate study in *Language Assessment, Measurement, and Program Evaluation* at the University of Hawaii, Department of Second Language Studies (including post-graduate certificate programs as well as MA and PHD degrees) <http://www.hawaii.edu/sls/lampe>
- Ongoing: Self-access learning tools, modules, templates, examples, and other resources on FL program evaluation on the FLPEP web site <http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation>

Contact me on any related issues: [jnorris@hawaii.edu](mailto:jnorris@hawaii.edu)