Linking the how to the why: Methods decisions in foreign language program evaluation

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SLS Brown Bag /Foreign Language Program Evaluation Summit Opening Workshop
When you hear “evaluation,” what kind of activity do you think it is?

Administer OPI test!
Administer course evaluation surveys!
Elicit student attitudes with a questionnaire!
Have external evaluators observe the program!
Track student enrollment!

Typical to think....

HOW do we do evaluation?

instead of...

WHY do we do evaluation?
What is program evaluation?

Evaluation is...

“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. Evaluation brings evidence to bear on the problems of programs, but the nature of that evidence is not restricted to one particular methodology.”

(Norris, 2006, p. 579)
Responding to program evaluation concerns

Educational
Transformative
Participatory
Democratic

Useful
Pragmatic
Responsive

Appropriate & accurate

Comparability of evaluation data

Willingness of teachers to participate

Available instruments and procedures

Lack of time, overburdened teachers

Institutional support, funding, help

Use, usefulness, follow-through on evaluation

Understanding, knowledge, expertise

Fear, misuse by external forces

Manageable & feasible

Clear & Understandable

Available in instruments and procedures

Pragmatic
Responsive

Transformative
Participatory
Democratic
Towards useful, feasible, appropriate, and accurate program evaluation methods

Which focus? (e.g., SLOs, placement)

Maturity of the program in focus?

A specific Component of a program?

About a specific program [WHAT?]

Evaluation Methods

For helping specific people [WHO?]

To make specific Program decisions [WHY?]

developers
improve
advocate
value
judge
hold accountable

empower
stakeholders

generate
knowledge

upper admin

Curriculum coordinator

teachers

learners

public

Lang teaching community

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Evaluation procedure

Initiator & Initiator’s motivation

Identify specific program & stakeholders

Determine primary intended users

Define & prioritize evaluation questions

Data analysis & interpretation

Gather information

Determine evaluation purposes and uses

Plan for the next cycle of evaluation

Phenomena (evidence) that will be useful in answering the evaluation questions.

A group or individuals who are in position to make decision about the program, intend to use the evaluation findings to inform their future actions, and are affected by the evaluation outcomes.

Identify immediate & long-term action plan to implement findings

Report findings

Initiator & Initiator’s motivation

Determine indicators for each question

• Design data collection methodology and create necessary instruments.
• Plan how to analyze and interpret data.
• Articulate timeline and who is responsible for what.
Evaluation procedure

Initiator & Initiator’s motivation

Plan for the next cycle of evaluation

Determine immediate & long-term action plan to implement findings

Report findings

Identify specific program & stakeholders

Identify primary intended users

Determine evaluation purposes and uses

Define & prioritize evaluation questions

Determine indicators for each question

Useful? Feasible? Appropriate? Accurate?

Data analysis & interpretation

Gather information

• Design data collection methodology and create necessary instruments.
• Plan how to analyze and interpret data.
• Articulate timeline and who is responsible for what.
Phase 1: Principles for deciding indicators

- Define & prioritize evaluation questions
- Determine indicators for each question
- Design data collection methodology and create necessary instruments.
- Plan how to analyze and interpret data.
- Articulate timeline and who is responsible for what.
- Gather information
- Data analysis & interpretation

For what purpose?
How will the information be used?
Whose values and assumptions?
What type of information will best inform the eval questions and prog decision making?
How accurate and credible is the info to the users of the eval?
Who are the informants? Do we have access to them? What is the best timing?
Phase 1: Identifying indicators, key informants, and best timing: An EFL example

**Context:** English program at a Japanese high school

**Users:** Curriculum coordinator, full-time English teachers, principal, recruitment committee

**Eval questions**
- What are the agreed and disagreed needs of the outcomes of high school English education?
- What distinct English education goals should we advocate?

**Indicators**
- Perception of what learners should be able to do (language tasks) by the end of the HS.
- Alumni’s (1st year university students) perception on learner needs.
- Curricular goals stated in the Course of Guidelines
- English education goals of competing schools

**Evaluation use**
- Create educational goals to clarify the curriculum.
- State English goals in recruitment materials to advocate distinct identity of the program.

**Informants:** Students & teachers
**Timing:** At the end of the 1st term.

Decided not to collect data due to feasibility

**Source:** Government documents
**Timing:** spring

**Source:** school HPs
**Timing:** summer
Phase 1: Identifying indicators, key informants, and best timing

ACTIVITY Part 1

Context:
EAP department in large university with new grad student teachers every semester

PIUs:
Program administrators

Intended Uses (WHY?)
• Specify goals of teacher induction program
• Figure out if induction practices meet teacher needs & administrators’ expectations
• Identify areas of improvement
• Form basis for implementing changes

Evaluation questions
• How are induction practices preparing new teachers for teaching?
• What are the intended outcomes of the teacher induction program?

Indicators (WHAT?)

Key Informants (WHO?)

Best Timing? (WHEN?)
Phase 2: Principles for deciding methodology

• Define & prioritize evaluation questions

• **Determine indicators for each question**

• Design data collection methodology and create necessary instruments.

• Plan how to analyze and interpret data.

• Articulate timeline and who is responsible for what.

• Gather information

• Data analysis & interpretation

What is the most feasible method? *Time, money, human resources, expertise, steps involved, existing instruments?*

Who collects information?

Who is going to manage data?

Who is going to be involved in analyzing & interpreting data? *Whose interpretation counts?*
What evaluation methodologies are available?

Variety of methods
- Provide different pictures
- Suited to different information needs
- Complement each other

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Observations
- Assessment
- Document Analysis
- Case Studies
Questionnaires

Series of written questions administered to individuals

Purposes

- Gain insight into learner attitudes
- Judge program performance
- Elicit stakeholders’ perceptions of outcomes
- Assess changes in program practices

Advantages?

Challenges?
Interviews

Interactions with individuals to gather extended responses

Purposes

- Gain in-depth insight into attitudes and perceptions
- Elicit stakeholders’ expectations and needs
- Capture and describe teaching processes
- Understand learner experiences in program

Advantages?

Challenges?
Focus Groups

Group interaction directed and moderated by a facilitator

- Gain insight into group perception of learning
- Elicit group attitudes towards program
- Identify and understand needs and expectations of group
- Focus evaluation questions using group perspective

Advantages?

Challenges?
Observations

Systematic observation using protocols, checklists, ratings, and field notes

**Purposes**

- Understand context, activities, people, and interactions
- Understand teaching and learning processes
- Identify needs and areas of program improvement
- See what people “say” and “do”

**Advantages?**

**Challenges?**
Document Analysis

Examination of program-related documents (e.g., mission statements, student learning outcomes, syllabi, webpages)

- Examine trends, patterns, and consistency in program
- Gain insight into program and its history
- Identify gaps in curriculum
- Preliminary study for other methods (surveys, interviews, etc)

Advantages?

Challenges?
Case Studies

Intense investigation of a course/class/individual using multiple methods (e.g., unstructured interviews, observation, and questionnaires)

- Document what actually happens
- Track learners' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior
- Understand individuals' needs and expectations
- Identify obstacles to program implementation

Advantages?

Challenges?
Assessment

Systematic gathering of information about student learning\(^1\) (e.g., portfolios, OPI, in-class tests) for sustained improvement

**Purposes**

- Examine student achievement of learning outcomes
- Provide feedback to teachers, students, and administrators
- Understand student progress within program
- Identify curriculum strengths and weaknesses

**Advantages?**

\(^1\)Norris, J. M. (2006), p. 579
Phase 2: Identifying and justifying methods: An EFL example

**Indicators**
- Perceptions of learner goals
  - **Informants**: Students & teachers
  - **Timing**: At the end of the 1st term
- National curricular goals
  - **Source**: Government document
  - **Timing**: Spring
- English education goals of competing schools
  - **Source**: Competing schools’ websites
  - **Timing**: Summer

**Methods**
- **Multiple**: Meetings, interviews, document analysis
- **Document analysis**: Questionnaire
- **Document analysis**
Phase 2: Identifying and justifying methods: ACTIVITY Part 2

Evaluation Questions

• How are induction practices preparing new teachers for teaching?
• What are the intended outcomes of the teacher induction program?

Indicators (WHAT?)

Indicator 1
Informants:
Timing:

Indicator 2
Informants:
Timing:

Indicator 3
Informants:
Timing:

Indicator 4
Informants:
Timing:

Methods (HOW?)

?
ACTIVITY Wrap-Up:
What Really Happened?

Evaluation Questions

• How are induction practices preparing new teachers for teaching?

• What are the intended outcomes of the teacher induction program?

Indicators (WHAT?)

Expectations of program

Informants: administrators, new teachers
Timing: during semester

New teacher needs

Informants: in-coming teachers
Timing: before program

Teacher perceptions

Informants: new & returning teachers
Timing: during semester

Methods (HOW?)

Interviews with administrators and new teachers

Questionnaire for in-coming teachers

Interviews with returning teachers

Now, when you hear “evaluation,” what kind of activity do you think it is?

**NOT** method-driven,

**BUT**… a purpose- and use-driven activity by and for users.

**NOT** a one-shot activity,

**BUT**… a cyclical process that informs future programming.

**NOT** an externally-driven or externally mandated activity,

**BUT**… a well-informed, appropriate, feasible, accurate, useful, and systematic investigation of a program for the evaluation users.
Resources

http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/evaluation

Welcome to the home page of the FL Program Evaluation Project at the University of Hawaii. Our mission is to enable useful evaluation in support of foreign language programs. We invite you to browse the web site, utilize the resources, and contact us with your ideas about program evaluation. This web site is updated frequently, so please check back soon for additional resources and project news.

Announcements

• New Guide: Roles and responsibilities for evaluation in foreign language programs. This short booklet presents a step-by-step overview of the program evaluation process with particular emphasis on who participates at distinct phases of an evaluation and what their responsibilities are for making evaluation happen.

• New Report: Understanding and assessing intercultural competence. This report provides a comprehensive review of the theory and practice of assessing intercultural competence, and it offers numerous examples of assessments, items, scales, and the ways in which assessments are being used by diverse college programs.

• Presentation by John Norris: "Using assessment for understanding and improving language education", to be presented at the Berkeley Language Center Lecture Series, October 12, 2007, 3:00 – 5:00 pm.

• Presentation by the University of Evansville Department of Foreign Languages: "Understanding the educational effectiveness of a department in terms of student learning outcomes", to be presented at the Midwest Modern Language Association, Cleveland, Ohio, November 8-11.

• FL program evaluation examples: View work that is underway in a variety of college FL programs around the U.S., based on outcomes of the NFLRC Summer Institute 2007.

• Graduate study in language program evaluation: The Department of SLIS at the University of Hawaii offers MA, Advanced Certificate, and PhD degree programs with a concentration in language assessment, measurement, and program evaluation. Find out more: http://www.hawaii.edu/lae/lae/programs

Resources handout

• Recommended texts
• Example L2 evaluations
• Useful websites

Presentation handout
We hope you now see evaluation methods as rooted in the *whys* of program evaluation!

Mahalo!