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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of instructional development evaluation programs is assessed. It is suggested that although it is a basic tenet in instructional development that teaching improvement is closely linked to effective evaluation, it is ironical that most instructional development programs have themselves been evaluated only superficially, if at all. There is very limited evidence that teaching practices and learning effectiveness have been substantially changed as a result of the instructional development. Evaluation strategies on three levels are discussed: (1) activity within the program, which can be monitored in terms of number of contacts made and distribution of instructional materials; (2) attitudes can be measured (teaching, learning, and program); and (3) the collection of empirical evidence for changes related to improved learning and teaching. In practice most evaluation of instructional development programs has been confined to the first two levels. A recent informal survey of instructional developers in several countries revealed that not only are evaluation efforts scarce, but many instructional developers are resistant to the very notion of formal assessment of their activities. The reasons for this, such as budgetary considerations, are explored. (Author/PHR)

EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES*

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen an explosion in the number of formal units that have been established in universities to encourage the improvement of teaching effectiveness. Although it is a basic tenet in instructional development that teaching improvement is closely linked to effective evaluation, it is ironical that most instructional development programmes have themselves been evaluated only superficially, if at all. In particular, there is very scanty evidence that teaching practices and learning effectiveness have been substantially changed as a result of the instructional development movement. A number of evaluation strategies are possible. At the most basic level, activity within the programme can be monitored in terms of number of contacts made, distribution of instructional materials, and so on; the second level involves the measurement of attitudes -- both to teaching and learning and to the programme itself; the third level requires the collection of empirical evidence for changes related to improved learning and teaching. In practice, most evaluation of instructional development programmes has been confined to the first two levels. A recent informal survey of instructional developers in several countries reveals that not only are evaluation efforts sparse, but that many instructional developers are resistant to the very notion of formal assessment of their activities. The reasons for this state of affairs are explored.

MODELS FOR PROGRAMME EVALUATION

The recent prolific growth of instructional development programmes in North American universities has been documented elsewhere (e.g. Wergin, 1977). Since the 1960s such programmes have developed and expanded not only in the United States and Canada, but also in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and many countries of continential Europe -- as evidenced by the wide geographical distribution

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of contributors to the present set of proceedings. Despite the existence of different models of instructional development in different locations (see O'Connell and Meeth, 1978, pp. 11-12, for a useful categorization), a common element in the work of nearly all programmes has been an emphasis upon the importance of evaluation of instruction. Hence it is paradoxical that the assessment of instructional development programmes themselves is a matter of comparatively recent concern. For example, only three years ago, Rose (1976) felt it necessary to argue vehemently in favour of what she called "holistic evaluation" of professional development programmes, though unfortunately she gave few clues as to how to go about this task. Lindquist (1978) is another who has advocated systematic programme evaluation by means of a variety of methods. He lists evaluative criteria that include changes in faculty behaviour and attitudes as well as improvement in student learning, if possible measured across institutions.

Among those offering specific evaluative prescriptions in this area are Abedor and Gustafson (1971), Bergquist and Phillips (1977), O'Connell and Meeth (1978) and Wergin (1977). The last author, following Stufflebeam et al (1971) distinguishes between the evaluation of process and products, and Abedor and Gustafson (1971) have provided a set of criteria related to each. They continue by taking up a common theme: the distinction between evaluation in terms of "measurable effects" as opposed to the "opinions of proponents" (p. 21), and later discuss the difference between short term effects and more lasting long term gains. Wergin's paper includes a helpful discussion of the classical scientific approaches to programme evaluation, indicating the practical limitations of experimental designs when applied to most instructional development programmes. More recently, Bergquist and Phillips (1977) have raised the important question of whether evaluation should be focussed primarily on changing faculty attitudes and "faculty growth" or upon enhanced student learning. They identify eight steps to effective programme assessment,

PROGRAMME EVALUATION IN PRACTICE

So much for the principles of programme evaluation. However, an interesting corollary question is the extent to which these principles are put into practice in real life instructional development. In an attempt to provide a partial answer to this question, the author wrote to the directors of ten established and fairly prominent instructional development programmes in Australia, Denmark, England, New Zealand, and the United States. Probably because nearly all the people approached were personally known to the writer, all of them replied to the request for information about their evaluation philosophy and practice. In some cases the correspondence became quite lengthy, and in many instances useful additional documentation was provided. Although the sample is obviously very small and subjectively selected, the comments were extremely frank and informative -- possibly because the topic appeared to be an especially salient one for the respondents concerned. Thus their replies formed the basis of an interesting -- if incomplete -- cross-section of philosophies and practices of programme evaluation in five different national contexts.

Table 1 lists the types of evaluation activities that the different centres used in connection with their programmes, classified in terms of the three levels described above. Obviously the most striking aspect of the table is the paucity of activities at Level 3, despite the frequent comments in the evaluation literature about the importance of measuring "outcomes", "real change", and so on. It is interesting that the two programmes that show the most Level 3 evaluation activity are both from the USA (where perhaps the calls for educational accountability have been shrillest), both are regarded as extremely successful programmes, and -- not coincidentally — both have sufficient staff to devote considerable energy to the programme evaluation process.

beginning with the "identification of program goals, priorities and values" and ending with the appraisal of the evaluation process itself by both evaluator and client (p. 290). The same authors describe seven evaluation models that can be applied in this field, encompassing both descriptive and experimental approaches. The different sorts of possible programme outcomes are listed by O'Connell and Meeth (1978), who distinguish between effects on faculty, on students, on the administration, and upon the institution itself. These authors also list various types of relevant evidence that could be gathered to demonstrate such outcomes have been achieved, including self-reports, observations, examination of relevant records and reports, as well as empirical tests that indicate change has taken place.

In an oversimplified form, the recommendations of these, and other, commentators on the programme evaluation process can be conceptualized in terms of appraisal at three different levels. The first, and simplest level, involves the relatively straightforward monitoring of activities generated by, and in response to, the instructional development programme. This type of evaluation might include counting the number of requests for advice and assistance, number of newsletters distributed, number of books borrowed from the resource library, and so on. The second level of appraisal involves the measurement of attitudes and perceptions, both in relation to the programme itself and to wider issues of teaching and learning. Opinions of faculty, students, administrators, and even the general public, all could have relevance here. The third level of evaluation requires the compilation of evidence for change. Most commentators tend to cite changes in behaviour in this connection, especially improvement in student learning, but clearly these are not the only changes of interest. For example, changed faculty attitudes and motivation might be equally important, as might a changed institutional climate, especially if this resulted in increased student enrollments.

TABLE 1: EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AT 10 INSTITUTIONS

LEVEL 1: Monitoring Activities	LEVEL 2: Measuring Attitudes	LEVEL 3: Demonstrating Change
*	Institution 1 (Australia) Informal feedback on value of services	
	Institution 2 (Australia) Follow-up survey of participants in teaching courses	
Institution 3 (Australia) Number of faculty seconded to programme; Requests for funds to support teaching innovations	Institution 3 (Australia) "Favourable public comment" on work of the unit	
Institution 4 (Denmark) Renewed contacts with former programme participants; Contacts from others in same department	Institution 4 (Denmark) Questionnaire surveys and oral discussions with programme participants	
Institution 5 (England) Review of activities by external committee.		
	Institution 6 (New Zealand) (Planned) comparative study of self-perceptions of instructional developers and perceptions of others in institution (faculty, students, administrators)	
Institution 7 (USA) Number of requests for services; "Repeat" clients; Faculty adoptions of advice; Letters of praise and thanks; Visits by outsiders; Use of centre facilities	Institution 7 (USA) Questionnaire surveys of publications and workshops; Interviews with clients by external evaluation team; (Planned) interviews with random sample of faculty	
Institution 8 (USA) Number attending conferences and workshops, especially from other institutions; Development of textbooks on basis of programme activities; Attraction of outside funding	Institution 8 (USA) Attitudes of persons seconded to programme; Favourable comments by students	Institution 8 (USA) Continuance of projects after central funding has ended; Replication of activities in other institutions (including use of centre publications)
	Institution 9 (USA) Attitudes of participating faculty; Comments from faculty and administrators	Institution 9 (USA) Increase in student enrollment in redesigned courses; Changed student attitudes to courses; Administrative changes in course credit system
	Institution 10 (USA) "Awareness survey" of random sample of faculty; Attitudes of grant recipients	

* Nearly all programmes provide general descriptions of their activities in the form of annual reports.

Of even more interest, however, are the comments provided by respondents indicating their basic philosophies of programme evaluation. Nearly all the directors commented on the difficulty of the process and, perhaps surprisingly, a small majority were extremely hesitant — if not downright hostile — about the usefulness of conventional programme evaluation techniques as applied to instructional development. This attitude was particularly evident in programmes outside the United States. For example, the director of a programme in New Zealand expressed scepticism about using the criterion of "the numbers of people making use of the resources" (Level 1 type evaluation). He pointed out that some Australian centres quote upwards of 90% of faculty making contacts with the instructional development service. "This would indicate a very effective Centre with extensive impact. However, if one looks closer, one finds that the contact included those who even came to borrow a slide projector". In similar vein, the director of a very large Australian unit (presumably not the one referred to above) commented favourably about evaluations which are essentially "number crunching" activities. This respondent saw his unit as a change agent -- "However, if I am doing my job perfectly, it may be I will suggest change to a Head of Department in such a way that he believes that the idea is his".

Much the same point about unrecognized catalytic effects is made eloquently by another Australian director whose comments are worth quoting at some length.

> The assertion that *the unit* has been an excellent investment for the University is impossible to prove, and in my view, it would be undesirable to attempt to prove... By the very nature of *the unit's* operations, our most significant achievements are the least tangible ones. It is, for example, easy to point to the research we have done, easy to list academic staff who have funds for teaching innovations from us; it is difficult and often impossible to demonstrate how that research and those teaching innovations have benefitted the University...
>
> The most significant point, which has a delicious irony, is this. *The unit* is most successful when its influence is not even recognized. When a seed is sown, a train of thought started, an interest stimulated, and later -- perhaps much later -- an

> academic teaches better, or his students learn better or work better, that academic may have no inkling that *the unit* had any part in it. That is ideal. If he thinks he is entirely responsible for some change for the better, if it is genuinely his own, he persists in it, builds on it, is involved in it, much more effectively than if it comes from outside, from somebody else. It is ironic, it puts *the unit* in a curious dilemma, that to receive no credit for something we have done is our highest achievement.

Since this programme is apparently well regarded in its own university, has existed successfully for a number of years, and has recently received increased financial support, it appears that this respondent has correctly judged the prevailing institutional climate, and that his approach to evaluation is an acceptable one in that context. Judging by the contents of annual reports from North American instructional development programmes (partly reflected by the data tabulated in Table 1), the environment in North American institutions is very different, and requires that at least lip service be paid to the importance of gathering tangible evidence of activities and effects — even though the quality of such evidence may often be questionable.

SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Analysis of the responses provided by instructional development programme directors from different institutional settings raises a number of general questions with regard to the evaluation process. Firstly, should the main purpose of the evaluation be to help programme staff improve their performance (formative evaluation) or to enable administrators to judge the programme's overall effectiveness at certain points in time (summative evaluation)? Linked with this is a second question of who should set the criteria for evaluation: programme staff? clientele? faculty at large? the administration? students? the wider public? Third is the important matter of how the evaluation should take account of the context in which the programme operates, including the institutional climate, and norms within the wider academic community of that country. Fourth is the question of the intangible

"catalytic" effects referred to by so many of the Australasian directors: one interesting example of such an effect is the fact that, since this informal study began, the New Zealand respondent has embarked upon a project for the evaluation of faculty development programmes throughout that country, "stimulated to a certain extent by your original letter". Finally there is the important matter of the resources available to conduct programme evaluation. Many existing programmes have extremely modest budgets and staff, and to bring in outside evaluators would be prohibitively expensive, while to devote staff time to assessment would severely limit the time and resources available for instructional development itself. This brings up the interesting evaluative technique of cost benefit analysis, which is widely used in industrial settings, but is rarely dealt with in the literature on evaluation of instructional development programmes -- though this approach might indeed provide a useful criterion to keep in mind when selecting evaluation strategies for a modestly staffed unit operating in a large institution.

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