

Evaluation:

Designing Evaluation for Improving Teaching and Student Learning

Context and Key Issues

Whilst there are many different models of good teaching and many different environments within which students learn, there is one unifying goal – that of *enabling students to learn*. Your evaluation program should help you to research and document how well, *your teaching enables your particular students to learn, in your particular context*. Biggs and Tang (2007) present a model of curriculum design, *Constructive Alignment*, based on ‘constructivism in learning’ and ‘alignment in teaching’ where aims and objectives, assessment, and teaching and learning activities ‘align constructively’. When you are designing curricula for your course or teaching sessions, think about evaluation also. The best evaluation programs are embedded in the learning processes for the student and the teacher.

At Griffith, evaluation of teaching and student learning mirrors the University’s quality assurance cycle – Plan, Implement, Review and Improve (PIRI). This continuous cyclic process can be applied to evaluate a specific aspect of teaching or curriculum, or more broadly to review a whole course or program. There are many dimensions to evaluation and many different ways by which data can be collected. This guide offers a set of prompts to consider when designing evaluation for improving teaching and student learning.

Strategies for Designing Evaluation for Improving Teaching and Student Learning

1. Embed evaluation in the learning processes for the student and the teacher.

When you are designing curricula and learning tasks to engage students, think about ways to make students’ progress in learning explicitly visible to both the student and yourself. For example, include a reflective loop where students complete an activity, stop to review it and then redo it to improve their first attempt. This serves as a learning experience and, with appropriate documentation, can be a valuable source of evaluative information for both you and your students.

2. Plan evaluation with deliberate intent.

The following set of prompts and questions will help you in deciding about appropriate evaluation strategies that align with your aims or purposes for evaluating, in your particular context and within your resource support environment.

1. What is the **purpose** of this evaluation?
 - Can you succinctly articulate the aims in one sentence or formulate a single question? Is there more than one aim? If yes, how do they relate to each other?
2. What kinds of **evidence** would help you understand more about these issues or aims?
3. What **sources** of information will you use?
 - Where will you get this information? Who would have information about or a perspective on these concerns? Who are the audiences and stakeholders?
 - What ethical issues and responsibilities need to be considered? Who owns and has access to data and reports?
4. What **methods** or approach will you take in collecting information?
 - What kind of data or information do you want to collect? Why? Given the types of audiences and sources – what kind of strategies or methods will help to get appropriate and valuable information?
5. What **timeline** would be best for undertaking each element of this evaluation plan?
 - When is best? Why? Does timing matter for each of the different methods, tools, data and audiences or sources?
6. What **resources** and support do you have?
 - What is needed? What is the most effective and efficient approach? Are the required resources available? If not, how does this impact on your plans and data collection?

Table 1 is an example of how you might record your responses to these questions. This style of evaluation planning grid (EPG) creates a compact summary and record of your evaluation plans and process. It can be used in your evaluation report or summary and can help in documenting your teaching and learning practice.

Table 1. Sample Format for an Evaluation Planning Grid

Evaluation Purpose and Questions	Who will 'know' about this? (Stakeholders) ✓				Types of evidence, tool most appropriate, mode of collection	Comment on timing and resources
	Students	Tutors & presenters	Course Convenors	(Include others)		
MAJOR QUESTION: What has been the impact of using concept mapping as a tool for teaching and learning?						
Evaluation Question 1 Did concept mapping help the students to learn? To learn what we intended? Did they enjoy it? What was their experience of the process and the tool?	✓	✓	✓	✓	Students' experiences and perceptions investigated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student survey for the whole group; • Focus groups; • ... 	Surveys and interviews completed later in the semester Focus group run at the end of the semester
Evaluation Question 2 Was concept mapping useful / valuable as a teaching tool? How? Why? What was the experience of the teaching team?		✓	✓		Staff experiences and observations investigated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching team survey • documentation of observations; • Teaching team focus group -survey as trigger for group reflection; • ... 	Survey and focus group run at the end of the semester

Adapted excerpt from EPG in *Evaluation and concept mapping: How do they fit?* Gail Dacey, Heather James, Gary Mellor and Carol Bowie. GIHE Flexible Learning Seminar. 2000.

3. Think carefully about your data collection and sampling procedures.

Firstly, consult the University Evaluation Framework and policies to identify requirements and expectations. Consult the GIHE evaluation website for more information about data sources, types of evidence, methods and strategies of evaluation. Consider the following tips in your planning:

1. **Use multiple viewing lenses** or triangulation. Collecting and considering data of different types and from multiple sources helps to construct a richer, more informed picture of the real processes and outcomes. Each time that you offer a course, you will have at least four sources of data to interpret: (a) the students' experiences and responses; (b) the assessment profile of the cohort; (c) examples of assessment pieces and students' work; and (d) yours and the teaching team's reflections and observations.
2. **Decide upon the amount, type and format of data** that you collect, according to your capacity to manage and subsequently use it. Consider carefully before collecting data about things over which you have no control and to which you therefore have no capacity to respond.
3. **Consider your sampling procedures and response rates.** Do you need responses from 100% of the cohort? Would stratifying your sample be more valuable i.e. taking samples from different campuses or cohorts?
4. **Complete any evaluation questionnaires or tasks yourself**, in order to check: for errors and possible confusion about questions; how long it takes; that it is 'do-able' and will make sense to your audience. Consider documenting your answers as a form of reflection on your teaching.
5. **Ensure that you can actually make a decision** based on the data you collect. Are the data sufficient to make a decision? A mix of qualitative and quantitative data is often helpful.

4. Close the loop: feedback and feed-forward what you learn from your evaluation.

After you have decided what you are going to take action on, think about who would benefit from hearing about the summary and outcomes, for example, closing the loop and feeding the information 'back' to the participants of the surveys or feeding 'forward' the information to the next group of students in your courses. The latter demonstrates to students' that you value and respect their feedback and really do take action in response to their comments.

Griffith University's Evaluation Policy and the GIHE Evaluation website provide detailed information about requirements, recommendations and frameworks for evaluation of student learning, courses and teaching.

References:

Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for quality learning at university*, Berkshire: SRHE and OUP. 3rd Edn.