

EVALUATION OR RESEARCH: EVIDENCE FOR THE INFLUENCE, CONTRIBUTION AND IMPACT OF YOUR CURRICULUM DESIGN

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Whether you are mainly interested in evaluation to support evidence-based teaching practice, or aiming for a wider contribution to knowledge of teaching (research), you will need to frame, ask and answer some questions about the impact of your curriculum.

For example, you will need to:

- clarify what measurable or tangible outcomes your project is aiming for;
- identify what evidence will show whether the intended outcomes have been achieved;
- find existing information systems that can provide relevant evidence; and
- plan for additional information gathering if needed.

KEEPING AN OPEN MIND

As part of longer-term reflective practice, and particularly if you are intending to make a contribution to scholarly research around your teaching, you can also take a step back to review whether you have made some tacit assumptions that need to be articulated and examined. Cross-discipline peer review, whether formal or informal, is a useful way of flushing out discipline-specific assumptions.

There may also be some unanticipated outcomes, serendipitous or otherwise. Your design may have some spin-off benefits that you can identify for future investigation. Something may not work as planned. You can examine why and share this with others as well as changing what you do.

EVALUATION

Figure 1 shows a framework that identifies different levels of outcome that you might want to evaluate – from institutional capacity building through to graduates' contribution to the wider community.

The evaluation evidence can contribute to:

- continuing improvement in the design (evidence-based teaching practice)
- personal portfolios (evidence of teaching excellence for promotion and award applications)
- information peer sharing and exemplars of best practice.

RESEARCH

If you identify where your curriculum develops something new within your discipline or more widely, this is an opportunity to contribute to the wider higher education community through scholarly publications.

For peer reviewed scholarly publications you will have to articulate more about your methodology and methods than for pragmatic evaluation purposes. How you do this will depend on the audience. For example, if you are presenting evidence from qualitative analysis methods to an audience more accustomed to quantitative evidence (or vice versa), you may have to explain and justify the validity of the analysis.

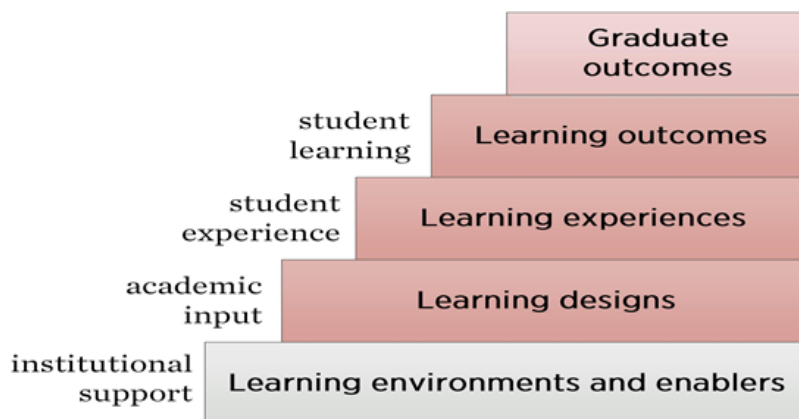


Figure 1. Levels of evaluation and research



EVALUATION QUESTIONS

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW AND WHY?

There are a lot of things going on when someone is learning. Do you know which aspects of your students' learning you want to find out more about? What is the rationale behind the changes or innovations you are introducing? How are you thinking about the student learning process or the nature of the learning outcomes?

If your initial approach has been pragmatic, it may be useful to explore where relevant educational literature and theories can help to articulate your assumptions and priorities and point to where you can turn empirical evaluation (does it work?) into something more reflective and scholarly (why does it work/not work here and where else would this apply?).

You are probably familiar with some types of research methodology through your discipline expertise, but not others. Working with colleagues, across disciplines, can help develop good questions and tease out what evidence is relevant for these.

WHAT KIND OF DATA AND ANALYSIS?

What are the relevant variables, in terms of:

- numbers and diversity of learners involved?
- level of knowledge (e.g. enabling, course, undergraduate, postgraduate)?
- timescale (e.g. how students engage in this week's activities or how the whole course benefits their future employment or something in between)?
- granularity (e.g. individual student learning processes or average student performance across a cohort)?

Are you mainly interested in quantitative outcomes - e.g. do more students learn better with a new design than with the previous version? Or are you looking for something more detailed about how an activity benefits particular students?

What research or evaluation processes would be relevant and viable in your context, in terms of:

- time available?
- access to data?
- ethics approvals?
- skills needed to collect and analyse data?

WHICH DATA SOURCES?

Within Western Sydney University, staff have access to the [Office for Quality and Performance information portal](#).

The dashboard data compiled from the Student Feedback on Units (SFUs) are de-identified, cleaned of any personal references and already cleared for use in evaluation and published research papers. There are also dashboards summarising data at course level, for the annual course reports - including student enrolments and progression.

For comparative student feedback across institutions go to the [QILT website](#).

This website presents results from national surveys of students, graduates and employers about the quality of higher education courses.

If you want to draw on statistical data across Australian universities, this information can be found on the [Higher Education Data Cube \(uCube\) website](#).

CONTACT

Visit the resources on our [2iC website](#) or contact [Dr Carol Russell](#) in the Learning Transformations team.

evaluation data examples

		quantitative evidence	qualitative evidence
	Graduate outcomes	CEQ, GOS, ESS survey scores	survey comments
student learning	Learning outcomes	assessment and progression stats	case studies
student experience	Learning experiences	CSS, SFU, SES scores	survey comments, interviews, focus groups
academic input	Learning designs	CMT, accreditation	staff comments, peer review
institutional support	Learning environments and enablers	benchmarking	benchmarking

Figure 2. Data examples