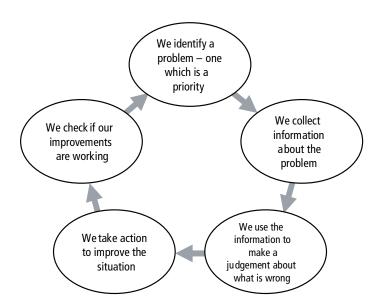# SECTION SEVEN

Evaluation of Training

'Quality assurance' and 'appraisal' are words we often use nowadays. Training institutions in many countries are trying to improve the quality of the training they provide. This is not new – good teachers have always looked critically at the way they teach, in order to do it better.

What is 'evaluation'? Broadly speaking, it means looking carefully at something that we are worried about, and then making a judgement about it. We usually do this because we want to improve the thing we are looking at. The following diagram shows this process more clearly:

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          We identify a
          problem – one
          which is a
          priority

We check if our                    We collect
improvements                       information
are working                        about the
                                   problem

   We take action          We use the
   to improve the          information to
   situation               make a
                           judgement about
                           what is wrong
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We call this the *'evaluation cycle'*. Once you have seen if your plan of improvement is working you may identify a new problem in your teaching, and evaluate that again.

This is clearly a kind of research. Perhaps you feel, *'I'm not an evaluator! I can't do this kind of research!'* Another way of looking at evaluation is that you use your common sense to judge what you (and other teachers) do in your work. If you think back, you will see that you have often done it (for example, when you review an examination paper after the exam) – but this section should help you to do it more systematically. Also, you don't have to evaluate everything at once. You can choose a small part of your work which seems to be giving particular trouble and start by looking at that. What might this be?

Things teachers evaluate

The curriculum – what we teach

Curricula get out of date easily and people just go on year after year teaching the same things. Here are some areas you might want to look at:

- The overall curriculum – is it complete? Does it contain all the knowledge and skills that the students are going to need to perform their job?
- The overall curriculum – is it overloaded? Are you teaching a lot of 'nice to know' and 'nice to do' material, in stead of concentrating on the 'must knows' and 'must be able to dos'?
- The content of individual lessons – do they contain what the curriculum planners intended them to? Do they emphasize priorities and leave out the rest? Does the teacher present the material in a sequence which helps students to understand it more easily?

The lesson process – how we teach

- The teaching methods – are they appropriate for the 'domain' of the material you are teaching? Do students learn skills by seeing a demonstration, and then practising the skill personally?

- How well do teachers use these methods? Are lectures well prepared and skilfully delivered, and do they interest and involve the students? Are practical sessions well organised, with checklists, and do all students practise and get feedback about their performance?
- The teaching aids that are used in class – is their quality good? Are they well used and do they help the learning process?
- The handouts and written documents – do they focus on priorities? Are they clearly written, using simple language? Are they suitably illustrated?

The assessment – how we test our students

- Is the *assessment valid?* Is it suitable for the 'domain' of the subject matter (for example, do we assess skills by observing students perform them)? Does it mostly assess the 'must knows' and 'must be able to dos'? Does it cover most of the important topics?
- Is the *assessment reliable?* Are there good marking schedules and checklists to guide the examiners so that they give fair marks?
- What is the *'assessment curriculum'?* Does the assessment make students learn those things which we consider to be the priorities?

The product – how well our students perform in practice

In the short-term you will need to find out if the participants have mastered the tasks and learning components in the course. Obtaining feedback during and immediately after the course can do this. In the long term you will need to find out if they are actually putting into practice the new ideas they have learnt and carrying out the activities in the job description previously developed. One way to do this is to make supervisory field visits to trainees, their employers and the community. At this time you can discuss the impact of the course. Depending on the objectives of the training it might be appropriate to look for any impact in the community using indicators such as increased utilisation of eye care services, support for prevention activities and changes in community behaviour.

These are just some of the possibilities. Of course, you will decide, from your situation, what you should be looking at.

Instruments to collect information for evaluation

Once we have identified a problem we need to collect more information about it. How do we do this? There are a number of 'instruments' that we commonly use to collect data for evaluation:

Document study

Here we examine written curricula, timetables, lesson plans, visual aids, handouts, exam papers and so on. We compare them to a standard that we have set beforehand. This can be done in an unstructured way (by reading them and gaining an overall impression), or more structured (by making a checklist, beforehand, of things we are looking for in the document). One special kind of document study is the 'readability test' (e.g. the Cloze and Gobbledygook tests) which we can use to assess handouts and textbooks.

Observing practice

Here we sit in on classroom and practical teaching and observe what is going on. We can do this in an unstructured way (by writing down what happens and analysing it afterwards), or a structured way (by having a checklist of things we would like to see happening and checking if they do). Of course, we sit right at the back of the classroom, quietly, not interfering with the process that we are observing. We can also ask colleagues or even students to observe us as we teach.

Questionnaires

We use these when we want to know people's opinion about an aspect of a training course – practical arrangements, the relevance of the material that is taught, what happens in class and so on. Again, questionnaires can be unstructured (asking the respondents to write general comments on how they feel about the topic) or structured (giving questions with pre-prepared answers, from which they have to choose the one they prefer). Besides the usual questionnaires there are some special ones that we use:

- The 'student happiness questionnaire'.
- Diaries – we ask teachers or students to keep diaries of their experiences on the course.

The 'student happiness questionnaire'

It is common practice to present students with a questionnaire at the end of a part of a curriculum or at the end of a term. The students are asked what they liked or disliked about the content, the teaching, the assessment, the practical arrangements. This can provide useful information about problems. However it must be used with caution:
- Students may be wrong – for example, since they lack a wider understanding they may believe (wrongly) that some of the course content is unimportant
- Teachers may believe that this is all the evaluation you need to do
- If it is routinely done, year after year, teachers tend to ignore the findings

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Interviews (with individuals) and discussions (with groups)

These are useful when we want information from people about aspects of our courses and teaching, but in more depth and detail. We carefully prepare some questions and put them to the persons concerned. Then we record exactly what they say (by hand or with a tape recorder) and analyse the information afterwards. What were the main points that the respondents raised?

Ready-made data collection instruments

Other teachers who have gone before us can help us with evaluation. It is often possible to find ready-made data collection instruments, which deal with a variety of common problems in teaching. A good source of these is the following book:

- Gibbs, G. and Habeshaw S. (1988), *53 Interesting Ways to Appraise your Teaching,* Bristol: T&ES

Such instruments have been tested and refined, and should provide us with useful information. Of course we don't use them uncritically – they usually need to be adapted a bit to fit our own situation.

Who should evaluate?

Who is best placed to evaluate teaching practice? Do you do it yourself (an 'insider'), or do you get someone else to do it for you (an 'outsider')? Do you evaluate your own practice, or that of your colleagues? The advantages of doing it yourself, about your own work, is that you understand it thoroughly – the background, the players, the details. The disadvantages are that you may be inexperienced in evaluation, and that you are used to looking at your work in a certain way and it is difficult to see it objectively. So an outsider coming with a fresh view may be more useful. Outsiders usually want to be paid though!

Three tips

Firstly: when someone asks you to do an evaluation you must be *opportunistic*. Of course you are going to collect specific data with instruments you have prepared. However, you should use every opportunity to get additional information. Talk to everyone you meet (and keep notes on what they say, look at notice boards and classroom walls (making notes of relevant information), go into the course filing cabinet and read relevant documents. In this way you gain a deeper understanding which helps you to make the right judgements.

Secondly: when you evaluate training courses you are looking at a whole *system*. This system is made up of teachers, students, sponsors and employers, buildings and classrooms, learning materials. Each of these has an influence on the others. Try to understand as much as possible about how these parts of the system affect each other. That will help you to make a better judgement.

Thirdly: one of the aims of evaluation is to find and clarify problems. However many people find it difficult to accept that they have been making mistakes. Therefore, you have to present your judgements – your *feedback* – in a sensitive way.
Start by listing all the good things that you found (and you <u>will</u> find them). Then, once you have affirmed the persons you are evaluating, you can mention the shortcomings in a polite and non-judgmental way.

Here are two further books on evaluation which we have found helpful:

- Harris, D. and Bell, C. (1986), *Evaluating and Assessing for Learning*, London: Kogan Page.
- Hopkins, D. (1989), *Evaluation for School Development*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.