Brookes Briefing

Evaluation of teaching practice

'Evaluation is the systematic process to determine merit, worth, value or significance' (Scriven, 1991 cited in Wanzer, 2021, p. 29). As such it is integral to both quality assurance and enhancement, providing the educator with information about 'what works' as well as how they might improve their own teaching practice. The evaluation process supports our development as teachers and supporters of learning, enriching our work and giving potential career progression opportunities. The latter, not least through providing an evidence base to help turn findings of good practice into a scholarly publication and engage with **SoTL** (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) as a producer[1].

To evaluate (our) teaching practice, it is first important to have a clear view of what teaching involves and its relationship to student learning. In this way, we can appreciate what good teaching is/involves and then evaluate whether good teaching is taking place.

According to Fink (2008), teaching involves four fundamental tasks: knowledge of the subject matter, interacting with students, designing learning experiences, and managing course events. Arreola (2000) provides a similar list of teaching 'defining roles': content, delivery, design, and management. Fink (2008) argues that the quality of the student learning experience depends upon how well a teacher performs these four fundamental tasks.

Fink (2008) goes on to provide an 'enlarged' model of good teaching that involves:

- Performing the above four fundamental tasks of teaching well

- Teaching in a way that leads to high-quality student learning

- Working continuously at getting better over time as a teacher

Fink (2008) argues that student learning quality has three phases, all of which need to be enacted for a high-quality student learning experience. The first is that during the programme of study and its constituent modules, students are engaged and active in the learning process, e.g. attending and/or using resources provided, participating in scheduled/facilitated discussions and other activities, and doing the 'work' of learning. The second is that by the end of each module, level of study and then programme, this engagement has resulted in learning that persists. Fink (2008) refers to such learning as significant learning.

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1   If you plan to disseminate findings externally you need to follow your faculty research ethics procedure. Please check this **research ethics guidance** first, and then consult your school or faculty research officer if in doubt.

Learning that persists extends beyond doing well on assessments (although, of course, that is vital to student success, and well-designed assessments will help test for significant learning in line with **subject benchmark statements**) but includes other things like valuing and knowing how to keep on learning about a subject of study, appreciating the personal and social connotations of knowing about a discipline or discipline(s) of study etc. The third is what happens after the programme of study is complete and students have graduated, i.e. has what students have learnt added value to their lives in whatever form is appropriate to them and their circumstances/ambitions, e.g. preparing for/building new opportunities for community engagement, preparing for working life/new working life opportunities, or enhancing personal confidence.

These three phases correlate with three aspects of teaching practice that usually have the most impact on the quality of the student learning experience: the design of the learning experience; the quality of teacher-student interactions; the learning achieved by students (during, and by the end of, module/level/programme or course). If we want to evaluate our teaching practice to find out whether what we have done as teachers has been effective and what we can improve, then these three aspects of teaching practice are usually the best ones to focus on.

Principles and practices for evaluating teaching practice

Principle 1: Establish the focus of your evaluation

Decide on the focus of your evaluation, is it one or more of:

- The design of the learning experience

- The quality of teacher-student interactions

- The learning achieved by students (during, and by the end of, module / level / programme or course)

Principle 2: Identify the indicators of quality

Identify the indicators of quality that you will use to establish your evidence base. To help you the table below identifies the various indicators of quality that you might use for each dimension or aspect of the student learning experience, as well as the likely sources of evidence or instrument that might be used including links to the various sources of guidance, and data, that you have access to at Oxford Brookes University.

Dimension/focus of evaluation	Likely sources of evidence/ instrument	Indicators of quality to use in evaluation
Programme / module design (design of the learning experience)	Course design materials such as module specification and handbook, assignments and other course materials, course design table, student work samples	• Learning outcomes clear and guide the design process. • Learning outcomes go beyond just learning content and simple application of skills (appropriate to the level of study) • **Constructive alignment** of learning outcomes, assessments and learning activities. • **Active learning** strategies are evident • Teaching strategy uses a combination and sequence of learning activities, **assessment and feedback** opportunities that build on each other and culminate in integrated learning. • Student work samples demonstrate ample achievement of learning outcomes
Interaction with students (individually and collectively) (the quality of student interactions)	Syllabus	• Majority of scheduled teaching time students are (intended to be) actively engaged with the course content, the teacher/facilitator and each other
	Course materials	• All materials (e.g. texts, readings, presentations, videos etc) consistently communicate an **inclusive student-centred approach**
	Inclusive teaching practices	• Learning activities consistently authentic with appropriate variation. Oxford Brookes **guidance on inclusive teaching practices** will be helpful here.
	Peer observation/observation of teaching	• Teacher behaviours support learning with **timely communication** and feedback • Teachers are **appropriately available** to students and support a learning climate that promotes a sense of belonging
	Student module and course evaluations e.g. BSS (Brookes Student Survey) and NSS (National Student Survey). Access data **here**.	• Relevant indicators from standard survey questions e.g. sense of belonging, appropriate challenge, stimulating learning environment etc.
	Any other bespoke student surveys	• Focus dependent on evaluation focus

Dimension/focus of evaluation	Likely sources of evidence/ instrument	Indicators of quality to use in evaluation
The learning achieved by students / overall quality of the learning experience	Student achievement/ results on formative / mid / end of module or course assessments Continuation rates Progression rates Graduate outcomes	Show appropriate improvement e.g. at or above benchmark

Table: Quality indicators and evidence sources for evaluating teaching effectiveness informed by Fink (2008) and Simonson et al (2021)

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Principle 3: Identify sources of evidence aligned to selected indicators of quality

Using the guidance in the table above, especially column two, identify the sources of evidence and any associated instrument (e.g. survey or data from an existing Oxford Brookes survey), you will use to gather the data you need for your evaluation. Since evaluation is assigning a value to the subjective interpretation of a collection of measurements to determine how well a desirable condition is achieved (Arreola, 2000) the quality of your evaluation will in part be determined by the alignment between the dimension / indicator(s) of quality selected, and the research instrument / source of data chosen.

As you can see from the list above, not all evaluation (should) come from students, although collecting and acting on student feedback and demonstrating to students that you have listened and responded as appropriate (closing the feedback loop) is a vital part of evaluating teaching practice. Some of the evaluation above can come via peer-, departmental-, external- and self-review processes aligned to the sources of evidence and indicators outlined in the table. If you would like to learn more about conducting such evaluation processes, then Arreola (1999), Arreola (2000) and Simonson et al (2021) are useful initial sources of further information. Wieman (2019) also offers further insights on conducting evaluation and making it valid, fair and a route to guide improvement.

References, resources and further reading

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Evaluation definitions discussed:
https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/impact-evaluation-with-small-cohorts/what-is-evaluation/

Free evaluation guidance resources:
https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/