

Chapter 23

Methods and Processes for District–Wide Literacy Evaluation

Salika A. Lawrence

Medgar Evers College, City University of New York, USA

Minkie O. English

Analytical Consultant, USA

ABSTRACT

This study examined how quantitative and qualitative data collection methods helped evaluators learn about classroom, school, and district level practices during a school district evaluation. Findings indicate (a) qualitative methods provide more accurate information about micro level, every day practices, while macro level data are useful for comparative, cross-context review of practice to inform program and/or administrative decisions; and (b) comprehensive evaluation of literacy programs require stakeholders to collaborate across the spectrum, working with a wide range of varied data collection processes at both macro and micro levels. Dove-tailing quantitative and qualitative data collection methods can reveal macro level information about practice that can align with micro level classroom-based practice or reveal discrepancies across contexts. Recommendations are identified for collecting data and developing an action plan with stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Schools and districts are required to demonstrate how they are meeting Annual Yearly Progress and supporting all students across sub groups. The challenge many districts face is how to meet mandates, align curriculum, and ensure that all students' needs are being met. In the current context of increased accountability, review and evaluation of literacy programs through formative or summative data is a reliable practice for monitoring progress (Clune, 1993). In New Jersey, standards for literacy instruction

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in K–12 classrooms indicate that, at minimum, students should read a range of texts and write across genres for different purposes and audiences (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996; New Jersey Department of Education, 2004). Through program evaluation, organizations can gain insights into areas where both efficiency and inefficiency are evident. Educators can use program evaluations to examine student proficiencies in relation to the curricular expectations stipulated in the standards. Using comprehensive program evaluation, educators can examine how research-based practices are implemented and how classroom and district practices align with standards as well as across contexts within the same district.

The current debate on whether conducting program evaluation is research poses another challenge for those conducting school and district evaluation studies. Program evaluations can be quite comprehensive; especially when examining efficacy in literacy practice by exploring “head-to-head comparisons between alternative instructional programs or materials aimed at determining which program produced greater literacy achievement” (Reinking & Alvermann, 2005, p. 142). Although there appears to be “no precise definition of an evaluation study, ... an evaluation study focuses mainly on determin[ing] the effectiveness of programs or materials and less on understanding why those programs or materials may or may not be effective. For some [this is a] distinction ... that evaluation studies are not always research” (Reinking & Alvermann, 2005, p. 143).

In this study, we use an illustrative example of a district-wide evaluation to provide a process for conducting internal and external evaluations of literacy programs. We explain in the chapter how program evaluation protocols can be useful at the micro and macro levels throughout the district to improve practice. In addition, we present a process for incorporating stakeholders throughout the evaluation process.

PERSPECTIVES

Program evaluations use a wide array of methodologies to examine practices inside and outside of classrooms. There are strengths and limitations to each design. Evaluation procedures with multiple data sources and stakeholders have different constituencies who bring unique perspectives, which can lead to comprehensive, in-depth, examination of practice.

Educational Uses of Program Evaluation

In education, evidence-based practices have been widely used, and in recent years, federally mandated with the passing of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and the 2006 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. If implemented correctly in the school context, evidence-based practices can inform instructional delivery and help to clarify best practices when teachers strive to implement behavioral interventions. (Fallon, Collier-Meek, Maggin, Sanetti, & Johnson, 2015). If a program is planned and implemented correctly, it will allow evaluators to adequately provide performance feedback to its participants and stakeholders. Performance feedback is a brief meeting between a consultant and consultee wherein the two discuss implementation, the observed strengths and weaknesses of that implementation, and suggestions for improvement (Noell, 2010). Fallon et. al (2015) stated that “only when an intervention is implemented correctly can a student’s response to that intervention be accurately assessed” (pp. 227-228). Therefore, it is critical that the consultant, whether serving as internal or external evaluator, and stakeholders—school and district administrators, teachers, parents and staff— work closely together

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