Linking the how to the why: Methods decisions in foreign language program evaluation

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I. What is evaluation?

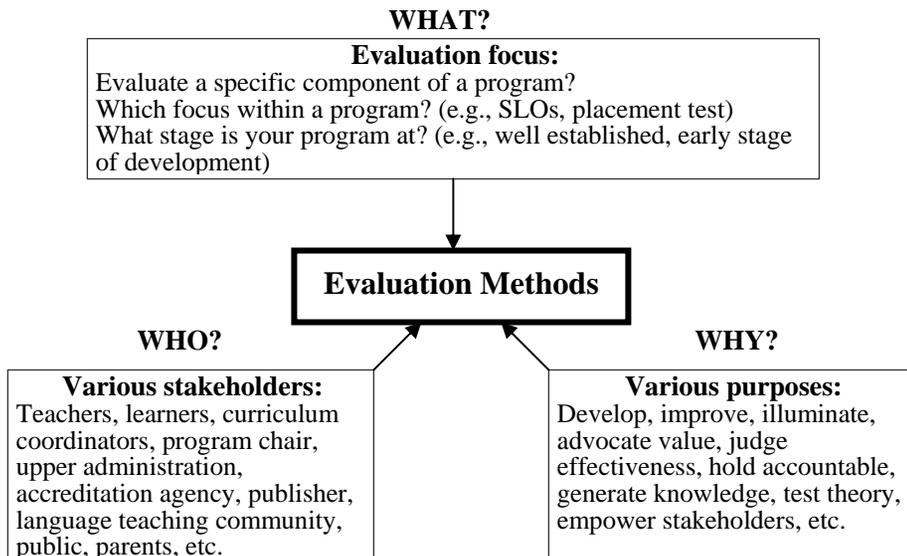☹ It is typical to think HOW do we do evaluation instead of WHY do we do evaluation.

☺ Evaluation is "the gathering of information about any of the variety of elements that constitute educational programs, for a <u>variety of purposes</u> that primarily include understanding, demonstrating, improving, and judging program value. Evaluation brings evidence to bear on the problems of programs, but <u>the nature of that evidence is not restricted to one particular methodology</u>" (Norris, 2006, p. 579, emphasis added).

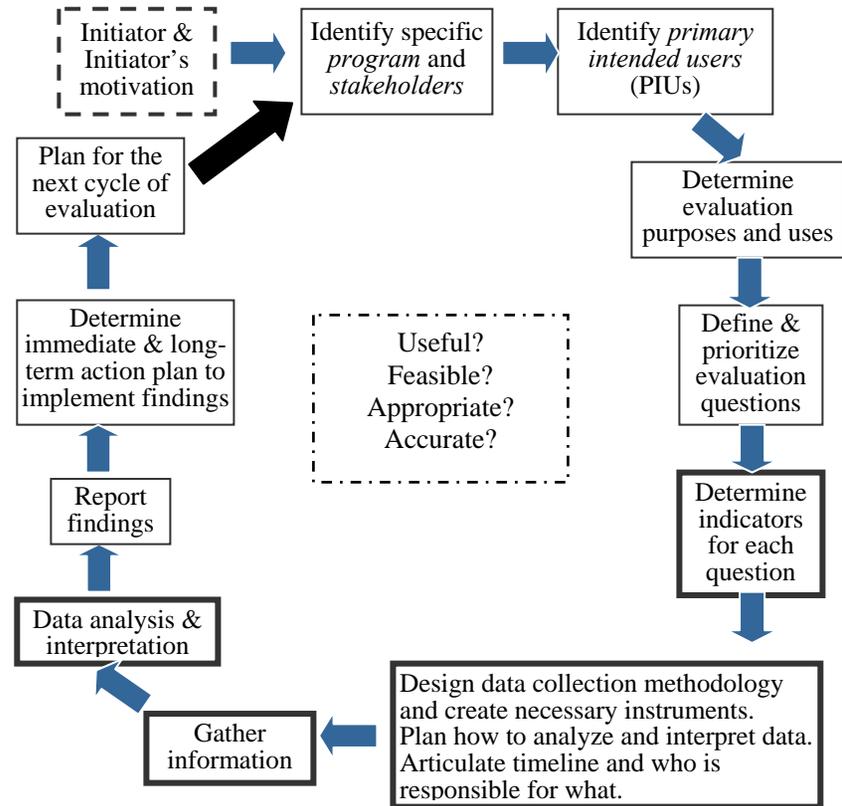## II. Responding to evaluation concerns

Evaluation should be...

No use　　　→ <u>useful</u>, pragrmatic, responsive
No buy-in　　→ educational, transformative, participatory, democratic
Fear of misuse　→ appropriate, accurate
No resources, support → manageable, <u>feasible</u>

III. Towards useful, feasible, appropriate, and accurate evaluation practice: What, who, and why of program evaluation

WHAT?

Evaluation focus:
Evaluate a specific component of a program?
Which focus within a program? (e.g., SLOs, placement test)
What stage is your program at? (e.g., well established, early stage of development)

Evaluation Methods

WHO?

Various stakeholders:
Teachers, learners, curriculum coordinators, program chair, upper administration, accreditation agency, publisher, language teaching community, public, parents, etc.

WHY?

Various purposes:
Develop, improve, illuminate, advocate value, judge effectiveness, hold accountable, generate knowledge, test theory, empower stakeholders, etc.

IV. Situating methodology decisions in the evaluation cycle

Initiator & Initiator's motivation → Identify specific *program* and *stakeholders* → Identify *primary intended users* (PIUs)

Plan for the next cycle of evaluation

Determine evaluation purposes and uses

Determine immediate & long-term action plan to implement findings

Useful?
Feasible?
Appropriate?
Accurate?

Define & prioritize evaluation questions

Report findings

Determine indicators for each question

Data analysis & interpretation

Gather information

Design data collection methodology and create necessary instruments. Plan how to analyze and interpret data. Articulate timeline and who is responsible for what.

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994) established guidelines for quality assurance

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V. Methods decision principles

Phase 1

- Determine indicators for each question
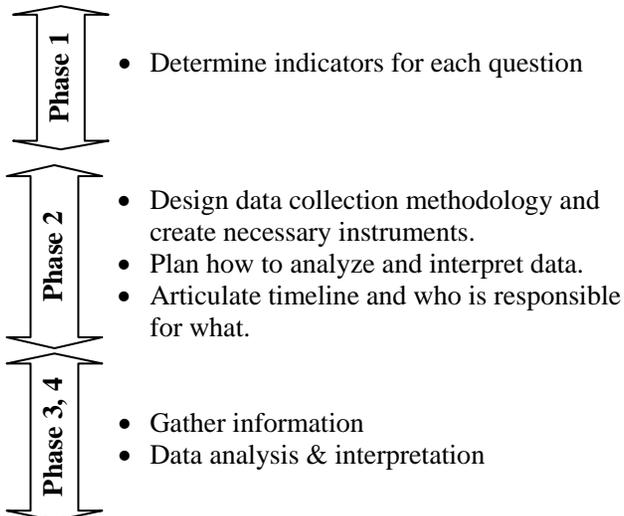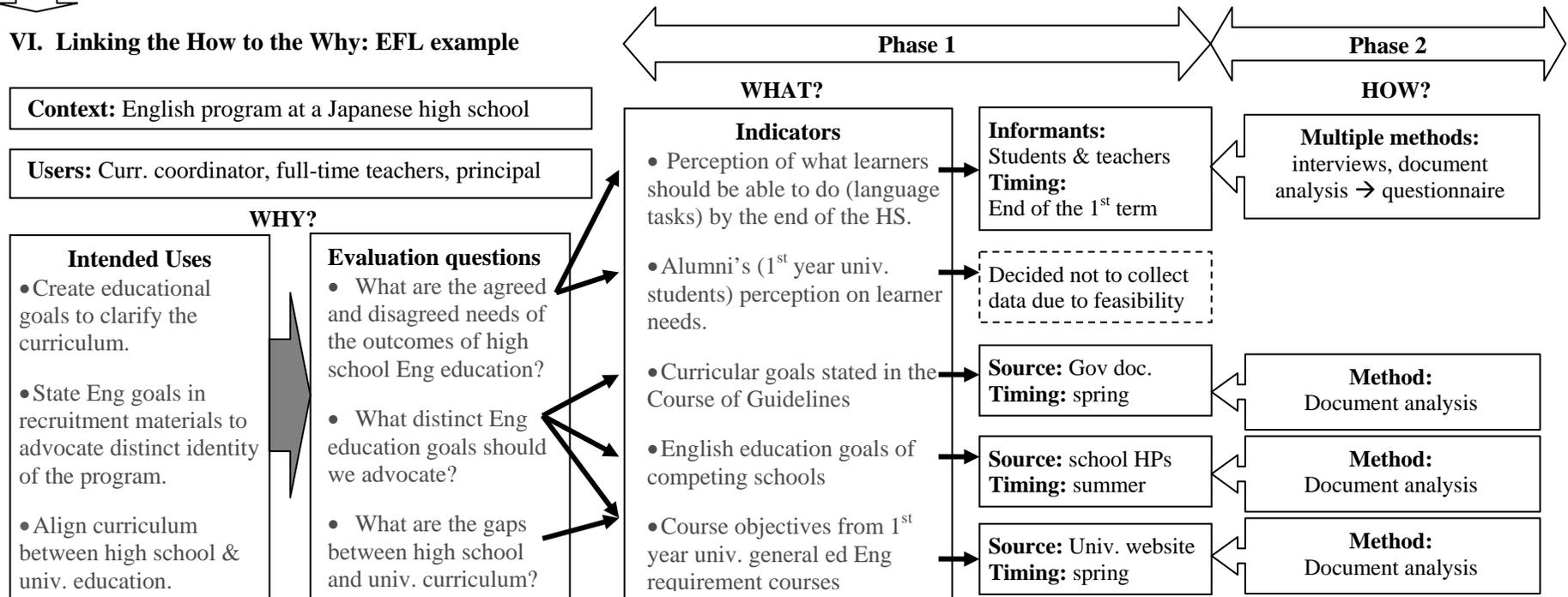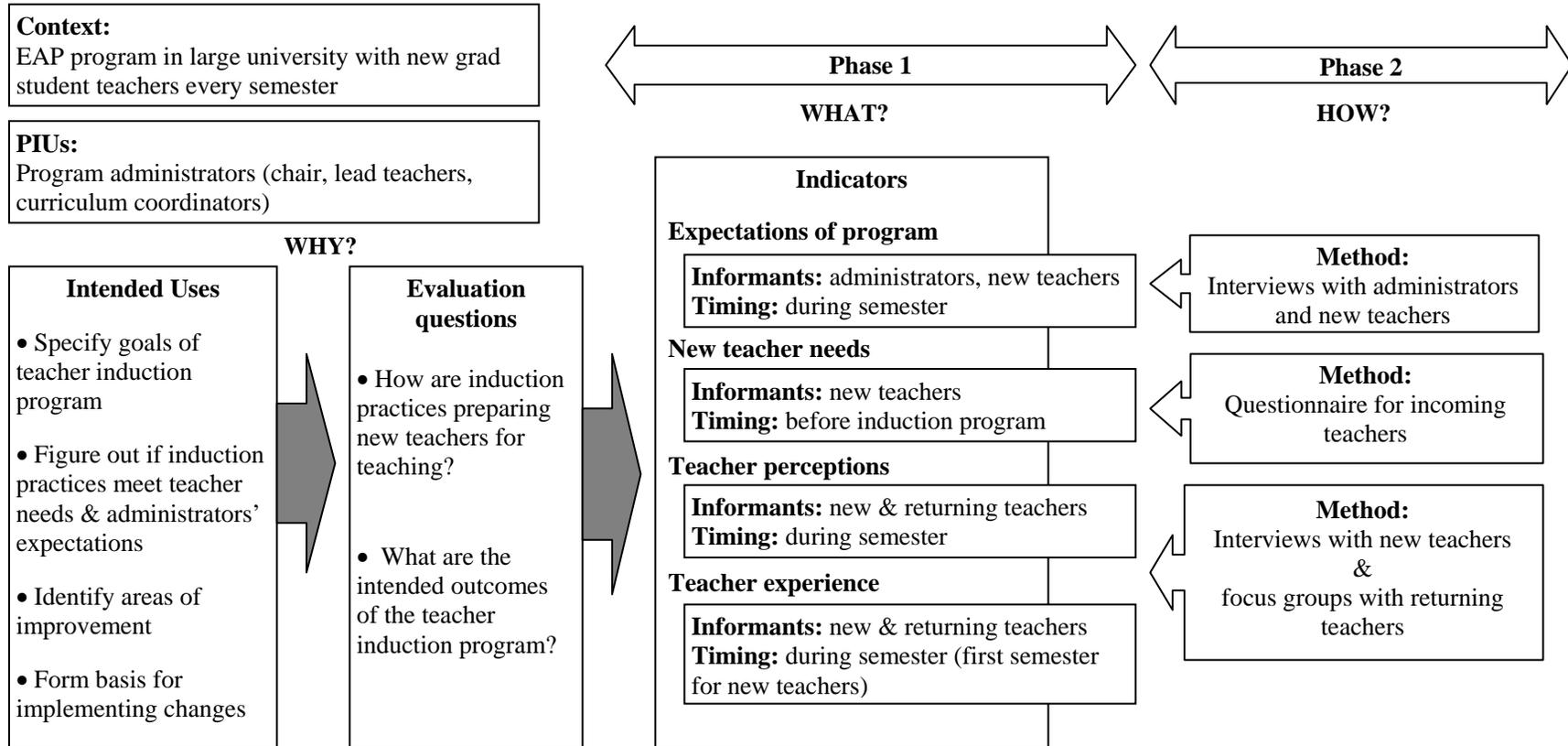
> For what purpose is the data going to collected?
> How will the information be used?
> Whose values and assumptions are reflected? Whose values and assumptions count?
> What type of information will best inform the evaluation questions and program decision making?
> How accurate and credible is the information to the primary intended users?

Phase 2

- Design data collection methodology and create necessary instruments.
- Plan how to analyze and interpret data.
- Articulate timeline and who is responsible for what.

> Who are the informants? Do we have access to the informants?
> What is the most feasible method?
> Who collects information? How are data going to be managed?
> How should the information be analyzed to maximize use?

Phase 3, 4

- Gather information
- Data analysis & interpretation

VI. Linking the How to the Why: EFL example

Phase 1 | **Phase 2**

Context: English program at a Japanese high school

Users: Curr. coordinator, full-time teachers, principal

WHAT? | **HOW?**

WHY?

Intended Uses
- Create educational goals to clarify the curriculum.
- State Eng goals in recruitment materials to advocate distinct identity of the program.
- Align curriculum between high school & univ. education.

Evaluation questions
- What are the agreed and disagreed needs of the outcomes of high school Eng education?
- What distinct Eng education goals should we advocate?
- What are the gaps between high school and univ. curriculum?

Indicators
- Perception of what learners should be able to do (language tasks) by the end of the HS.
- Alumni's (1st year univ. students) perception on learner needs.
- Curricular goals stated in the Course of Guidelines
- English education goals of competing schools
- Course objectives from 1st year univ. general ed Eng requirement courses

Informants: Students & teachers
Timing: End of the 1st term

Decided not to collect data due to feasibility

Source: Gov doc.
Timing: spring

Source: school HPs
Timing: summer

Source: Univ. website
Timing: spring

Multiple methods: interviews, document analysis → questionnaire

Method: Document analysis

Method: Document analysis

Method: Document analysis

VII. Linking the How to the Why: Teacher induction program example (Yang, forthcoming)

Context:
EAP program in large university with new grad student teachers every semester

PIUs:
Program administrators (chair, lead teachers, curriculum coordinators)

Phase 1

WHAT?

Phase 2

HOW?

WHY?

Intended Uses

• Specify goals of teacher induction program

• Figure out if induction practices meet teacher needs & administrators' expectations

• Identify areas of improvement

• Form basis for implementing changes

Evaluation questions

• How are induction practices preparing new teachers for teaching?

• What are the intended outcomes of the teacher induction program?

Indicators

Expectations of program

Informants: administrators, new teachers
Timing: during semester

New teacher needs

Informants: new teachers
Timing: before induction program

Teacher perceptions

Informants: new & returning teachers
Timing: during semester

Teacher experience

Informants: new & returning teachers
Timing: during semester (first semester for new teachers)

Method:
Interviews with administrators and new teachers

Method:
Questionnaire for incoming teachers

Method:
Interviews with new teachers
&
focus groups with returning teachers

For detailed report on above evaluation work, please refer to:

VIII. Now, when you hear "evaluation," what kind of activity do you think it is?
• *NOT* a traditional research activity
  BUT… a study grounded in pragmatism (context-driven).
• *NOT* an externally-driven or externally mandated activity,
  BUT… a well-informed, appropriate, feasible, accurate, useful, and systematic investigation of a program <u>for the evaluation users</u>.
• *NOT* method-driven,
  BUT… a purpose- and use-driven activity <u>by the users</u>.
• *NOT* a one-shot activity,
  BUT… a cyclical building block activity that informs future programming.

IX. References

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