

Evaluation Scenarios

Summary: Your group will analyze several case studies as though you are consultants helping a person or organization figure out how to gather assessment data about a new initiative.

Materials:

- Paper
- Pen
- Evaluation Scenarios + Debrief Cards

Instructions:

1. Have people in your group pair up. Give each pair an evaluation scenario making sure that each evaluation scenario is shared by at least two pairs.
2. Have each group read the evaluation scenario and sketch out a plan for assessment according to the prompt on the scenario. Groups should focus not on generating the best idea, but instead putting down what ideas come to mind. Give the groups 5-7 minutes.
3. After groups have wrapped up their brainstorming, have them share out and discuss their ideas. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
 - What stakeholders can you include in your assessment plan?
 - What are qualitative and quantitative ways of measuring progress?
 - How do you measure progress in the short-term or long-term?
 - How can you use resources that the school already has to get feedback? (For example, an online parent portal or open house nights)
 - How does assessment look at each stage of the initiative? (i.e. Before, during, or after.)
 - What is the right scope of assessment? (i.e. at the classroom, school or district level.)
 - What is evidence for change?

Debrief:

- For each scenario, Justin has a debrief card. You might find these helpful to guide discussion.

Scenario 1: Supporting Parent/Teacher Communication

The lower school at the American School of Brussels is working on increasing connections between home and school and having parents become more aware of, and involved in, their children's classroom experiences. The principal is requiring all elementary teachers to create blogs (beginning in September) to help build these connections. These blogs will share specifics about lessons and also about how the class is doing as whole.

How could you assess, short term and long term (first in October and later in May), whether this initiative is working? Write down at least 4 ideas.

Scenario 1 Debrief

So there are lots of great answers to this exercise. Lots of people will jump quickly to log data— are people looking at the blogs at all? Others will come up with ideas of surveying parents, and I think that's a great idea to. Sometimes people over look some pretty simple but powerful solutions.

One thing you can do to learn whether an initiative is working, is just talk to people. Ask your teachers whether or not you think it's working. Ask parents whether or not they are feeling connected to school. Assessment doesn't have to be about quantitative insights, people's subjective experience can be really powerful as well. If you are disciplined about taking good notes right after you talk to folks, and thinking carefully about what they are saying, then that's a powerful way to start assessing innovation as well.

Scenario 2: Classroom Blogging

The Smith school district has launched a district-wide effort to encourage and improve student writing through classroom blogging. They have a districtwide Wordpress installation that makes it easy for teachers and students to start blogging.

Teachers have been encouraged to adopt an approach to student blogging that emphasizes student autonomy, creativity, and attentiveness to a real audience.

The technology director in the school district, Bud Hunt, wants to write his Master's thesis about blogging in the district. How should he evaluate whether or not things are working for students?

Scenario 2 Debrief

What did Bud Hunt, the technology director, do? He took a sample of all of his school's blog posts. He read and categorized them. He drew some conclusions about the kinds of learning taking place based on that analysis.

One of the great things about the Smith school district blogging initiative is that it has a clear learning goals for students- to have students exercise autonomy, be creative, and be attentive to a real audience. So that gives us a great sense of what to look for in student work.

Bud Hunt took a sample of all of the posts created in his school blogging system, read and categorized them all, and drew some conclusions about the kinds of learning taking place.

Bud noticed that of the 233 blog posts that he sampled, only about 40% were written by students. Students outnumber staff and teachers by something like 10 to 1 in Smith school district, so that suggests that the initiative may not be empowering students as much as one might hope.

Then Bud looked at the kinds of writing that was happening— lots of announcements, lots of assignment responses, lots of summaries, a little bit of reflection, but not much authentic student writing.

By looking closely and systematically at student work, Bud was able to recognize that the goals of the initiative were not well aligned with the work by students. Now that might be some hard findings to have to report out, given all the work that goes into setting something like this up. But it's also how things get better, we try something out, we try to examine in a disciplined way how it's work, and then we start imagining all the things we might do to make it better. **By looking closely at the student work here, Bud gave his district the best possible chance of making good on all their investment and effort. Again, what Bud did was disciplined and systematic, but not impossibly complicated.**

If Bud was just starting a pilot blogging exercise with a few classes, it might not be worth doing all this work right away. **When things are new and still under development or in pilot, that's a good time to collect people's subjective impressions--- which are easy to get and can point you in the right direction. What's great about this example is that Smith school district made a pretty big investment in this effort, so it was worth a very thorough, systematic assessment.**

Scenario 3: Supporting Teacher-to-Teacher Learning

Gail, an assistant principal, heard in a pre-conference workshop about a practice from another assistant principal: Any time one teacher want to see another teacher's classroom. The interested teacher can just bring a substitute lesson plan, and the principal covers his or her class so that observation in another classroom is possible. This is especially simple when students in the interested teacher's class are taking a test, doing independent project work, etc.

Gail decides to implement this practice in her school. What should her goals be? How can she know if it's working?

Scenario 3 Debrief

I'm guessing you came up with some great goals. Some of them were concrete and near-term – that four teachers would take Gail up on her offer, or something like that. Others had a more long-term view of goals– that teachers would conduct more collaborative projects because of their time together in other classrooms. Both might be great goals, and it can be useful to clarify for yourself how you are thinking about the future.

In education, we almost always wrestle with the Someday/Monday dilemma. Where do you hope to get one distant day, and what can you get started right now?

One powerful tool in assessment work is prediction. What do you expect to happen? Gail imagines more teacher observation, but what should it lead to? How will it ultimately improve student learning? What's the someday here? Gail can think about exactly what she's going to do to initiate this new practice. Will she send an email to the faculty? If she does, what does he think will happen? Will people read it? Will they take her seriously? Will be they be too busy? Maybe Gail also personally talks to two close teacher colleagues and asks them to take her up on the offer. What will result from that effect?

Predictions and hypotheses can help remind you of your original vision for an initiative. This can be obscured as you get started. So distinguishing Someday goals from Monday actions, and making predictions as well as planning action steps, can help in this assessment work.

Scenario 4: 1-to-1 Pilot

The Newmarket High School has just purchased 300 tablets to allow them to pilot a 1-to-1 program in the ninth grade. The director of academic technology is supposed to run the program and then present an evaluation to school leadership at the end of the year. **What questions do you have?**

Scenario 4 Debrief

There are lots of answers to this question, but the best one is: How do you hope student learning will improve because of this investment? How is technology, or any other innovation, in the service of learning?

Especially in education technology, it's pretty common for innovation initiatives to get kind of lost. Innovation in schools is really about changing and improving learning experiences for student, but educational technology has so many logistics and details that tech initiatives can often become about power cords, and wireless access, single sign-on, and filtering, and not about teaching and learning.

When projects head off track, a great way to try and get them back on track is with assessment. If you ask the question, is this working? The next logical question is often "What are we trying to do?" Another way to ask that question is, "What does awesome look like?" If we were successful beyond our wildest dreams, what would we accomplish?: How could we measure our progress towards awesome?

It's never too late for assessment. Often times, an effort at assessing innovation can help people refocus on the most important question, which is how will our investment in this innovation make a difference in the learning and in the lives of students.