The Benefits Of Employing a Hybrid Evaluation Approach, Enacted Through Evaluation Survey and Reflective Journaling in Teacher Education in the Cayman Islands

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Abstract: The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the benefits of employing a hybrid evaluation approach to assessing a teacher education programme's objectives or intended outcomes. The benefits of employing the hybrid evaluation approach enacted through its evaluation survey component was seen in the fact that it acts as a guide for participants' thinking, facilitates the acquisition of a broad overview of their thoughts and could provide stakeholders with statistical data, if needed. The benefit of employing the hybrid evaluation approach enacted through its reflective journaling component, was seen in the fact that journaling helped participants to carry out in-depth 'thinking about', and formulating written perceptions of various aspects of the programme. The strength of the hybrid evaluation approach rests in the combined and simultaneous use of both components in a single process of programme evaluation.

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the benefits of employing a hybrid evaluation approach (enacted through evaluation survey and reflective journaling) in assessing the extent to which objectives or intended outcome in a newly formed teacher education programme in the Cayman Islands were achieved. The paper commences with a review of the literature on the benefits of evaluating teacher education programmes, approaches to, and instruments of evaluation, and reflection and reflective journaling. The research process is outlined and the findings presented and discussed.

Benefits of Evaluating a Teacher Education Programme

Providers of teacher preparation programmes worldwide are increasingly required to provide evidence of their programmes' effectiveness in producing quality teachers and/or meeting state-mandated standards for teachers and teacher preparation programmes (Darling-Hammond 2006). Evaluating a teacher education programme is one way of displaying its effectiveness in producing teachers compatible with governmental and local contextual demands. While state or governmental demands are important reasons for evaluating a teacher education programme and its objectives or intended outcomes, there are also a number of benefits to students, lecturers and other stakeholder when this is carried out.

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The benefits of evaluating a teacher education programme are many but a group is most frequently referenced in the literature. One, evaluation aids in ascertaining the degree to which programme objectives are achieved. The main reasons for ascertaining the degree to which programme objectives are met is to identify areas of success or failures, indicate to stakeholders the degree to which programme objectives have been achieved and to aid in further programme development. Evaluating programme objectives is also critical to the accreditation process of teacher education programmes world-wide (Eurydice European Unit 2006). Evaluating programme objectives can also provide evidence that the student body as a whole is meeting required teaching standards (Schwile & Dembele 2007). More importantly, the process of evaluating programme objectives requires that there is a clear definition of what is hoped to be achieved in a programme and influenced in terms of candidates' knowledge, skills and dispositions (Darling-Hammond 2006, and Nelli & Nutter 1984).

Two, evaluating a teacher education programme helps to improve and display the degree to which the quality of a programme has increased overtime (Schwile and Dembele 2007). Quality in products and services are being demanded by consumers and governments so not surprisingly, the need to ensure quality is a recurring theme in teacher education world-wide. There seems to be an agreement among educational researchers that quality is an important outcome of appropriately planned and implemented evaluations (Oliver, Tucker, Gupta and Shelly 2008 and Blanton, Sidelar & Correa 2006). Careful reading of the conclusions of the Eurydice European Unit (2006) study supports this proposition for it reveals that the internationally acceptable mechanism for assuring quality and standards in teacher education programmes involves properly planned and executed evaluation by academic peers.

Three, evaluating a teacher education programme provides for accountability on the part of those involved in teacher preparation. Accountability of teacher educators is not hierarchical like that which occurs in a traditional business i.e. workers to middle managers to upper managers, but flows upward and downward. This is so because, there are a number of stakeholders i.e. students, policy makers, university board of governors, ministries of education to which teacher educators and programmes must give an account (Nelli, & Nutter, 1984).

Four, Nelli & Nutter, (1984) also point out that evaluation helps to reduce uncertainty in decision making, promote gradual change and accelerate change already began. The writers state, 'clearly, those who administer and instruct in programs of teacher preparation have a special responsibility to evaluate those programs, both in terms of the challenges being raised by others and in relation to their own objectives for those training efforts' (p. 5). Thomas and Loadman (2001) conclude that 'Good methodologically solid useful teacher education programme evaluations are needed across the country if future teachers are to be well prepared' (p.204). As developers of teacher preparation programmes, we are in total agreement with the thoughts of these writers regarding the need for, and benefits of evaluating a programme. However, an important question is, 'Is there a best approach?

Hybrid Evaluation Approach

Nelli & Nutter (1984) point out that the most common approach to programme evaluation is the use of questionnaires completed by students at graduation or at some other time. Such questionnaires indicate graduates' opinions or perception of various aspects of their preparation programme and certainly yield valuable insight. These responses, however, are insufficient data for evaluating a programme for it precludes triangulation which normally helps to establish the trustworthiness of findings (Bush, 2002).

To resolve this dilemma, Darling-Hammond (2006) advocates a multisource evaluation approach. In other words, she advocates a mixing or hybrid between instruments and/or methods. For example, pre and posttests of teaching candidates' knowledge of teaching, sample of student teachers' work, longitudinal observation of clinical practice, and observation of graduates' teaching practice. An important benefit of a hybrid evaluation approach includes the fact that it facilitates triangulation which leads to the 'trustworthiness' of the data (Bush, 2002). Additionally, the approach also allows a comprehensive view of what candidates learn and what a programme contributes to their learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

The use of reflection enacted through reflective journaling is an invaluable source for soliciting people's perceptions of a programme of study (Clarke 2004, Uline, Wilson, Cordry 2004 & Chitpin 2006). There are many benefits to including reflection enacted through reflective journaling as a component of a hybrid approach to programme evaluation. For example, programme evaluations deep-rooted in reflection enable developers to take a deep and enduring look at all aspects of their programme, with a view of improving it and making it better for those who will participate. This is so because reflection is a deliberate way of 'thinking and doing' that leads to improvement. Additionally, quality and continuous improvements are hallmarks of a teacher education programme that incorporates evaluation based on reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1994).

While the benefits of using a multi-source evaluation approach to programme evaluation is documented (Darling- Hammond, 2006 and Schwile & Dembele, 2007), there is however, little or no literary sources referencing the use of reflective journaling as a source of programme evaluation and specifically, the idea of a hybrid evaluation approach enacted through evaluation survey and reflective journaling. As a result, a study was launched.

The purpose of the study was twofold. Firstly, to aid in filling this seeming literary gap, and more importantly, to determine the benefits of using a hybrid evaluation approach to assess the extent to which objectives or intended outcomes of a teacher education programme in the Cayman Islands were achieved. Accomplishing this task was significant because the programme is still in its infancy and there is the need to develop, test and implement an appropriate evaluation approach and instruments that could be utilised for the duration of the life of the programme.

The Research Participants

A total of 20 pre-service teachers in a newly developed yearlong postgraduate diploma in education course in the Cayman Islands were asked to participate in the study. The sample was made up of 3 males and 17 females. The study was carried out during the final quarter of the 2007-2008 school year.

Data Collection Process and Instrument

The data collection process involved issuing subject evaluation survey forms (n=160), over the course of a school year to students (n=20) who had completed eight courses. Subject evaluation surveys forms were issued during the final lecture in each course. A total of 55 of 160 forms were returned. This reflects a response rate of (34%). As a part of the final evaluation of the entire programme, students were asked to write a final reflective journal entry and submit it for analysis. They were to address three areas: what they learnt about 'self' as teacher, what was learnt about teaching as a profession, and to what extent the programme prepared and/or

improved their skills or ability to teach. Nine out of 20 participants or (45%) gave permission to use their journal entries in the research.

Analysis of the Evaluation Survey

An evaluation survey is administered to the Postgraduate diploma in education students at the end of each course they complete. The main aim of the survey is to assess the degree to which the course content is being appropriately delivered. Thus, the survey is divided into two main parts, one which examines presentation of lectures and contained questions such as: Were the lectures well structured? Were teaching aids used effectively? Were the presentations varied? Could you hear adequately? The other, lesson content and contained questions such as: Were the lectures interesting? Were the main points clear? Was the material at the right level? Were relevant examples used? Students wrote a number from 1-5 to indicate their response to each question for example, 1= very rarely; 2= rarely; 3= occasionally; 4= most of the time; 5= always. The survey also provides the option for students to comment on each question as well as an overall comment.

The process of analyzing the survey involved a tabulation of each question and stating the frequency and percentage of responses falling into each response category (Youngman, 1982). Based on the thoughts of Youngman (1982) the total number of responses was tallied based on the given rating scale. The total number of responses under each section of the rating scale was also assigned a percentage figure. For example, the question, 'Were the lectures interesting?' (n=10) (18%) respondents stated that this was so 'occasionally' (n= 28) (50%) respondents stated that this was so 'most of the time' and (n=17) (30%) respondents stated that this was 'always' the case. Conclusions were then drawn regarding how students perceived the lecture content and lecture presentation.

Analysis of Reflective Journals

Powell and Renner (2003) support the use of preset categories when analyzing data. They also state that preset categories provide direction for what to look for in the data. In light of this, the journal entries used as data for the study were analyzed using the following programme objectives as a guide: appropriate course content delivery and presentation, grounding of the programme in the local context yet with international relevance, training reflective practitioners, teaching practicum which aids in developing students' self-confidence and students employing ICT and learnt classroom management skills in their teaching. Specifically, students' perception which addressed various programme objectives or intended outcomes were isolated and used to assess the degree to which each objective or outcome was achieved. These objectives are used to guide the discussion in the next section.

Presentation of the Findings and Discussion

The literature discussed in the earlier section of this paper (Schwile, Dembele 2007, Darling-Hammond 2006 and Nelli & Nutter 1984) point to the importance of programme evaluation as a means of ascertaining the degree to which objectives or intended outcomes are achieved. The first objective or intended outcome of the local teacher programme is to appropriately deliver course content and presentation. To determine the degree to which this was achieved, the first

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component of the hybrid evaluation approach i.e. an evaluation survey specifically designed for this purpose and for use across all courses was utilised. The aim of the evaluation survey was to ascertain the perception of all students, of this very important objective or intended outcome.

Programme Objective or Intended Outcome 1: Appropriate Course Content Delivery and Presentation

Respondents thought that the content of lectures was interesting. In fact (80%) indicated that lectures were interesting most of the times or always. Similar sentiments were shared when asked if the points of the lectures were clear. An overwhelming (89%) indicated that lectures were clear most of the times or always. The level at which the material was presented appealed to (88%) of respondents. The responses concerning the use of relevant examples showed the strongest indication about how the students viewed the content of lectures.

Finally, the question about the use of recommended readings although slightly lower in preference, showed that (69%) of the respondents thought that the readings were either useful or always useful. An important revelation is that (18%) of the respondents considered the lectures interesting occasionally. When the results are viewed as a composite, they favour a strong inclination that the lectures were most of the time or always appropriately handled.

The reporting on the five questions about pedagogy revealed that respondents were as positive about the lecture presentation as they were about the content. An overwhelming number of respondents indicated that the presentations were most of the time or always well structured (89%), varied (83%) and they made use of aids effectively (79%). Not too far behind were the statements addressing whether respondents could hear adequately, some (77%) indicated that as instructors presented the lectures they could hear adequately, while (72%) stated that handouts used in the delivery were useful most times or always.

There was an unusually high non-response on the question about hearing adequately and the usefulness of handouts, some (18 %) of the students did not respond to the question about hearing adequately while (21%) did not respond to the question about the usefulness of handouts distributed during the presentation of lectures. What we do know is that, on all five questions about presentation, more than (72%) indicated a strong inclination to all five questions most of the time or always.

Overall, the content of lectures were interesting, clear, relevant, and projected at the right level while using appropriate examples. The presentation of lectures was deemed to be well structured and varied. The pedagogic variety was indicative of effective use of teaching aids and handouts. The presentation styles of the instructors also aided students to hear the lectures. Together, these are indicators of a degree of quality in the local programme brought into sharper focus by the evaluation process. This thought is in-line with views of Oliver, Tucker, Gupta, & Shelly (2008) and Blanton, Sidelar & Correa (2006) who state that quality can only be recognised through appropriately planned and implemented evaluations.

Benefit of a Hybrid Approach Enacted Through an Evaluation Survey

The benefit of the hybrid evaluation approach enacted through its evaluation survey component can be seen in the fact that, it guides students' thoughts to areas pertinent to the overall objective or outcome being evaluated. For example, lecture, presentation, use of teaching aids etc. Its benefit is also revealed in the fact that it facilitates the acquisition of a broad overview

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of students' thoughts by providing opportunities on the survey document for them to insert both numbers from a rating scale, and thoughts relating to either the numbers they inserted, or the questions asked. Additionally, stakeholders who are interested in ascertaining numerical data, which indicates statistically how the objective was met, can be accommodated.

The other objectives or intended outcomes of the local teacher programme are: grounding of the programme in the local context yet with international relevance, training reflective practitioners, teaching practicum which aids in developing students' self-confidence and encouraging students to employ ICT and learnt classroom management skills in their teaching. Since the evaluation survey was specifically designed to assess objective one, to determine the degree to which other objectives or outcomes were achieved, the second component of the hybrid evaluation approach i.e. reflective journaling was utilised. The aim of reflective journaling was to ascertain participants' in-depth perception of these important aspects of the programme.

Programme Objective Or Intended Outcome 2: Grounding Of The Programme In The Local Context Yet With International Relevance

Giving students a broad knowledge of the local educational context and the ability to function in it effectively is also a very important objective or intended outcome of the programme. This is important because sometimes it is a challenge for many higher education institutions and programmes to shed the image of being an 'ivory tower' (Barnett, 2005) and to be responsive to the local community.

Participants' reflective journal entries reveal the fact that this objective was achieved, and involved introducing them to the local education system, national curriculum, school inspection system, local parent and students' attitude towards schooling and the overall culture of the Islands. The following are examples of participants' thoughts as seen in their reflective journals:

> This programme was very informative especially in the area that relates solely to the Cayman Island's school system and the way to handle possible challenges that one may face only in this community (Tammy).
> The programme has provided a historical appreciation of the educational process, review of the national curriculum, the Education Standards and Assessment Unit, functions and expectations of the teacher, multiculturalism, social and cultural issues as they impact education and, an appreciation of classroom and community diversity (Sammy).
> It [the programme] has enlightened me on the history of teaching in the islands, it has broadened my view on the relationship that exist between teachers and the students, the relationship between the teachers and parents, the attitude and culture of the students, parents and the community (Rammy).

In addition to being grounded in the local context, respondents also thought that skills, knowledge and practical experiences gained were transferable and could be utilised in other jurisdictions as evidences by the following extracts:

> The course has been that instrument that has passed on skills, knowledge and the practical experiences to equip its participants to function at a high standard as teachers not just in the Cayman Islands but anywhere in the world (Greenie).
> ...techniques I have been taught, which I have used and proven will be transferable anywhere (Titus).

This programme has brought about the acquisition and improvement of skills that has prepared me not just for teaching in the Cayman Islands, but the wider world (Sammy). One participant identified a facet of the programme which demonstrates that it was not only grounded in the local context but also had international relevance. 'Despite the fact that we worked with many materials from the United States and the United Kingdom as well as the Caribbean, the concepts were always brought back to be applied to the local situation' (Connie).Globalization and the world-wide demand for teachers has forced teacher preparation programmes to include the idea of preparing teachers to work in any jurisdictions. The stakeholders most satisfied with this programme objective are students who were from various countries and might someday return to their native lands to teach.

Programme Objective Or Intended Outcome 3: Training Reflective Practitioners

Participants also thought that the programme was grounded in reflection and facilitated their use of elements of reflective teaching. The development of students' capacity to reflect is an intended outcome or objective of the programme.

The course has had a major focus placed on reflection. This is a strategy that I feel is extremely important to anyone in the education field. We learnt that children and education are in a state of constant flux, and if we as teachers wish to stay at the top of our game we need to change as well. The easiest way to do this is to practice the strategy of reflection (Connie).

'The thing I think I have learned is that the course has also prepared me to be a reflective thinker' (Christine). A number of participants identified practical ways that the programme encouraged and aided their development as reflective teachers. One respondent pointed out that the programme aided her in categorizing and naming what she was already doing-reflecting on her teaching.

Before I started this course, and as a teacher of art in various parts of the community, I was already reflecting and did not know that was what I was doing. I never had a name for it until I started this course and I learned what I was doing all along was being a reflective thinker... then came the 'aha!' moment, one that I shall never forget (Christine).

Another participant spoke of her ability to reflect-in-action and linked this to the programme:

I have learnt that one has to be able to reflect as you teach, look for signs of students who may not be fully grasping concepts and monitor behaviours; all this calls for keeping all areas of one's classroom visible and constantly moving around (Sammy).

Sammy and Woody (participants) also spoke of reflecting on 'self':

I have valued most of the criticisms that I have been given along the way and used these as a part of my personal reflections; as such ongoing self-assessments and reflections are necessary for growth (Sammy).

The most significant concept that helped me to learn more about myself was the reflective writing that was incorporated into so many of my classes. The reflection often cemented the ideas, and helped me to see how the book content I was learning could be applied in my life. I have grown into a person who values learning through collaboration and reflection (Woody).

An examination of the quotations in the foregoing discussion highlights the fact that the idea of reflection permeates the programme. The importance of developing reflective teachers is well documented (Zeichner, Liston 1996, Ghaye, Ghaye 1999 & Valli 1997). The development of

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reflective practitioners is a regular occurrence in many teacher preparation programmes aimed at developing effective teachers.

Programme Objective Or Intended Outcome 4: Teaching Practicum Which Aids In Developing Students' Self-Confidence

Four participants identified the development of self-confidence and other skills as being significant and resulted from the programme: 'With the skills learnt, comes a new sense of confidence, I know what is expected of me and how to reach my goal' (Titus).

> Despite the challenges, the course helped me to discover resources within myself that I was not aware of. I do feel confident that I am ready to function as a teacher within the Cayman Islands, empowering and inspiring students to find the treasures that are hidden within them and guiding them along the path to success (Greenie).

One participant stated that, through discovering her talent for writing and improving her grammar coupled with her teaching practicum experience, she gained in self-confidence:

> ...Also because of the course, I found I have some writing skills, my grammar has also improved a great deal, and because of my teaching practice, I am very confident that whatever school or class I am employed to teach, I am quite sure that I can make my classes fun and educational at the same time (Richie).

The work of Morgan and Bourke (2008) supports the fact that experiences gained by students teachers in various programmes of preparation result in the development of self-confidence. Speaking specifically of primary school teachers and their confidence in teaching Physical Education, the writers conclude that the quality of an individual's school Physical Education experiences directly predicted his or her confidence to teach Physical Education.

We can also infer from the work of Murphy, Neil, & Beggs (2007), that institutions and programmes do influence teachers' confidence. These writers charge higher education institutions and programmes with the responsibility for preparing new, confident and effective primary school teachers of science. They argue that this can be achieved by increasing partnership work with schools and other continuing professional development providers in relation to primary science. The above quotation from Richie concurs with Soares and Soares (2002) who support the need for the continued use of teaching practice as an aspect of teachers' preparation for it develops not just self-confidence, but competence in handling classrooms encounters.

Programme Objective Or Intended Outcome 5: Students To Employ ICT And Learnt Classroom Management Skills In Their Teaching.

Aspects of teaching identified by participants include: Classroom management and the use of Information Communication Technology in the classroom. Classroom management, in particular, how to discipline students, was taught in the programme and students are given opportunities to examine their attitude about these areas. One respondent wrote:

> As I reflect on my classroom management style, I note that I was one of those teachers for whom [students'] non-conformity in the classroom was tantamount to disrespect and a challenge to my authority which had to be dealt with. I say 'was', because I have been enlightened by the knowledge I have received in this course (Titus).
> This course taught me the importance of consistency in classroom management to paraphrase Slavin, students must know that punishment will be the inevitable

consequence of mis-behaviour as night follows day. I have learnt the value of a reward system which must also be consistently followed (Titus).

Participants also pointed out that their exposure to Information Communication Technology (ICT) during the course and their subsequent use of Information Communication Technology in their teaching, encouraged students' interaction and involvement with lessons. Additionally, participants also enjoyed employing ICT in the classroom and stated that the programme improved their IT skills:

I also learned that I enjoyed using technology as a teaching aid. I have found it allowed my students to interact more with the lesson and it fostered a positive and open environment for critical thinking and discovery (Christine).

I must say that I have also become very cognizant of the presentation of my lessons, such as including IT which I knew had sparked their [students'] interests (Rammy).

The programme has improved my skills in IT, for example I would not have designed a website if it were not a part of the criteria for this programme. Now after designing my own site my brain is already working on how I can use that technique in my future classes (Richie).

It is not just an intended outcome or objective of the programme to enable student teachers to employ ICT in their teaching and to manage their classroom effectively, but a mandated government policy directive (National consensus on the future of education in the Cayman Islands, 2005). The consensus document aided the development of the teacher preparation programme and is presently driving local educational changes.

Benefits Of A Hybrid Approach Enacted Through Reflective Journaling

An overview of the foregone data and discussion reveals that the benefit of the hybrid evaluation approach enacted through its reflective journaling component, can be seen in the fact that journaling helped students to carry out in-depth 'think about', and formulate in writing their perception of various aspects of the programme. For example, the students identified through their journals, the fact that while the programme is grounded in the local context, it is internationally relevant, because skills, knowledge and information gained are deemed useful in other jurisdictions. Participants are being trained as reflective practitioners as revealed in their use of elements of reflective teaching. Growth in self-confidence is being achieved and this is attributed to the teaching practicum component of the programme as well as skills gained from exposure to other facets of the programme. Participants employ ICT in their teaching and learnt skills, which they apply to managing their classrooms. These occurrences also fulfil national educational goals of the government of the Cayman Islands.

Here too, we can conclude that, together, these occurrences indicate a degree of quality in the programme brought into sharper focus by employing the hybrid evaluation approach including a reflective journaling component. These results which emerged from the evaluation process also indicate the need to maintain and gradually build on these occurrences (Nelli, & Nutter, 1984).

The strength of the hybrid evaluation approach rests in the fact that its first component, the evaluation survey facilitated a broad overview of students' thoughts. Its weakness in soliciting meaning or getting at a deeper understanding of issues was offset by the use of its second component, reflective journaling. Via journaling, meanings were unearthed and issues fleshed out. Therefore, the use of reflective journaling and evaluation survey yield 'rich' data (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) which led to greater understanding and hence great confidence in identifying and drawing conclusions from data to affect the future of the programme.

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