



Reviewed work:

Evaluating Second Language Courses. (2016). Dale Griffie & Greta Gorsuch. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing. Pp. 272. ISBN 9781681235936. \$45.99

Reviewed by
Sadi E. Phillips
West Virginia University
United States

<http://www.amazon.com>

Dale Griffie and Greta Gorsuch's book, *Evaluating Second Language Courses*, is a thorough textbook broken down into well-organized chapters with many easy-to-follow subsections. The book consists of 10 chapters that range from defining evaluation to assessing publications on evaluation. Chapter 1, "What is Course Evaluation?," provides an introduction to what evaluation is by defining evaluation along with other relevant terms. It also gives a general overview of the process of evaluation, what course evaluation is and why it is useful and to whom. The chapter also includes what can be evaluated in a course, comparison of evaluation to research, how long to expect evaluation to take, and what questions to consider before starting the evaluation process. Chapter 2, "Models of Second Language Course Evaluation," introduces the use of models for planning out a course evaluation. It encompasses possible models to be accomplished, why they are important, and a familiarization with existing models and their components in detail. Chapter 3, "Stakeholders and Outcomes, the World, and Outcomes Validation," covers course objectives and outcomes, problems related to objectives, and solutions to those problems. A study on outcome validation can also be located here. Chapter 4, "The World, Stakeholders, and Needs Analysis," talks about outcomes, outcome validation, and needs analysis in relationship to one another; an outline for a potential needs analysis and a detailed explanation of each category. Chapter 5, "Curriculum and Outcomes, and Course Logic," discusses how to define course logic, how to conduct a course logic study, and how to assess and validate the course logic. Chapter 6, "Curriculum and Stakeholders, and Formative Evaluation," is a lengthy chapter that covers course curriculum and how it relates to the needs

and wants of the stakeholders. This chapter also explains what formative evaluation is, including its location in the SOAC (Stakeholders, Outcomes, Assessment, and Curriculum) model (this model is covered in Chapter 2). It discusses reasons for using formative evaluations, and how to focus the evaluation using and without using course logic. Finally, Chapter 6 ends with steps for planning data collection, analyzing the data, answering the evaluation questions, and composing decision points in a formative evaluation. Chapter 7, “Curriculum and Assessment, and Instrument Validation,” discusses the topics of instrument validation and evaluation, validity and instrument validation, a validity model, and validation strategies suggested by score interpretation, test usefulness, and stakeholder values. Summary of test and quiz validation evidence, and chronological steps for validating a test or quiz are also included in this chapter. Chapter 8, “Curriculum and Assessment, and Data Collection Validation,” covers constructs, validation, and evaluation revisited, as well as developing validation evidence for observations, interview, and questionnaires. Chapter 9, “Outcomes and Assessment, and Summative Evaluation,” mainly discusses what summative evaluation is, where it is in the SOAC model (covered in Chapter 2 and 6), and why summative evaluations for courses are not often done. It then transitions to summative evaluation and formative evaluation comparison, a summative evaluation model, and an exit interview project. The final chapter, “Reading and Assessing Evaluation Publications,” provides brief descriptions of four types of Reading and Assessing Evaluation Publications (RAPs) and an annotated example of RAPs. The chapters vary in length depending on their use of examples, charts, and graphs to better support the arduous tasks in second language course evaluation.

Strengths

The accessibility of this book to a wide audience is one of its best attributes. It does not make any assumptions of its audience. Thus, course evaluation is broken down in a way that an individual with no background in language assessment or second language courses would be able to follow. The authors accomplish this by having a neat and straightforward chapter layout. Each chapter starts with a short abstract of what topics are covered and then begins the body with a brief and basic introduction of the topic, which often includes basic vocabulary for language assessment and second language courses in italics (words in italics can be found in the glossary at the end). The rest of the chapter’s content is broken down into topic sections and discussion questions. Longer chapters are often broken down further into subsections for more complex subjects or into steps for longer more intricate processes.

The authors also excel at preparing those not familiar with second language assessment by providing brief in-text explanations of topics or ideas that could possibly be foreign to the readers. For example, when the authors are making a distinction between subjective needs and objective needs (p. 157), they provide a brief example of each in parentheses. This example allows readers to be more productive as they do not have to pause to look up a concept or concepts before moving on to the next sentence. This brief explanation also may boost the readers’ confidence. If they come upon a word that they do not understand, and it is either in italics (glossary word) or there is a brief summation in parentheses, they can assume that they are not the only ones who are not familiar with this term. This is one of the best features of this book; its ability to keep from alienating those who currently have little knowledge of the topic.

The next positive attribute that this book has is its discussion questions. The discussion questions are useful in several ways. They break up the monotony of reading by asking readers to pause and think critically about what they already know, if they understand what they have just read, or their opinions about the different options the chapter has presented. As course evaluation often involves a group of people, the discussion questions also aid in starting a conversation on how these aspects of course evaluation can be applied to their specific situation, as well as aid overall comprehension. They are convenient in guiding students or other audiences when they want to start a conversation about how they understood the implications of the topic or the general meaning of the topic that was just introduced.

Another strength is the insertion of certain tables and figures throughout the chapter. For example, Chapter 1 has several tables that help guide those who have never done evaluation before. This is not just an introductory chapter feature. The authors continue to provide them throughout the book. These tables help readers organize their thoughts and give them a point of reference on where to begin, where they otherwise might find themselves lost or overwhelmed. These tables help guide the readers step-by-step through the long, arduous evaluation process and aid in making the process less mentally taxing, by putting many of the resources they need where they need them. While the authors often provide empty tables to be filled out by the audience, they also provide impressive examples of completed tables and reports to serve as guidelines. For example, the book features an Outcome Evaluation Report (p. 43) that has been filled out for an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. It is an extensive three-page example that readers can read, digest, and then use as a guideline for themselves.

This book is successful in covering an immense amount of information. Evaluating a second language course could easily be a topic that spans several texts. Each aspect could be introduced, explained, and then forgotten by the time it is again relevant, but this text succeeds in keeping terms relevant. Instead of forgetting a new term, readers continually add to their understanding of it. For example, the term *stakeholder* is introduced in the second chapter and the readers' understanding of its role, implications, and definition is further developed in almost every subsequent chapter. Introducing terms of depth in small digestible chunks throughout the text like this can improve comprehension and keeps the reader from merely reading and then forgetting.

Weaknesses

The first weakness, and perhaps it is not as much of a weakness as it is out of place, is that the quotes at the beginning of each chapter are distracting and sometimes irrelevant. If read at all, these quotes seem to distract one's mind into a more philosophical mindset about life and divert attention from second language evaluation. To be honest, after reading the quotes for the first two chapters and finding myself unimpressed and distracted mentally, I skipped reading them altogether. This space could be better used for a relevant idea to consider while reading the chapter or deleted altogether, letting readers to dive straight into the abstract for the chapter.

Second, while some of the tables in the chapters are useful, several are overwhelming and could have been moved to either the end of the chapter or an appendix. For example, Chapter 8 features Table 8.2 (p. 178–179), which is a table to organize possible additional readings that show different examples of validation. While this table is useful for someone who wants to present further evidence, it is overwhelming especially for someone new to the field. To be close to finishing a book on evaluation and see a whole table full of other possible readings they might need to decipher. Going from the body of a chapter to a large table that does not provide immediate input to what is being read, then going back to the body of a chapter also sidetracks the reader from what they are trying to process. It would be helpful to have an appendix with all of the tables, charts, and graphs so that anyone trying to refer back to them does not have to dig back through the chapters.

My only other real qualm with this book is in Chapter 2, where they introduce the SOAC Course Evaluation model (p. 25). The authors have already chosen to go with the SOAC model for their text and implement it in every subsequent chapter in the book. There is no issue with the model itself, as it was created specifically for second language evaluation and considers all the important factors for course evaluation. My issue is that the whole chapter is dedicated to introducing different models, although not in detail. If the reader is not getting the option to choose from one of these other models, it seems like a waste of time to read. It would serve the chapter better to either delve further into an explanation of the model they will be using throughout this text, or to back up the choice of the SOAC model by quoting other successful evaluations or studies that have shown that the SOAC model is the most relevant for second language evaluation.

Conclusion

Although I did find some weaknesses for this text, it is not to say that I do not highly recommend it. This text could easily be used in a classroom to teach the process of evaluation for a second language course. However, if the students read the text, they might not need much instruction. It may be beneficial in a classroom setting for an instructor to pick and choose the chapters that provide the most pertinent information or facilitate comprehension of otherwise difficult information. This book would be most useful as a guide for a group of people trying to accomplish a course evaluation together, as the book provides ample guidelines, charts, materials, and questions to consider for the process. This book could also be an intricate part of a study on evaluating second language courses. The book itself is a great resource, but it also provides a considerable amount of information on previous research done on this topic.

About the Reviewer

Sadi E. Phillips is a native of West Virginia. She is currently a graduate student in TESOL and a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the French Program at West Virginia University, where she also earned her Bachelors of Arts in World Languages with a concentration in French. E-mail: Sadiphil@iu.edu