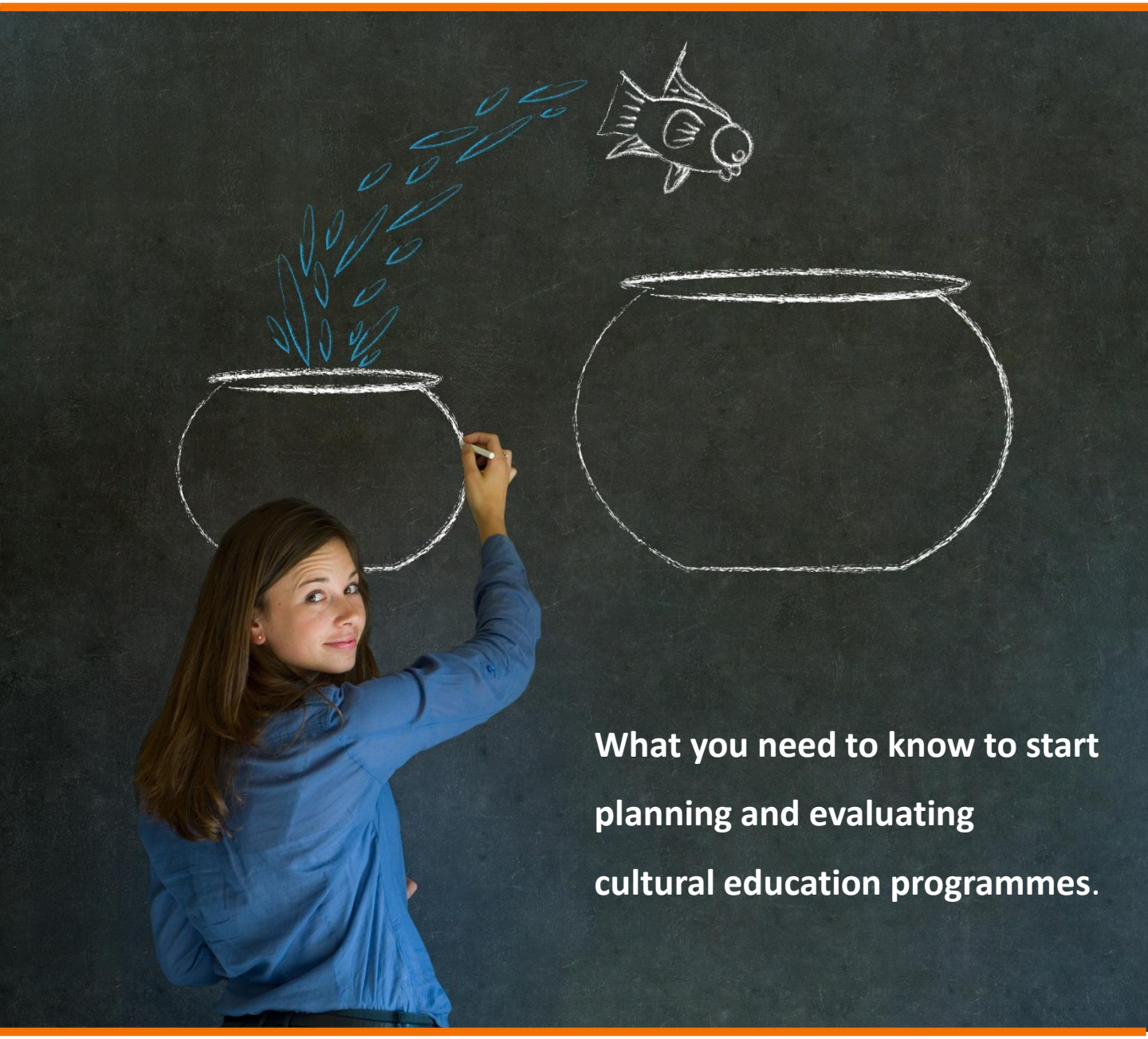
Beginner's Guide to Evaluating Impact

This brief guide has been developed by NotDeadFish for schools, third sector organisations and other not for profit bodies delivering Cultural Education.



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Cultural Education has many potential areas worth investigation. Through carefully thought out programme design and the application of outcomes focused research methodology it will be possible to:

- **Raise the standards of cultural education,**
- **Understand how to tackle difficult issues, such as certain children having less access to cultural education than others,**
- **Show the benefits of cultural education for young people within education and beyond,**
- **Show the benefits of arts and culture activities on school life, other areas of the curriculum, and overall academic attainment.**

This Beginner's Guide to Evaluating Impact provides an introduction to outcomes, evaluation and research methods to help get your cultural education programme and research started.

What is impact?

There are many ways to talk about impact: the difference you make, the impression you leave, outcomes, changes, results, etc. They all broadly mean the same - certainly for our purposes they do.

One word to be careful of using interchangeably in impact evaluation though is *benefit*. Benefit pre-assumes that your impact is beneficial – and of course you hope it has, but *impact evaluation* is not just about benefit hunting. You must look for evidence which tells the whole picture – the good, the bad and the unexpected!

In this guide we will describe *impact* as the outcomes of your work. Outcomes are therefore: *the changes brought about as a result of an activity or intervention*, i.e. the course of events has been altered as a result of something you did, for example – better exam results were achieved using new teaching method B, rather than the previously used method A.

If you are not already thinking this, then you will be by the end of this guide: how can I evidence that? How can I show that it was my work that made the difference? How do I collect that evidence? Read on…

So, are you really a beginner?

Whilst impact evaluation may seem new you are probably already familiar with many of the concepts and do much of this already. You know that you want to make a positive difference to young people – that is why you are involved in education. You will plan how best to approach this – through the syllabus and lesson plans. You are used to measuring the impact of your teaching – exams help with this, but you probably have many inspiring examples of young people reflecting positively about your activities. You are used to justifying your results to others – parents evenings, to colleagues and OFSTED.

This guide builds on what you already do and provides frameworks and tools to help you be more methodical and effective at assessing and presenting your outcomes.

Approaching your research project

This guide breaks down research into three phases. Although theoretically the phases take place in sequence you will quickly see the need to consider all three when you start off.

Phase 1: Select your topic of research

You should start by identifying one area of cultural provision that you would like to include over the duration of the project. During this phase you are developing the project and identifying what you want to do and how you are going to achieve it. Consider the following:

- What kind of cultural provision would you like to increase in your school?
- How would this provision especially help your school?
- Are there specific people it will have an impact on (students, staff, …)?
- What are you expecting to be the outcomes of the provision?
- How are you going to implement/increase this provision?
- Are there other case studies, books or articles you can draw on for comparison and inspiration?
- How could this work support you with Artsmark?
- Who in your school or local network could you work with on this research?
- Who are you collecting the data for (beyond this program)?

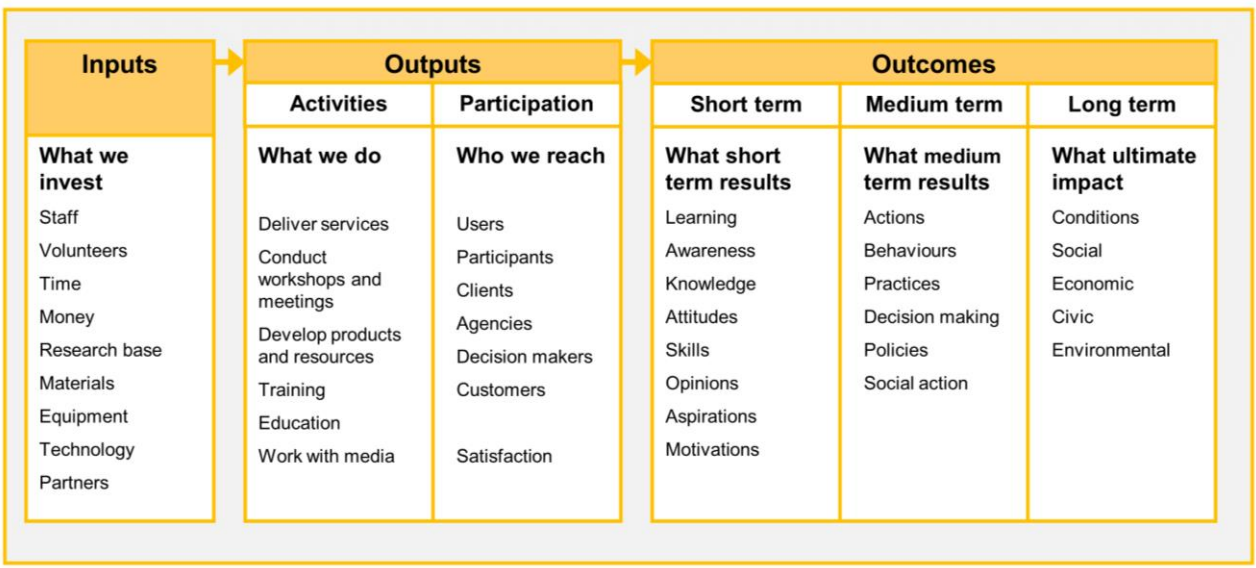
A new cultural provision should not be planned without thinking about the outcomes you would like to achieve (and therefore measure) and how you are going to use and present the data you have gathered.

The Logic Model

The Logic Model approach is helpful tool for structuring your thoughts during Phase 1. It can help you plan your provision, challenge your assumptions and naturally leads to the identification of key points of measurement, which is helpful for Phase 2.

The Logic Model, shown in the picture below, encourages you to identify the relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes:

- **Inputs** are the resources we use (money, time, etc.)
- **Outputs** are activities coming from the inputs (training, events, lessons, etc.) Participation in those activities is also an output, not an outcome, for example, attendance at an event provides no indication of any change.
- **Outcomes** are described as short, medium and long. You may or may not find this distinction useful. **Short outcomes** relate to changes brought about by the outputs (i.e. as a result of the event young people learnt something, developed new attitudes, practiced new skills). **Medium outcomes** describe what the short outcomes lead to -typically the way people behave (i.e. as a result of new attitudes young people's behaviour changed, they now do something differently). **Long term outcomes** are more global – or at least community wide (i.e. as a result of young people, individually, doing something differently, the changes in the school have been more or less of something.)



This approach is also called a theory of change. You will need to create a vision of the end point. This doesn't need to be a long term outcome, your research may be focused on better achieving short term outcomes. You then need to establish a pathway of intermediate outcomes to achieve the vision.

> Try using the **"if-then"** approach to establish the relationship between the activities and outcomes. Forget the structure of the logic model for now. Get a big piece of paper and some post it notes and write down everything you want to do and everything you want to achieve. Then try to sequence them using "if" and "then" i.e. if we do X, then Y will happen – and if Y happens, then young people are more likely to Z. For example if knowledge is increased then attitudes will change, then behaviours will modify, then the overall impact on the school will be… and so on.

Once you have created your model ask yourself 'why will one thing lead to another?' How do you know that those outputs will lead to those changes? Is it based on experience? Is it based on research? Are extra activities needed in order to achieve the outcomes – for example, is teaching skills enough for them to be deployed effectively? Are other activities required? What are the barriers to achieving the outcomes and how can these be overcome?

Once you are happy with your theory of change you may wish to organise it into the logic model framework. This will help you to present your programme's rationale to others.

Keep in mind that the longer the chain between your activities and the desired outcomes, the less in control of the programme's success you will have. Programme plans should reflect what is within and outside of your direct control. Be clear about which outcomes will be directly attributed to your programme and which you will make a contribution to. For example, you may be able to plot the correlation between your work and the uptake of cultural activities in your school. You are less in control of how those young people engage with cultural activities when the leave full-time education (although you may have made a contribution – which is worth noting).

What is an outcome?

The range of outcomes that can be planned on any given programme is significant; to keep the process manageable select those that will provide the most meaningful change. Outcome types to consider when planning (and later, evaluating) include:

- **Tangible outcomes** are actual changes and can include: changes in individual's circumstances; physical or psychological health; behaviour; attitude; self-perception; knowledge; skills; relationships; values; condition or status.
- **Equity outcomes** develop parity for a particular marginalised, disadvantaged or under represented section of the population, i.e. young people from low income families now have the same range of opportunities to access culture as those from wealthier families.
- **Satisfaction outcomes** are not to be confused with positive feedback, rather they are changes in the perception of services, i.e. the percentage of people who thought the experience was 'good' increased by 20%.
- **Financial outcomes** reflect savings either to individuals, organisations or the Treasury by avoiding the need to access more expensive services. Prevention and health economics may apply here. Whilst financial outcomes may provide an attractive argument for funding they should not take precedent over tangible improvements for individuals.
- **Process outcomes** occur on the way to achieving other outcomes, for example community cohesion being created during a project to develop a local theatre. These outcomes may also be internal to an organisation (developing a new capability). Often process outcomes will be achieved irrespective of the success of other outcomes.

Outcomes can be considered at four levels: individuals; community and family; available provision and society as a whole. Outcomes should be SMART; specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timetabled.

There's a lot to consider here – grab a big piece of paper and dive in. You can go through this guide later to make sure your programme (and your description of it) is robust.

Phase 2: Plan the research

This is generally the most challenging stage for new researchers, but with a bit of dedication it should not be complicated. You have already given a lot of thought to your programme Phase 1, so hopefully the points of measurement will have begun to reveal themselves.

Remember, you are doing your research to illustrate all of the brilliant work you have done with your cultural provision. It's a celebration and your project legacy. Consider:

- What kind of impact would you like to measure (opinion, confidence, grades, …)?
- Who is your research 'subject' (students, staff, …)?
- Which research tool (questionnaires, interviews, observations, tests, …) would be most suitable to measure your impact?
- When will you measure the impact and why? Will you only measure it once or throughout the project?
- Are there ethical questions you need to think about (consent, …)?
- Are you also going to collect comparative data (from similar groups who are not part of your provision)?

Research methods

There are several ways you can collect data in your school. Before you begin to collect data consider which one would most suit your research questions. The four most popular methods are: questionnaires, observations, interviews and tests.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be used to find out what people have done and what people know. They have a relatively straightforward process of construction, distribution and analysis. However, a low response rate can impact on the validity of quantitative data.

Tips

- Carefully consider the research objectives and the participants. What do you need to know and how best to ask it?
- Keep questions short and precise, including no leading or biased questions.
- Use language familiar to the participant, avoid technical language.
- Children should be at ease when completing questionnaires in an environment and with company they were familiar with.
- Be aware of bias. Children might want to please by including answers they feel are required. They may also be rebellious and deliberately void the result by not doing what is required of them.
- Test your questionnaire and analyse the data before using it with a large group. This will give you an idea of potential responses so that you can assess whether you are likely to get the data you need.

Observations

Without observations there is often much which the researcher does not experience. Observing naturally occurring events can allow the researchers to open their mind to the 'reality' which surrounds the research data and provide useful context.

Tips

- Record only the visual and oral data which is available and relevant to the project.
- Understand your own position as a researcher: Are you able to look at a classroom scene objectively? You already understand the environment so you might only look at certain things rather than the scene as a whole? This has advantages and disadvantages.
- Aim to view events through the perspective of the participants. Try to uncover how and why people think and act, empathise with the participants.
- Make notes of an observation using a pre-prepared form. This will help you to identify the same information from each observation and help you to capture comparable information and that which is required for the evaluation.
- Record observations using film (which needs additional consent) to go back through at a later date.

Interviews

An interview could be either a personally administered questionnaire or an informal conversation. They can be used to explore complex issues in detail and provide the opportunity for the researcher to clarify questions and probe the responses. There is however the risk of going off-topic, introducing a researcher bias or not conducting all interviews in the same way.

Tips

- Start all interviews by thanking the volunteers, confirming that their answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously, laying out the process and time frame and offering them the right to withdraw themselves or their answers from the research process at any point.
- If possible record the interview on a voice recorder or phone so that you can access the information again and transcribe it if necessary.
- Pick the questions beforehand and have no more than ten. They should be as short and precise as possible. Use both open ended questions which expect a detailed answer and closed questions which require a 'yes', 'no' or multiple choice response.
- Be aware that the interviewee may strive to please the interviewer or be keen to look clever.
- Find out how your interviewee felt about the intervention? 'It is no good knowing that an intervention works if we do not also know that it is unpopular and likely to be ignored'

Tests

Test scores are an excellent way of showing individual progress and can be repeated to highlight development over a period of time. Tests help to plot progress based on personal achievement and against national guidelines.

Research has shown that teachers' assessment and students' achievement does not always correspond so it is worth thinking about how else you can make sure that its results are accurate. Do you engage in moderation? What kind of learning outcomes do you mark to? Are all assessors qualified in what they do? Objectivity is especially important in this area in order to produce meaningful research. Take a step back in order to become researchers, not practitioners.

Phase 3: Data collection, analysis and discussion

Whatever data collection method you use, those above, or others – take care to make sure that what you collect will be useful to your evaluation and avoid wasting opportunities to get the best evidence. It's too late to ask an all important question once the data has been collected. Plan, test, analyse and revise early on in the process.

The last phase of the project will see you complete your own case study. You will run your programme, collect the data you need, analyse it and present your findings. Ask yourself:

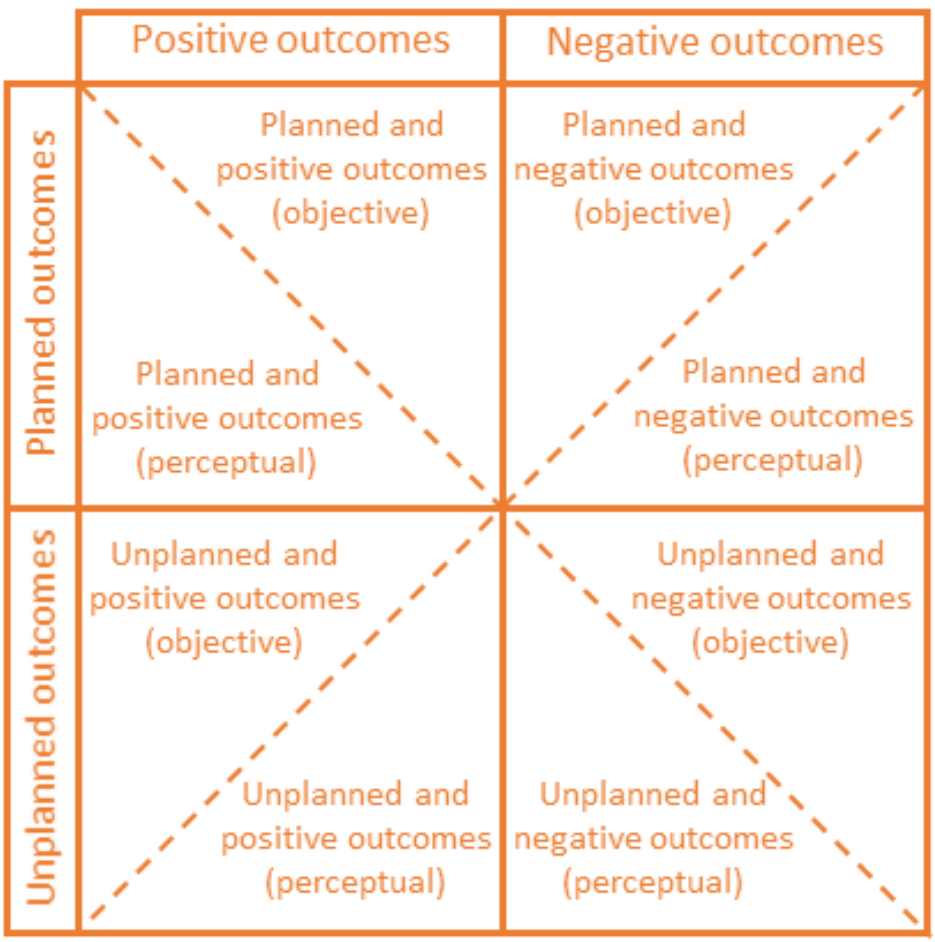
- Have the expected changes taken place?
- If so, why do you think this has been the case? Alternatively: why not?
- Did the research process and programme go as planned?
- How does your data compare to results of other studies?
- What limitations are there to your data? Can it be generalised?
- Do you feel that you have developed as a researcher throughout the project?
- What would you do differently next time?

Evidencing outcomes

When evaluating programmes we seek to find evidence to both: *prove* that we are achieving outcomes; and identify ways to *improve* the quality of these outcomes in the future. We achieve this by observing a range of outcomes, not just those specifically in focus.

Many evaluation tools are limited to measuring the positive outcomes resulting from planned activity. Whilst this helps show the benefits of the programme, it is important that we understand the full implications of our activities. We must identify the conditions that the outcomes were achieved within, examine the strength of the causal relationship between what we did and the impact and understand the scalability and transferability of the programmes. We must also understand if our programme did any harm.

The model in the picture below encourages researchers to consider whether the outcomes achieved are planned or unplanned and of positive or negative benefit.



The evidence to show the achievement of outcomes can be objective, where the impact can be measured in some way such as results, trends, anything measurable (soft and hard measures). Evidence may also be perceptual, which is gathered by listening to the individuals involved and is based on opinions, beliefs and perception).

Perceptual evidence is more than just user satisfaction. It can also describe 'the way things are actually done,' for example: were positive outcomes achieved because the programme was well conceived or because individuals succeeded against all the odds. Perceptual evidence will also highlight good practice and extract tacit knowledge that may otherwise be missed.

When evaluators collect their evidence they can identify where to locate it on the matrix by considering whether the evidence relates to outcomes that were planned or unplanned, of positive or negative benefit and whether the evidence is objective or perceptual. Plotting evidence on the matrix shows at a glance the range of outcomes and the level of understanding of the programme.

The absence of evidence in the negative quadrants could mean that the programme has achieved entirely positive outcomes, or that negative outcomes have not been identified through the evaluation. Researchers should explain the significance of empty segments; is there no evidence or has no investigation been attempted?

Evidence in the planned and negative quadrant would suggest that the planned outcome was achieved but had some negative effects, either because the planned outcomes were achieved, but had an adverse affect or that they were not achieved as planned and this had a damaging influence. It could be that at the planning stage negative impacts on other areas are identified. For example, one project doing well may divert attention from other areas. Where disbenefits are expected they should be minimised or perhaps accepted as necessary for change.

A successful programme would have a lot of evidence in the planned and positive quadrant, and a good evaluation would identify at least some evidence in the other three segments. Much can be learned from a 'failed' intervention and only truthful acknowledgement helps you and your practice to grow.

Results analysis and presentation

Analysing the data of a study should be considered just as crucial as its design and implementation. The analysis shapes the way the reader understands the results. Most researchers acknowledge that the search for the 'ultimate truth' is futile however it is important to draw conclusions which are as believable, logical, clear and comprehensible as possible.

Qualitative data can be analysed in a thematic way, i.e. looking for similar patterns in the interview transcripts. Quantitative data can be analysed with statistical formulas.

Although the design of the study should be logical and appropriate, there are still many factors which could act as limitations to its validity. A study in a real environment has an unlimited number of factors which can impact on the practice and outcomes of research. Explaining the possible effect of the following factors, and what you did to mitigate them, would strengthen your analysis:

- Comparability of results – was the intervention implemented differently by different students/teachers?
- Quality of responses – did children understand the questionnaires or interview questions?
- Impact of the evaluation on the programme – did students feel self-conscious about observations or during interviews and behave in a way they would normally not.
- Accurate results – do test scores reflect the children's true attainment or were they subjectively chosen by the teachers?
- Personal bias – As the intervention was expected to have positive outcomes were the results interpreted in a better light than is justified? It is very important that you consider all findings equally.
- Data collection quality – were the research methods chosen appropriately and does the data answer the research questions?
- Sample size – do you have a small sample (a limited number of students)? If so be aware that your outcomes might not be representative.

What to include in a case study

Once you have completed your intervention and the connected research project it can be helpful to describe your findings as a case study. Take the opportunity to reflect on the experience and its outcomes and tell others about it in a clear and structured way.

It will depend on the complexity of your project, but as a general guide, aim for a case study of between 1500 and 2000 words to include the following sections:

1) Focus Area - introduce and summarise your intervention/investigation in one sentence.

2) Aims - what had you hoped to achieve?

3) Rationale - why did you pick this topic?

4) Background context – introduce your school/ organisation, its students, staff and the day-to-day routines.

5) The Story - what problem did you try to tackle?

6) How we did it - describe the planning and implementation of your intervention. This section could also include a timeline of events.

7) Results and Impact - what were the outcomes of your intervention? How did you measure success? How did you change your school/ organisation, its members and/or provision?

8) Evaluation - how did you find the research process and what would you do differently next time?

9) Next steps - what are your plans now that the project has been completed?

Your report should then be summarised with a conclusion at the end and an abstract at the beginning. Depending on how you will be using your report, you may also wish to produce an executive summary.

Important things to consider

Anonymity

Preserving the anonymity of participants is an important part of the research process. This is not just necessary in order to allow them to express opinions and possibly sensitive data without the fear of judgement by others, it also allows them to distance themselves from the research at a later date. Make sure that you devise a system of anonymisation which makes sure that none of the participants in your study can be identified by name.

Guidelines and recommendations are especially strict when it comes to researching with children.

Researching with children

As children's rights are developed, their voice is given more consideration. Children can be encouraged to design studies and become active agents in the investigation of knowledge. Under law, children belong into the group of especially vulnerable people and it is the researcher's responsibility to plan and conduct a study which does not take advantage of any of the participants.

To improve research with you people you could: keep data collection brief by using short questions; create an open atmosphere; stress that there are no right or wrong answers; use simple language; keep checking whether the participants understand the questions and thoroughly pilot the studies.

Informed consent

Informed consent means that everyone who participates in your research should know that the research is going on and what their involvement is. In the past it was only the parent who would make a decision on behalf of their child, however the last decade has seen an increasing body of work which defends the child's right to choose themselves and that making this democratic choice would have advantages not just for the researcher but also for the child.

However, obtaining informed consent from children poses new questions. From what age can we expect children to make decisions for themselves? Some researchers believe that children should be involved in the decision making process, regardless of their age.

If you conduct research which is part of your normal school day (students take a test or you talk to a group of students after the lesson) it will probably be sufficient to let your head of school know what you are planning.

However, if you are planning a more intensive study (e.g. interviewing students one-on-one) you will have to let the parents and students know via a letter home.

Referencing

You may wish to include some context or background by discussing the work or others in your case study write up. If you do wish to quote other people's work then it is best practice to reference the source. Check the guidelines for the 'Harvard' referencing style which is most widely used in education action research.

Useful links

A New Direction: Cultural education research
https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/research

A New Direction: Cultural education blogs
https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/blog

Education Endowment Foundation: Impact of arts education… A review of evidence
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Arts_Education_Review.pdf

EEF: Teaching and Learning Toolkit, arts participation
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/toolkit-a-z/arts-participation/

National Foundation for Education Research: Cultural Education Partnerships (2015)
https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/CEPP01/

Institute for Effective Education
https://www.york.ac.uk/iee/

Teacher Development Trust
http://www.teacherdevelopmenttrust.org/

National college of teaching and learning
https://nationalcollege.org.uk/

Arts Council (England)
http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/

Arts Council Bridge Organisations
http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/cyp/bridge-organisations/

Artsmark http://www.artsmark.org.uk/

Scottish Arts Council
http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/

Arts Council of Wales
http://www.artswales.org.uk/

Arts Council of Northern Ireland
http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/

Project Oracle (Children and Youth Evidence Hub) www.project-oracle.com

Centre for the Use of Research & Evidence in Education www.curee.co.uk

Coalition for Evidence-Based Education
www.cebenetwork.org

Outline of principles of impact evaluation
http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/37671602.pdf

Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Guide
http://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide

Resources helpful to educational researchers at different stages of their careers (full of links!)
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/glacier/tlrp/

Research Methods in Education (book)
http://knowledgeportal.pakteachers.org/sites/knowledgeportal.pakteachers.org/files/resources/RESEARCH%20METHOD%20COHEN%20ok.pdf

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This booklet has been produced by NotDeadFish as part of a growing series of resources for education and not for profit organisations.

Check our website for more

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