How does the developmental magic happen?

A case study and dialogue between evaluators and end users

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Barrington Research Group, Inc.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Outline

- The Players
- The Context
- A Brief Word About the Project
- Elements of Success
- So What Is the Magic?
- Questions for Discussion

The Players

Sharla King (End-user)

Experienced administrator & researcher, pushed to think more broadly about evaluation & evidence

Gail Barrington (Senior Evaluator)

Recognized evaluator, pushing for innovation & reflective practice

Fred Bertrand (Evaluator)

Newcomer with a smart toolbox, pushing to mix surveys, advanced tools & artistic influence

2nd project together

Gail becoming an evaluation instructor

10+ years of collaboration

Growing experience with the DE approach

The Context

- In 2010 the University of Alberta's Faculties of Education and Health Science jointly created a Master of Education in Health Sciences Education (MEd HSE) .
- The program goal is to extend the knowledge & skills of health sciences educators in educational pedagogy, educational research, & interprofessional leadership within the collaborative context of educational communities of practice.
- See website: **uab.ca/medhse**

MEd HSE Program Features

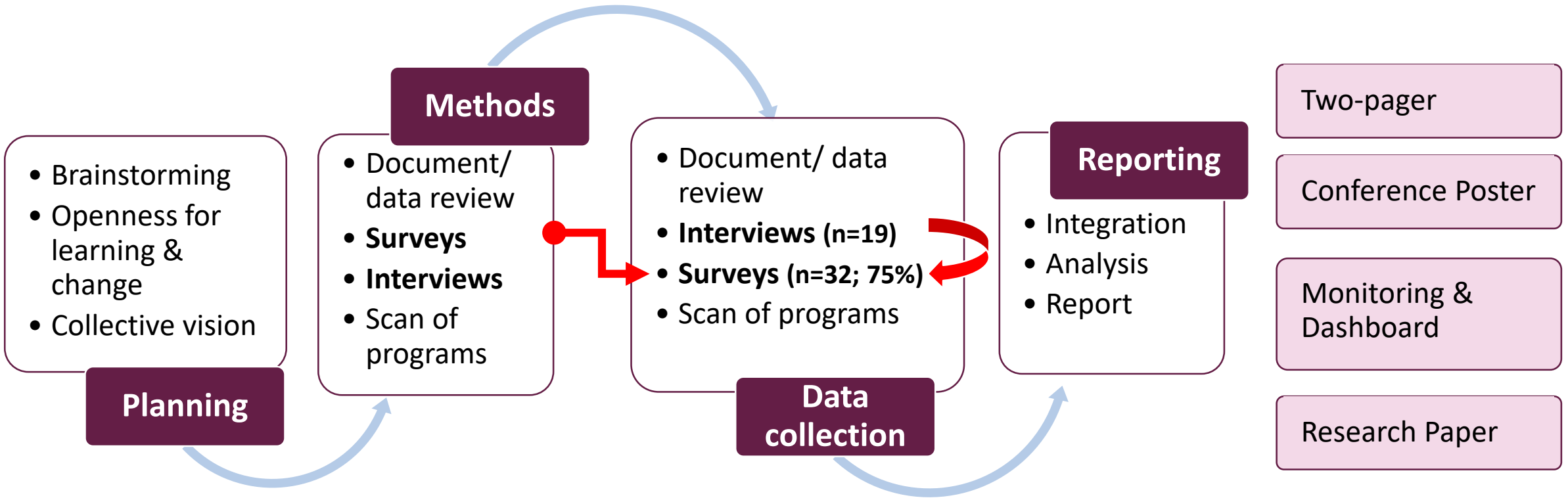
- Flexible & part-time delivery
- Blended delivery format (online and on-site)
- <20 students per cohort
- Quality educational curriculum & instruction
- Educational pedagogy to reflect program philosophy
- Students prepared to conduct educational research
- Interprofessional teamwork & leadership promoted

The Context

- In 2016, the first external program evaluation was commissioned to Barrington Research Group, Inc.
- Sharla expected the evaluation to be monochromatic, boring & academic. She admits that she underestimated the power of evaluation.
- The result was surprisingly positive:
  - A mutually beneficial relationship
  - A highly successful project
- But the final report was not the end of the story. It has been a stepping stone to program change, ongoing monitoring & continuing communication.
- We asked ourselves: What was the magic? Why can't every evaluation be this successful?

A Brief Word About the Project

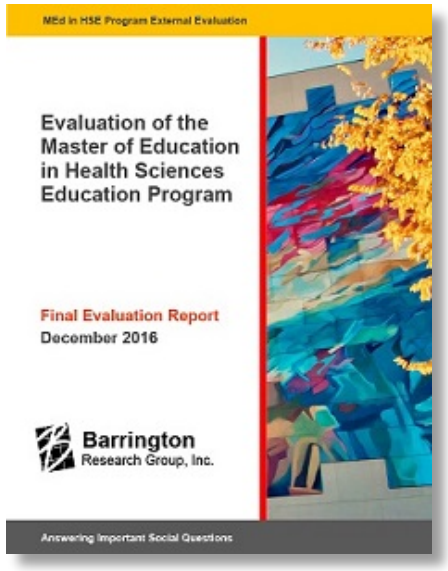
Logic Model v1 → Logic Model v2 → Logic Model v3 → Logic Model v4



Some Evaluation Results

- **The program had a transformational effect** on graduates' career advancement, profile, professional networks, & leadership opportunities.
  - 90% of graduates' expectations were met or exceeded
  - 88% of students/graduates are satisfied with key program aspects
  - 80% of graduates reported that the program had an impact on their competencies & skills at work
- **Graduates linked much of their success to this program**:
  - Using their "new lexicon" for educational pedagogy & research
  - Accessing career options not available otherwise
  - Continuing career advancement
  - Becoming the go-to resource person for educational issues

Evaluation report



Elements of Success

The end-user (Sharla)

- Underestimated the power of evaluation
- Working collaboratively with the evaluators came to see the program in a transformative way
- Used the evaluation to clarify the information needed to re-think & adjust the program
- Found the process to be a dynamic way to communicate effectively with stakeholders about the program:
  - Rationale and value added
  - Outcomes for students and graduates
  - Growth of a community of practice

If You Change, Everything Changes
Ana Parini

Elements of Success

The evaluators (Gail & Fred)

- Welcomed the opportunity to be critical friends & to play an active role in program development
- Became self-reflective about our complementarity
- Used innovative & customized reporting tools
  - 25-page report
  - Two-pager & poster as marketing tools
  - Peer-reviewed article (in progress)
  - Online dashboard (in development)

The team as an adaptive system (end-user & evaluators)

- Mutual respect
- Space to breathe, innovate and reflect on practice

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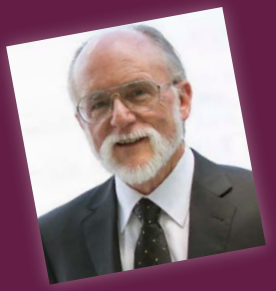
So What Is the Magic?

- What we experienced fits the characteristics of a developmental evaluation (DE).
- DE provides a way to understand the activities of a program operating in dynamic environments with complex interactions.
- It focuses on innovation & strategic learning rather than standard outcomes, & provides a way to think about programs in context…
- Let's map some of the essentials of DE based on our experience.

Developmental evaluation is based on the insight that evaluative thinking, techniques, practice, and discipline can be a boon…that data systematically collected and appropriately tied to users' goals and strategies can make a difference, even in open-ended, highly complex settings where the goals and strategies are themselves evolving….

Patton, 2016



The Magic

DE Essential	Our Experience

Developmental purpose & context	• Desire for learning & program improvement
	• Intentional flexibility planned from the beginning and during the project
	• Authority/flexibility for Program Director to make change to the:
	  • Program design & delivery
	  • Evaluation process & deliverables
	  • As cost-recovery program, a need to prove sustainability

Adaptive systems	• The evaluation team was an adaptive system
	  • Open to ongoing adaptation of methods
	  • Demonstrating mutual respect of workload & real life issues

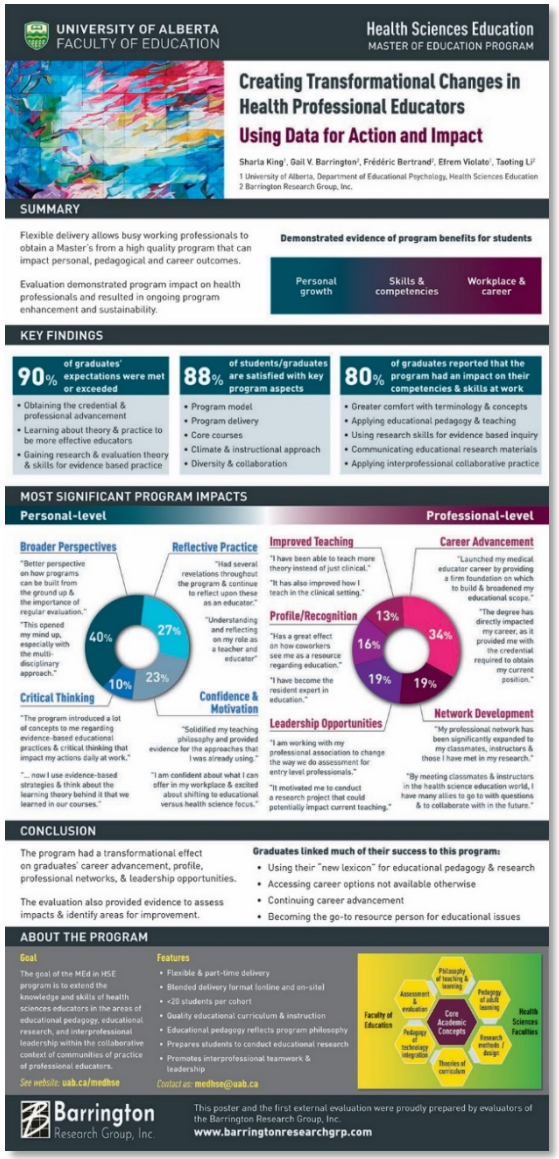
We Are What We Think
Ana Parini

The Magic

DE Essential	Our Experience
Utilization focus	• Primary user involved throughout all design & analysis activities • Preliminary stakeholder interviews helped frame study tools • Evaluators responsive to user's emerging needs for information • End use kept in mind throughout study

Co-creation	• Relationship building & trust
	• Shift to capacity building
	  • Knowledge sharing led to change
	  • Creative thinking resulted in ongoing improvement of the study

Two-pager/Poster



The Magic

DE Essential	Our Experience

Innovation	• Reporting for the evaluation was innovative:
	  • Final report template shared by an AEA colleague
	  • Data visualization inspired by Stephanie Evergreen
	• A two-pager and poster were created to showcase both the evaluation & the program
	  • Used for communication with manager, instructors and stakeholders
	  • Used for an academic conference
	• An ongoing monitoring process has emerged from the evaluation experience
	  • Development of monitoring tools
	  • Online dashboard & program resources

Online Dashboard

The Magic

DE Essential	Our Experience

Timely feedback	• Evidence tailored, continuous, rapid & rigorous
	• Provides motivation to incorporate findings into decision making
	• Other examples of changes that occurred due to the evaluation results:
	  • Hiring a part-time administrative assistant
	  • Engaging in discussion with instructors to built a community of practice
	  • Exploring opportunities to foster a community of practice with students & graduates
	  • Improving communication about elective courses
	  • Revisiting online program profile
	  • Reporting student/graduate data in an online dashboard
	  • Enhancing support for capping project
	  • Ongoing …

Questions for Discussion

- Are the programs you evaluate emergent, dynamic, unpredictable?
- Is innovation valued?
- Are your evaluation processes flexible and results-driven?
- Can you use developmental evaluation in your context?

REAL SIMPLE
How To Read People
Ana Parini

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