



Which design? An interactive workshop in language program evaluation

P. Gruba, March 2025

First of all, many thanks

- I would like to acknowledge the invitation and generous support of the School of Chinese here at University of Hong Kong
 - Many thanks to Xiaofang for her help and guidance
 - A shout out to Dr Kellie Frost for her contribution to my work
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- And, most of all, thank you for coming to today's workshop!



Overview

- History of language program evaluation
 - Current state of the field
 - A focus on design as a way forward
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- Postpositivist and Methods Designs
 - Pragmatic and Use Designs
 - Constructivist and Values Designs
 - Transformative and Social Justice Designs



Designs for Language Program Evaluation

Paul Gruba

Recently ...

- Gruba, P. (2024). *Designs for language program evaluation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Key question: How can language programs adopt concepts and techniques from 'mainstream' program evaluation?

But the seeds of my evaluation journey were planted much earlier ...

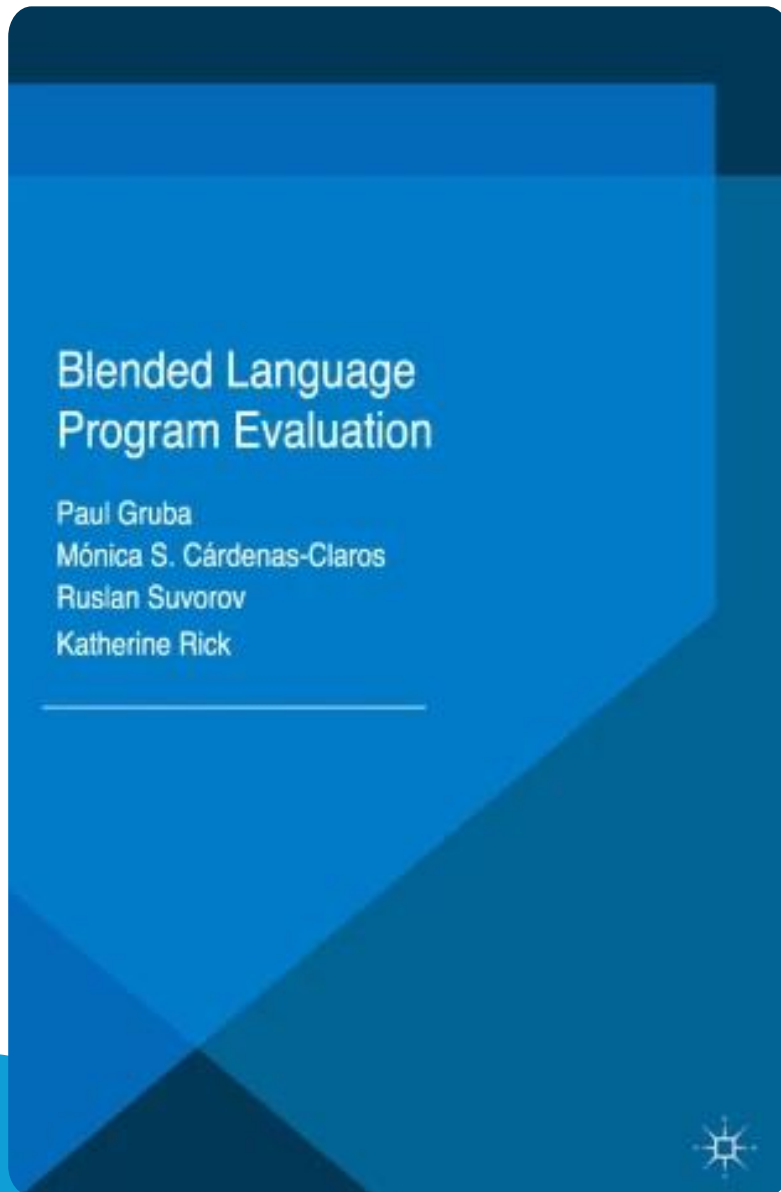
- Gruba, P. & Hinkelman, D. (2011). Blending technologies in second language classrooms. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Niggling question: But, did all that technology integration ever make a difference?



BLENDING TECHNOLOGIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

PAUL GRUBA AND DON HINKELMAN



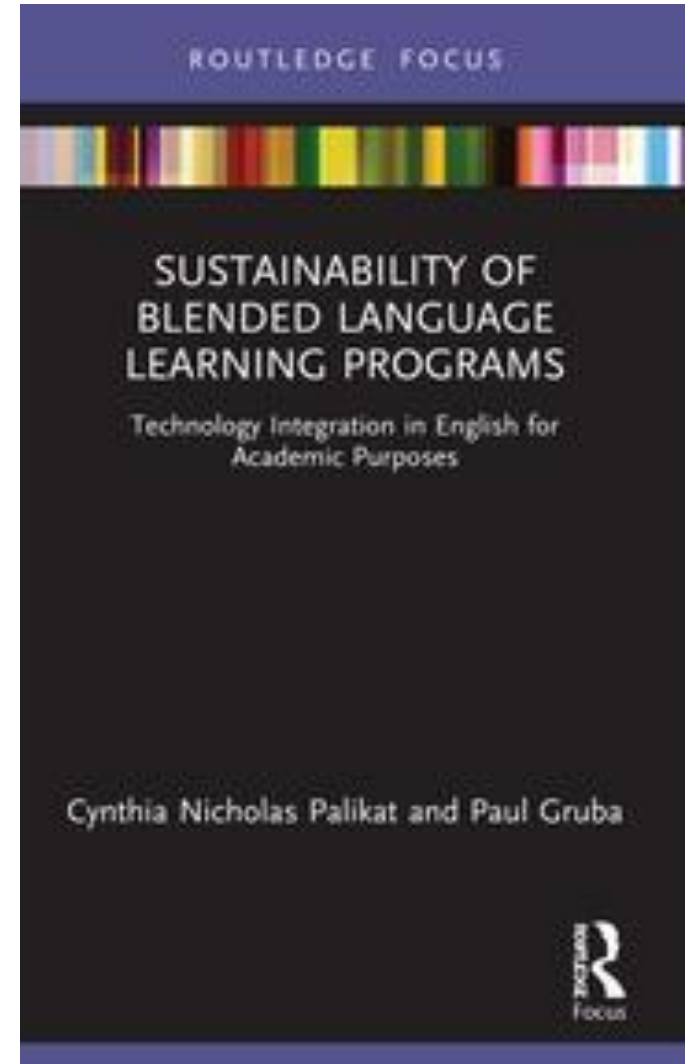


And then ...

- Gruba, P., Cardenas-Claros, M., Suvorov, R., & Rick, K. (2016). *Blended language program evaluation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Niggling question: How much are leadership, administration and professional development implicated in technology integration?





Which then led to ...

- Palikat, C. & Gruba, P. (2022). *Sustainability of blended language learning programs*. Routledge.
- Niggling question: What about a wider variety of language programs—what might be the basis for their evaluation designs?





Throughout today's workshop

- I'm keen to have everyone participate, interact, contribute
 - Language program evaluation is an emerging area; each voice is important as we collectively develop the field
 - What does success look like?
 - Each of us has an improved ability to select and justify a 'design', or theoretical basis, for language program evaluation
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Two key resources

Better Evaluation

<https://www.betterevaluation.org>

Mertens & Wilson (2019)

Mertens, D. M. & Wilson, A.T. (2019). *Program evaluation theory and practice: A comprehensive guide (2nd ed.)*. Guilford Press.



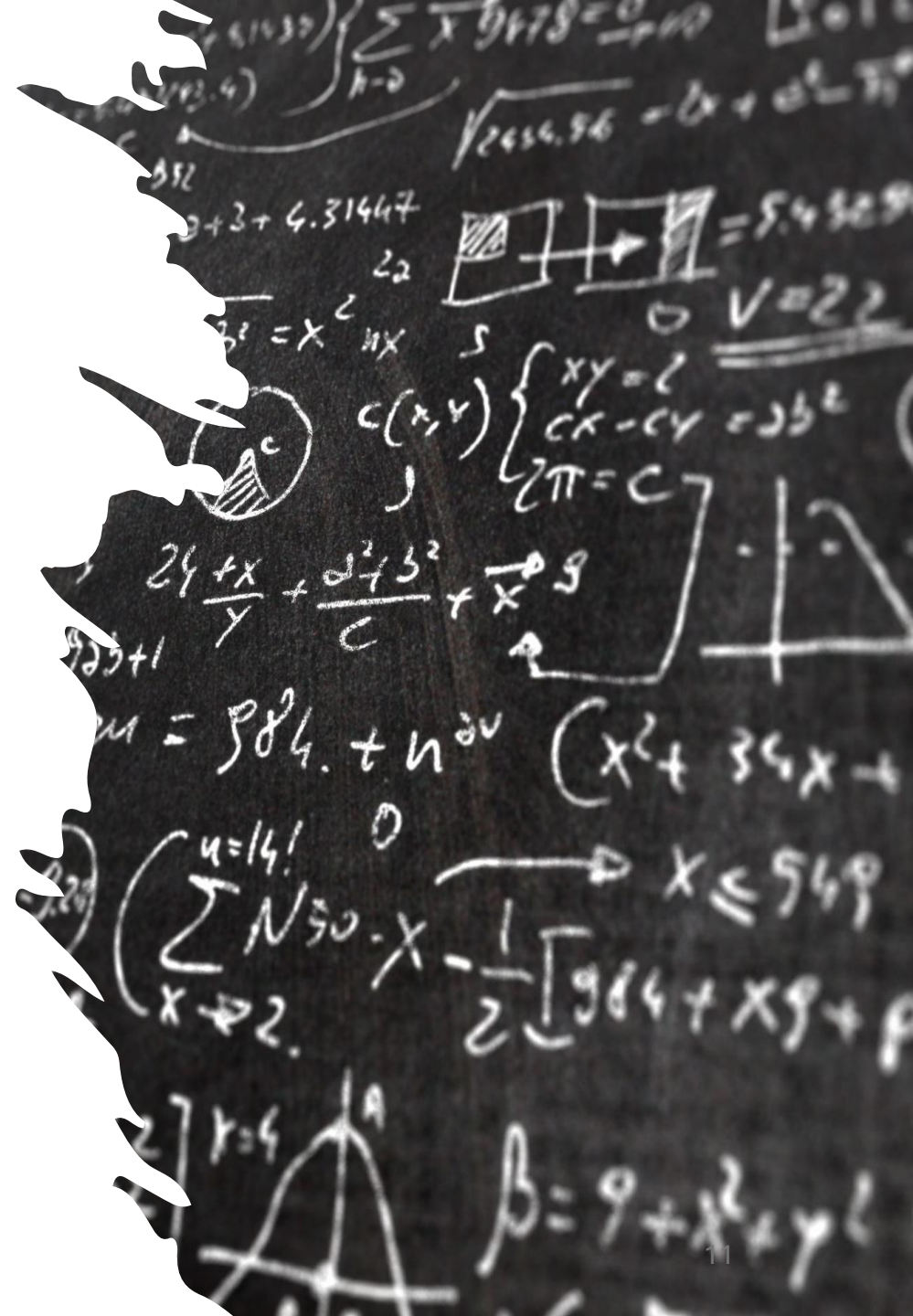
A brief history

Program evaluation developed throughout the 1960s to justify / evaluate / improve large gov't funded programs

- The 'Bangalore Project' pioneered language program evaluation
- Rise of scholarship throughout mid-1980s for a decade
- Emphasis on quality assurance for EFL programs
- Renewed interest driven by the 'accountability movement'
- Recent focus on technology integration, for example

Current state

- ‘Mainstream’ program evaluation has grown to become a large, interdisciplinary field
- ‘Quality assurance’ (not evaluation, strictly speaking) is the dominant approach used in language programs
- No journals, conferences, keynotes, or professional organizations in language program evaluation ... recently, though, more workshops
- Research is sporadic and uneven
- Few graduate subjects in applied linguistics, foreign language education, or TESOL



Drawing on ‘design science’ for our work

“While design is a process for developing a working solution to a problem that may only be relevant to a single actor or situation, design science is intended to produce and communicate knowledge that is of general interest. The results of design work are sometimes relevant only to a local practice, i.e. a practice in which just one single individual, group, or organisation engages. In contrast, design science produces results that are relevant both to a global practice, i.e. a community of local practices, and to the research community.” (p. 9)

Johannesson, P., & Perjons, E. (2021). *An introduction to design science* (2nd ed.): Springer.

‘Evaluative thinking’ at our core

“... forces clarity about the inquiry purpose, who it is for, with what intended uses, to be judged by what quality criteria; being explicit about what criteria are being applied in framing inquiry questions, making design decisions, determining what constitutes appropriate methods, and selecting and following analytical processes; and being aware of and articulating values, ethical considerations, contextual implications, strengths and weaknesses of the inquiry, and potential (or actual) misinterpretations, misuses, and misapplications.” (Patton, 2018, p. 23)

The need for sincere and ongoing integration of primary stakeholders

Throughout our work, we must be constantly aware of the need to consult, integrate, and empower primary stakeholders – investors, administrators, students ...

- Consult: Discuss the design, provide information and allow access to contacts, employees, students
- Integrate: Involve stakeholders throughout the process of data collection, interpretation, and creating recommendations
- Empower: Encourage the uptake of recommendations, further improvements, and greater capacity development





Any (brief) questions so far?



Postpositivist and Methods designs

What emphasis is placed on reputation? How important is it to meet published industry or government standards? Is a display of certification important?

+ Efficient, quantitative focus, standard 'checklist', enables comparison, recognized certification, conducted by quality assurance assessors, aligns with business / investor discourses



- Minimal stakeholder involvement, 'surface' analysis, compliance ethos, little culture change, limited basis for research

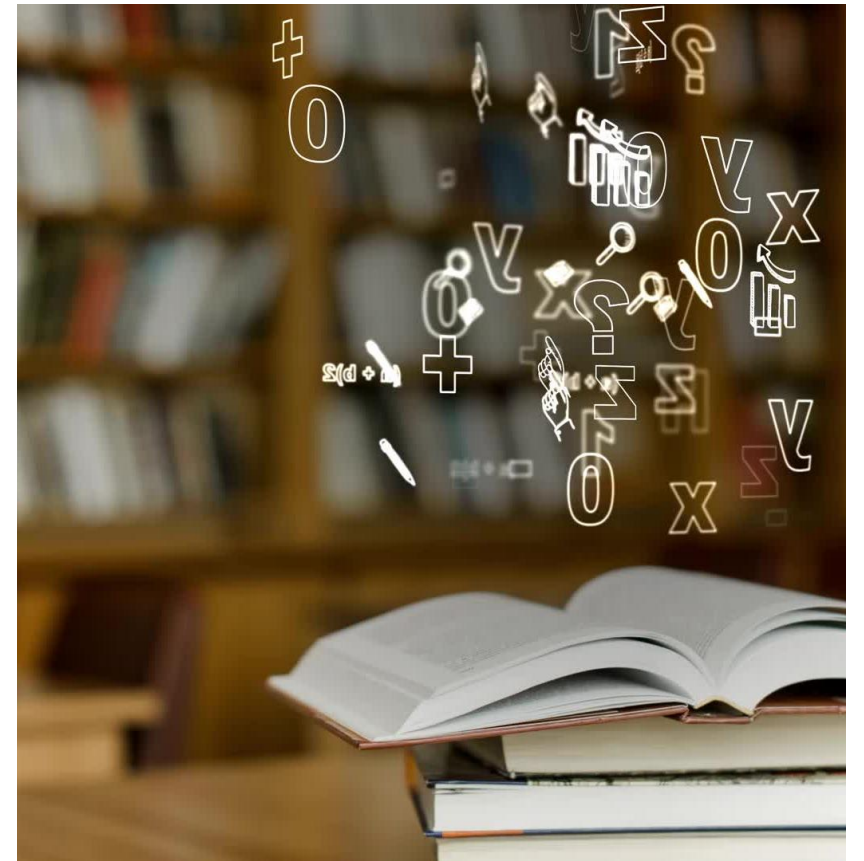


Example organization

Quality Assurance in Language Education Network (QALEN)

“The objective of QALEN is to provide opportunities for quality assurance and accreditation bodies in the English language education sector to communicate and collaborate within a safe, supportive environment. In this way, we may develop, explore, and share global perspectives on quality assurance in English language education, and better understand and address common challenges and emerging trends. Working together, we seek to develop and document best practices and promote global awareness in quality assurance, while at the same time respecting and acknowledging our individual characteristics and contexts.”

<https://qalen.org/>



Other Quality Assurance organizations

Accreditation UK

“Accreditation UK is the quality assurance scheme for English language teaching (ELT) centres in the UK, which the British Council runs in partnership with English UK. Schools, colleges, and universities that offer courses in ELT can join the scheme voluntarily, and members are inspected on a four-yearly basis, supported by unannounced interim visits between inspections.

The scheme gives an assurance of quality to international students who are taking or are planning to take an English language course in the UK. Our external inspections ensure that all accredited centres meet or exceed the agreed quality standards in management, resources and environment, teaching, welfare and (where applicable) safeguarding under 18s.”

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation>



Pragmatic and Use Designs

How much emphasis is to be placed on practical, visible outcomes? Who are the key stakeholders? Evaluator capabilities?

+ Prevalent in higher education, use of mixed methods, local criteria, flexible, research basis

- Little uptake of recommendations, uneven techniques, may be secretive, may induce resentment, non-transferable results

CARLA: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition

The [Program Evaluation Planning Worksheet](#) can guide you through the process in small, manageable steps. (When you click the link, you will be asked to make a copy of this Google doc.)

Start building a plan for your program by working through each step—you don't have to do them all at one sitting! When you are done, ask another LPD or a colleague for their feedback and revise your plan accordingly.

<https://carla.umn.edu/lpd/modules/mod3/process>

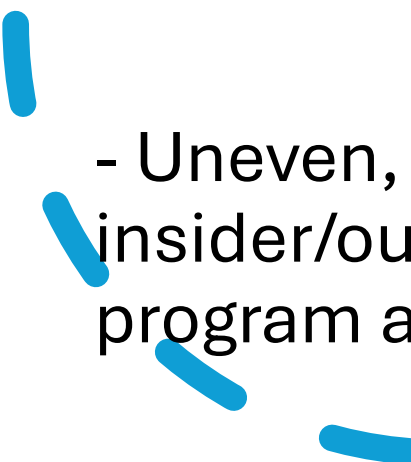




Constructivist and Values Designs

What is the importance of culture, for example, in the program?
How much are community values incorporated?

+ Sensitive, community-driven, stakeholder involvement, use of mixed methods, viable recommendations, ownership of results



- Uneven, resource-intensive, sporadic, prone to 'biases', insider/outsider tensions, requires deep understanding of the program and culture

Example resource

Designing & Refining Heritage Language Programs (Shirk, 2022)

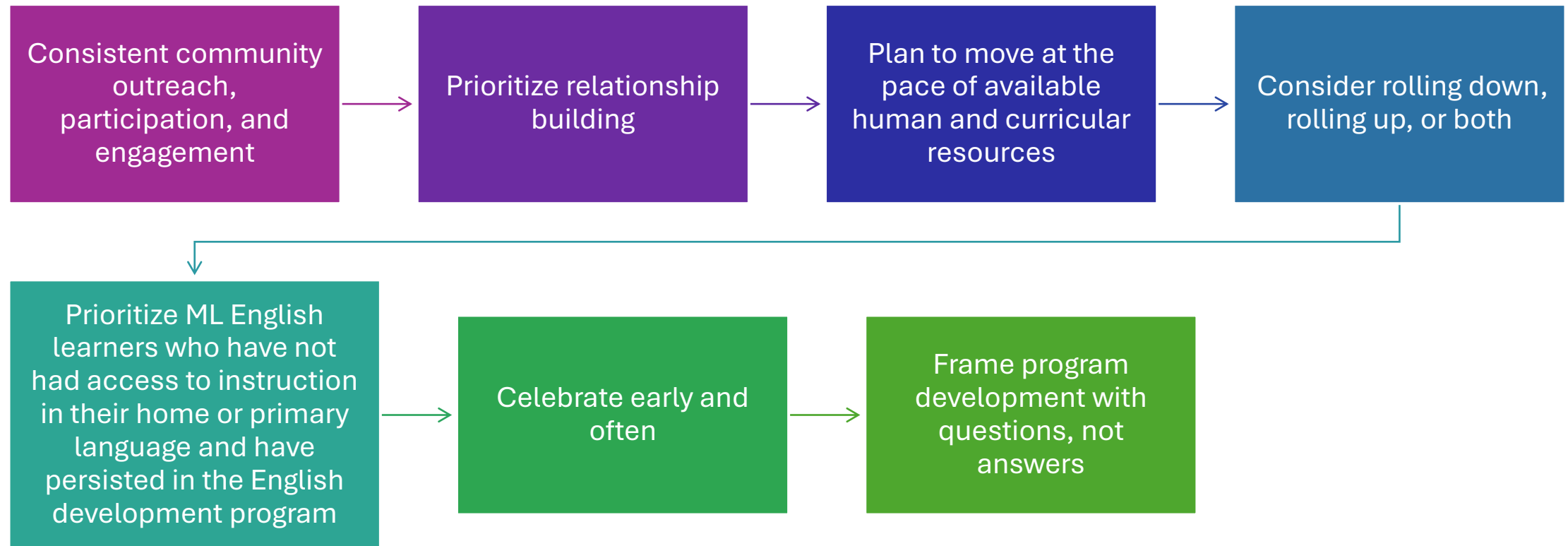
Heritage Speakers/ Users have acquired their heritage language skills in their home or community. They have always been in a multilingual environment but have most likely experienced subtractive bilingualism.

Heritage Language Learners are trying to regain or improve their understanding and use of a heritage language through formal study or in the classroom.

Those who are heritage motivated have a cultural heritage connection to the language but have not had the opportunity to acquire the language in the home. In the classroom, heritage motivated students may have extensive knowledge of the social expectations and cultural dimension of the language but begin learning the language in a classroom setting. Heritage motivation is an essential aspect of language revitalization.

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/designingandrefiningheritagelanguageprogramsno2022.pdf>

Keys to Success (Shirk, 2022)



Transformative and Social Justice Designs

What is the role of language in social justice? How do principles inform program staff, teaching, and outcomes?

- + Motivated by real world concerns, sensitive to stakeholders, emphasis on long-term vision, qualitative techniques
- Abstract goals, impractical to measure, unfamiliar concepts, 'biased', uneven results, difficult to determine success

A language justice framework for culturally responsive and equitable evaluation

This paper proposes an evaluation framework focusing on the importance of language justice, especially concerning practitioners of culturally responsive and equitable evaluation.

The paper defines language justice "as the right to communicate in the language in which one feels most comfortable". The paper begins with an overview of language in the evaluation literature and discusses language, power, and language justice. The authors then set out three principles and discuss how these principles might be integrated into evaluation practice. The three principles are:

- Principle 1: Language justice is integral to social justice
- Principle 2: Language is a tool for transforming thinking and empowering action
- Principle 3: Multilingual spaces embrace every perspective

<https://www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/language-justice-framework-for-culturally-responsive-equitable-evaluation>

Example resource

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9Z7TQm8UMU>

Principles- Focused Evaluation

The GUIDE



Summary

- Postpositivist designs are widely used in 'industry', quantitative techniques, quality assurance ethos, efficient to conduct, produce certification, align with government aims
- Pragmatic designs are prevalent in higher education, familiar to academics, utilize mixed methods, draw on research training
- Constructivist designs are sensitive to local cultures, involve stakeholders, encourage capacity development
- Transformative designs highlight social justice concerns, focus on principles, recognize stakeholders, foster understanding



Part 2: Workshop

Which design?

Hired as language program evaluators, you need to work as a team to determine which design is best suited to a specific language program – what does success look like?

Design choice is not a given—your job is to justify which design you would advise such that it produces outcomes and outputs that can lead to tangible improvements

There are no ‘correct answers’ – of course – our intent here is to discuss, question, and learn with each other



Prestigious international kindergarten

- Competitive market
 - Discerning, status-conscious parents
 - Very young students
 - Small classes, individual attention, frequent reports
 - Bi-lingual and immersion sessions
-
- Which design?

Online English language test preparation

- Investor owned, profit-orientated business
 - High-stakes test preparation
 - Little direct contact, plenty of numerical data
 - Frequent student turn-over
 - Difficult to alter an embedded approach and content
-
- Which design?

Cantonese and English language for migrants

The Home Affairs Department sponsors non-governmental organisations to organise language classes at district level *to facilitate integration* of members of the ethnic minorities in our community. (italics added)

Course feature

- The courses combine classroom and outside classroom activities
- Small classes to meet individual needs
- Students of all cultural backgrounds learning together
- Experienced tutors with certified qualifications
- Students with an attendance rate of 80% or above will be awarded certificates

https://www.had.gov.hk/rru/english/programmes/language_programme.htm

Which design?



Business Chinese language program

- Role of language is ‘equal’ to content of the course
- Varied language proficiencies amongst staff
- Reputation is crucial in the marketplace
- Skeptical of any benefits / improvements from a *language* program evaluation from the business community

Which design?

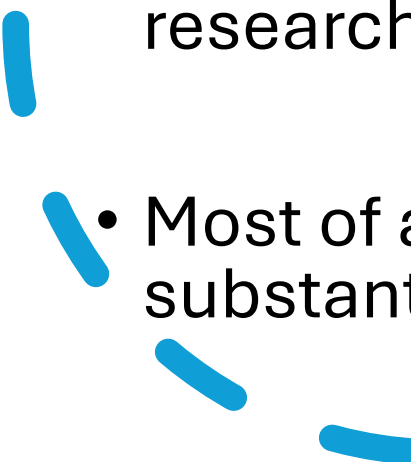
Tagalog heritage language program

- Approximately 130,000 Filipino Tagalog speakers live and work in Hong Kong, and form the largest ethnic minority here
- Community wants to preserve language and culture
- Few resources, volunteer led, no set curriculum
- Seek an evaluation to attract NGO funding, for example

Which design?

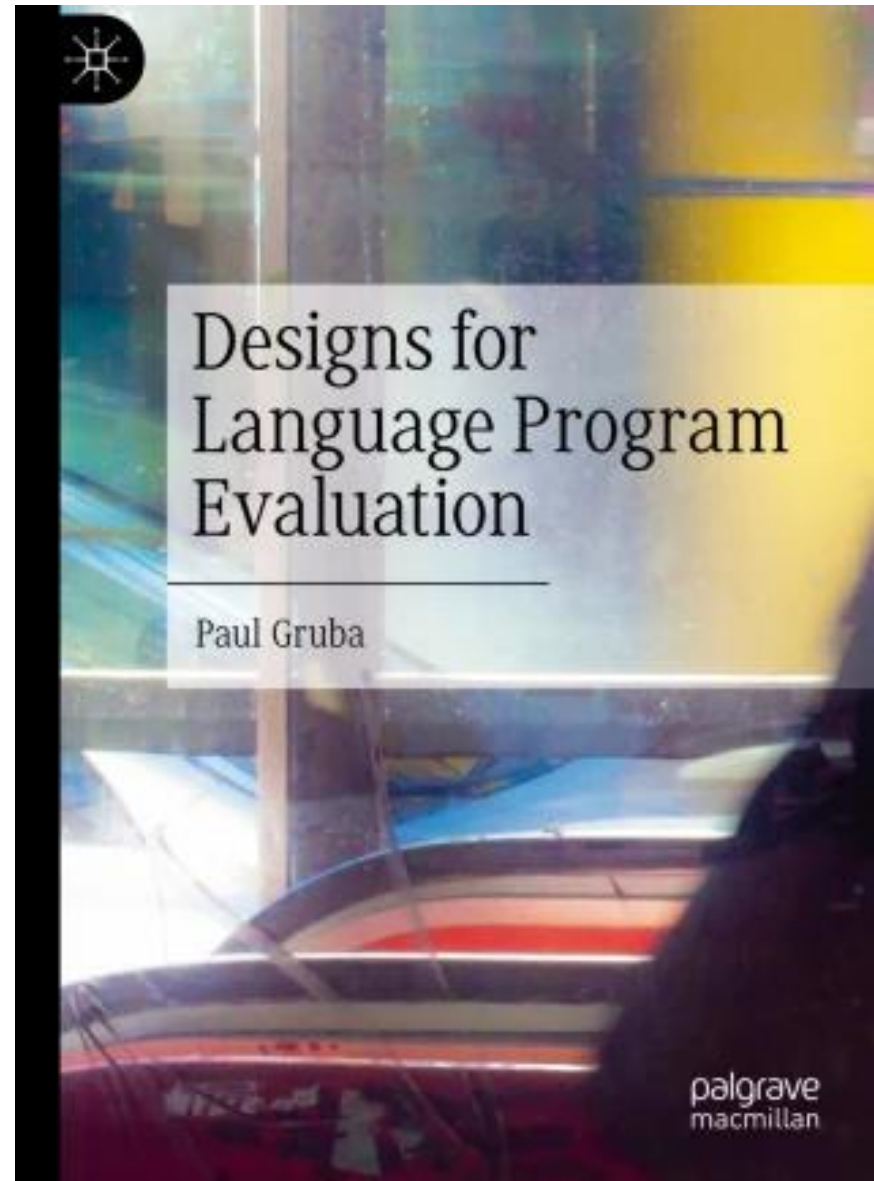


Wrapping up

- Design choices are the foundation for program evaluation
 - Ideally, discussed in collaboration with primary stakeholders
 - Design makes visible many underlying philosophies and values
 - Language Program Evaluation needs much greater development, research, and pedagogical materials
 - Most of all ... our aim is to foster program improvements, substantiate claims, ensure long-term growth and sustainability
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Many thanks

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