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Survival of the Fittest: Lessons for Program Evaluation

Reva Ramiah 2017

Overview



- Evaluation
- Evaluation in AALL Practice
- Systems Evaluation
- Framework for Systems Evaluation

Evaluation...

Evaluation is the gathering of information about any of the variety of elements that constitute educational programs, for a variety of purposes that primarily include **understanding, demonstrating, improving, and judging program value.**

Evaluation brings evidence to bear on the problems of programs, but the nature of that evidence is not restricted to one particular methodology.

(Norris, 2006 p. 579)

Traditional misconceptions of evaluation...

- Monomethodological – positivistic measurement of program outcomes in quantifiable terms
- Driven by top-down regulatory policies or mechanisms
- Focused only on holding teachers, learners, employees and others within programs accountable to a financial or minimum competency bottom line.

(Norris 2016)





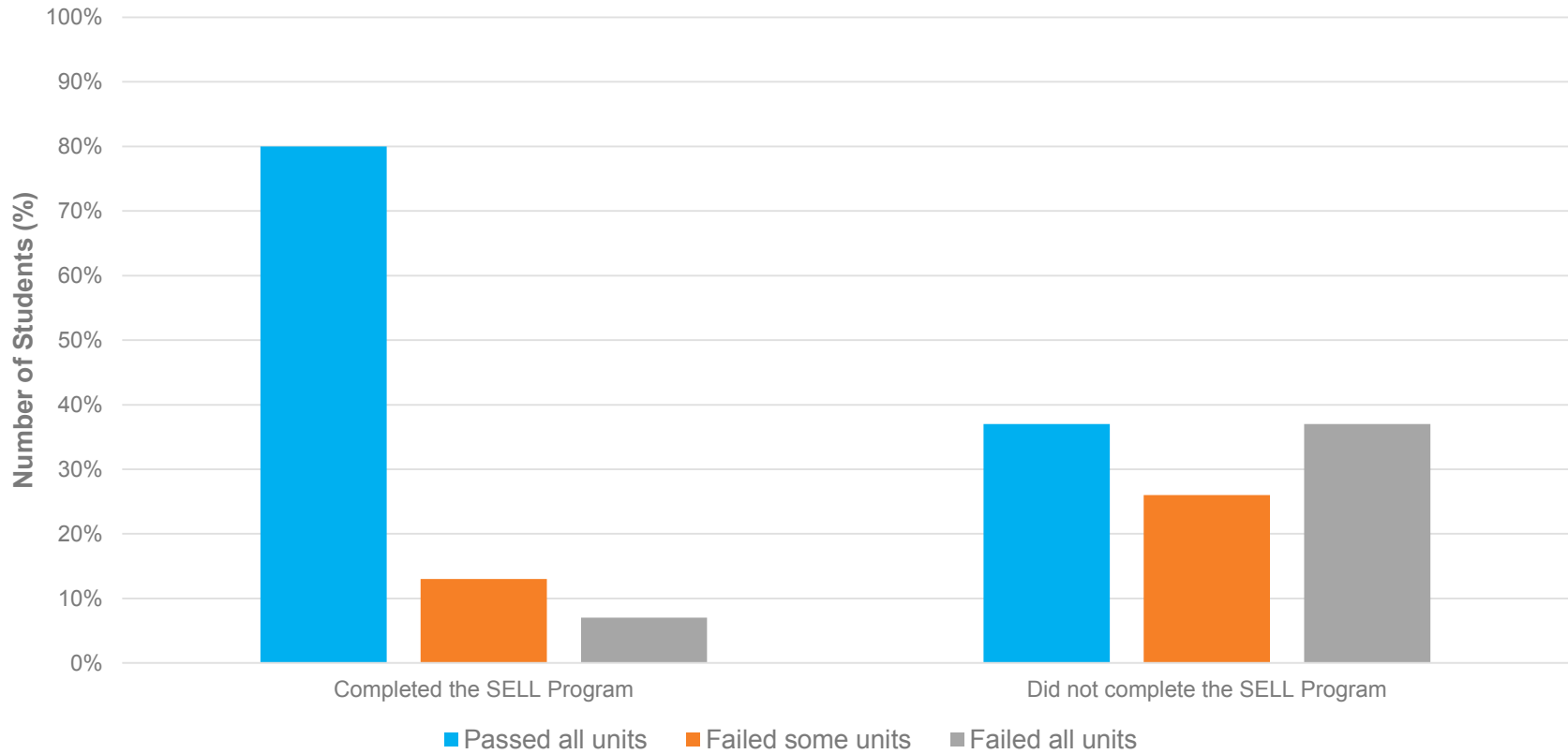
Is our concept of evaluation
so small that we feel
hemmed in...

<https://bespokeunit.com/articles/style/how-to-make-a-pocket-square>



Case study example: first impressions

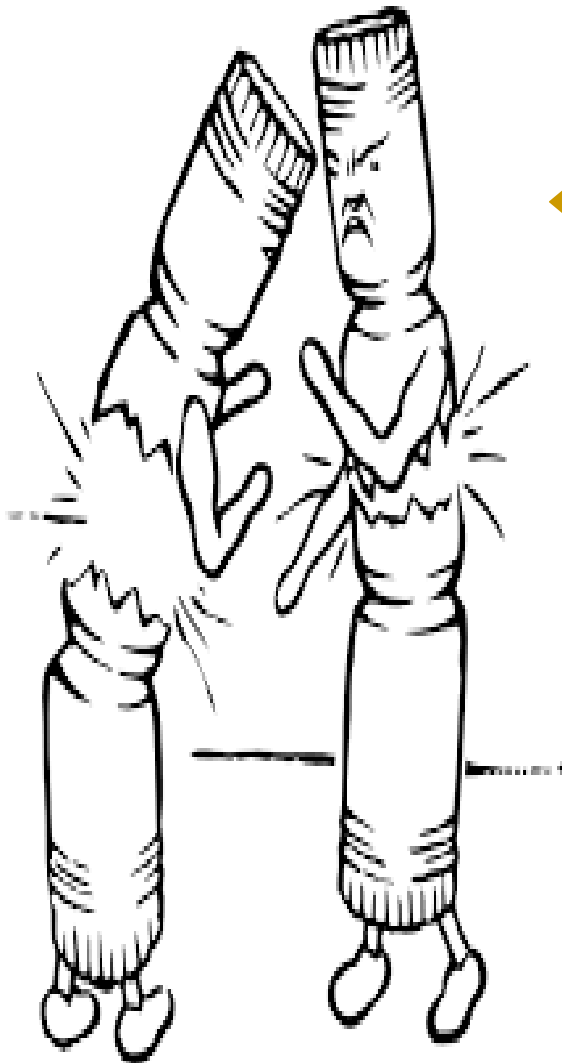
Outcomes for SELL Program Completion



SELL – Science and Engineering Language and Literacy



Paradigm Wars



Quantitative

Qualitative

Scientific	Naturalistic
Experimental	Interpretive
Summative	Descriptive

AALL Practice

Significance:

- improves the student experience
- contributes to student learning
- contributes to retention and completion
- contributes to student satisfaction



Evaluation in AALL Practice



AALL is
MESSY
business



<http://eleba.com/favorable-picket-fence-designs-in-living-room-farmhouse-designs/picket-fence-designs-in-exterior-traditional-with-colonial-revival-1940s-house-5/>

Desire



<http://www.amusingplanet.com/2014/04/city-crows-build-nests-out-of-coat.html>

Reality



<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/michael-deforges-ant-comics>

Systems Evaluation

Systems evaluation is an approach to conducting program evaluation that considers the complex factors that are inherent within the larger "structure" or "system" within which the program is embedded.

(<https://core.human.cornell.edu/research/systems/theory/>)

What is complexity theory?

A theory of change, evolution and adaptation, often in the interest of survival, and often through a combination of cooperation and competition.

(Morrison, 2006, p. 1)



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cobalt/2116701915/>

Complex Systems

- Are made up of multiple interacting agents
- Include other complex systems (nested systems)
- Are historically determined,
- Exhibit patterns of behaviour
- Develop through non-linear interactions
- Develop 'emergent' properties

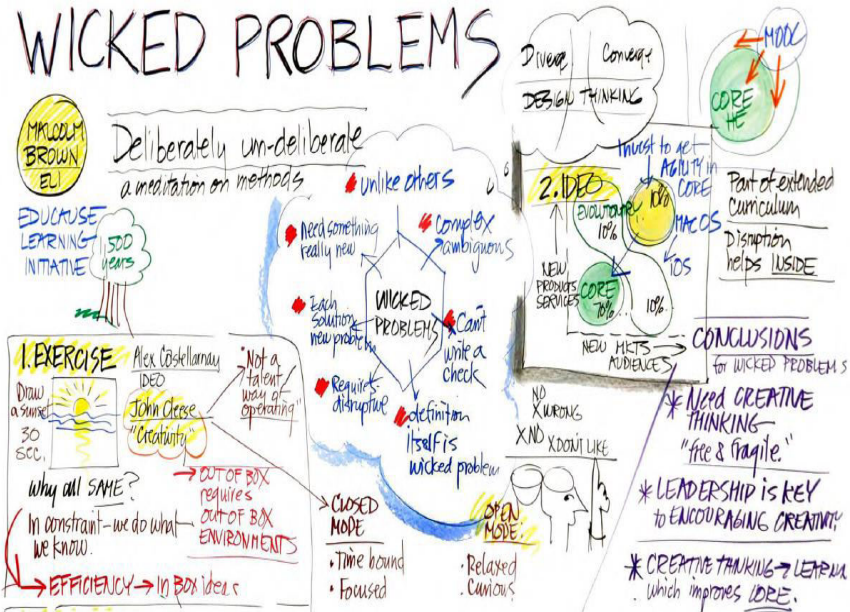
(Walton, 2015)

Common concepts across systems approaches

- Understanding of interrelationships
- Commitment to multiple perspectives
- Awareness of boundaries



Why is systems evaluation ideal for AALL work?



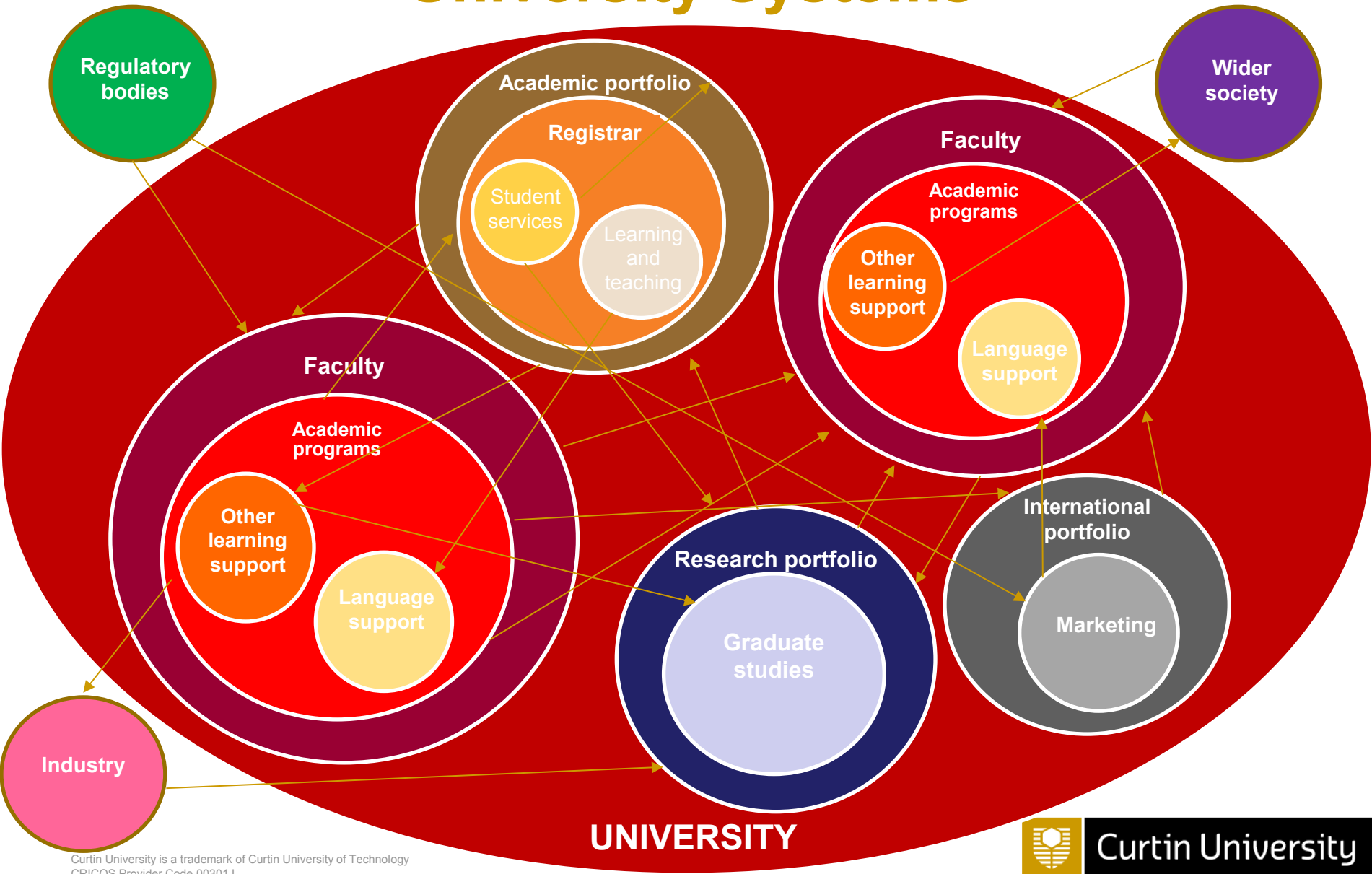
http://redarchive.nmc.org/system/files/Wicked%20Problems_0.png

'Wicked' Problem'

- No definite formulation of problem
- Continually evolves
- Solutions are better or worse
- Many causal levels

(Blackman T, Greene A, Hunter DJ, et al. cited in Walton, 2016)

University Systems



UNIVERSITY



Data collection

- Consider a view of the system over time
- Mixed methods
- Participatory methods
- Case study design

(Walton 2016)



Considerations for Analysis

- Constituent elements of the system and drawing conceptual boundaries around the system
- Interactions amongst system elements
- Local rules that govern interactions and results across system levels from interactions
- Forms of feedback that constrain or support change
- Initial conditions that affect interactions within the system
- Conditions that affect interactions within the system
- Interactions between levels of the system

(Walton 2016)



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References

- Morrison, K. (2006, November). Complexity theory and education. In *APERA Conference, Hong Kong* (pp. 28-30).
- Norris, J. M. (2016). Language Program *Evaluation*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100 (Supplement 2016) DOI: 10.1111/modl.123070026-7902/16/169-189
- Walton, M. (2016). Setting the context for using complexity theory in evaluation: boundaries, governance and utilisation. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 12(1), 73-89.
- Walton, M. (2014). Applying complexity theory: a review to inform evaluation design. *Evaluation and program planning*, 45, 119-126.



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Thank you