EVALUATING AN OPEN RESEARCH PROJECT: SOME PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM THE ROER4D PROJECT

Goodier, S.;
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Evaluating an open research project: Some practical lessons from the ROER4D project

Sarah Goodier
ROER4D Evaluation Advisor
Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching
University of Cape Town

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Outline

• The project being evaluated: ROER4D

• Evaluation framework

• Benefits and challenges of being “open”

• Discussion & conclusion
THE ROER4D PROJECT
In what ways, and under what circumstances can the adoption of OER address the increasing demand for accessible, relevant, high-quality and affordable education and what is its impact in the Global South?
GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PRACTICE and RESEARCH in developing countries by better understanding the use and impact of OER

PROJECT CLUSTERS

- OER Desktop Review
- OER Survey
- Academics’ adoption of OER
- Teacher educators’ adoption of OER
- OER adoption in one country
- OER impact studies
- Baseline educational expenditure

Research on Open Educational Resources for Development in the Global South

August 2013 - February 2017

ROER4D has 100+ researchers across 18 sub-projects in 26 countries across 16 time zones
ROER4D Objectives

1. Build an empirical knowledge base on the use and impact of OER in education
2. Develop the capacity of OER researchers
3. Build a network of OER scholars
4. Communicate research to inform education policy and practice
5. Curate output as open content
EVALUATING ROER4D
## ROER4D Key Evaluation Areas

1. Build an empirical knowledge base on the use and impact of OER in education  
2. Develop the capacity of OER researchers  
3. Build a network of OER scholars  
4. Communicate research to inform education policy and practice  
5. Curate output as open content

Using the utilization focused evaluation (UFE) framework
What is utilization focused evaluation (UFE)?

UFE is centered around intended use by intended users

- What do the users (key stakeholders) want to know?

- How will answers to the evaluation questions potentially help to improve the project?
UFE in 12 steps:

Steps are **iterative**, not linear

Utilization Focused Evaluation Framework (Adapted from Ramirez & Brodhead, 2013)
Evaluation work guided by...

• Intended use by intended users
• Propriety = a key guiding standard in evaluations
  – Is it legal?
  – Is it ethical?
  – Is it fair?
Project work guided by...

• Principle that research is only valuable if it is used
• Make open
  – by default, keep closed by exception
  – if it adds value
  – if it is ethical
  – if it is legal
Benefits of being “open”

✓ The team dynamic in the network hub is very open and inclusive. *(Transparency, Adaptability)*

✓ The open and dynamic nature of the project can also result in opportunities - new activities and outcomes related to the priority objectives will provide new windows of insight *(Adaptability)*

✓ Benefit from the other components of the evaluation work being undertaken *(Reciprocity)*
2. Develop the capacity of OER researchers

- Evaluation data showed that the initial series of webinars (run in 2014) experienced varying degrees of success:
  - Decreasing attendance over the series
  - Several barriers to attendance (e.g. timezones)
  - Researchers found supporting materials & session recordings helpful

Changes in timing and number of sessions implemented in 2015 webinars
Examples

4. Communicate research to inform education policy and practice

- Tracking analytics on a regular basis has helped to shape the project direction in terms of which communications platforms are working and what it may be good to focus on
Challenges to being “open”

✗ Evaluation work, by its nature, cannot always be conducted in the open - what can and can’t be shared openly and at what stage? (Propriety, Vulnerability, Liability)

✗ The geographical distance between the hub and many of the sub-projects - differences in time-zones, language, ICTs available (Connectivity, Temporality)
Examples

General

- Assumption of keep closed by default, make open by exception

- Many evaluation outputs have not been shared openly; different process to other project outputs

- Where possible, preparing evaluation outputs specifically for different audiences (internal/external): what level of data could be shared? e.g. processes, methods and/or high-level findings and recommendations
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION
Key points

- **Key benefit:** good fit between open and inclusive team dynamic and the participatory UFE framework

- **Key challenge:** evaluation work cannot always be conducted in the open
Take care in evaluation output production and consider carefully what can (and can’t) be shared openly and at what stage.

Propriety needs to be at the heart of Evaluation design and implementation
Thank you!

Website: http://roer4d.org

Contact author: Sarah Goodier
sarah.goodier@uct.ac.za
@SarahGoodier

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Further reading:

About ROER4D:


About evaluation:

