



One needs to know what is happening, to what extent a particular policy (or practice or initiative) is successful and why, and whether it is transferable to other countries and contexts. Evidence is needed both as a basis for decisions and to analyse their impact.

For any policy, practice or initiative, one needs to ask:

*What is it?*

*Does it work?*

*Why/how does it work?*

*How do we know it works (or not)?*

*To what extent is it transferable (can it be adapted, if not adopted, elsewhere)?*

Ideally, policy should always be based on research but it is not possible to mount a research project to produce new evidence before every policy is formulated. Research can take years, but policy decisions are often made in months or weeks (or even days!). Sometimes evaluation has to be 'quick and dirty' and has to draw on what is already available. This does not mean that such evaluation will lack rigour. Rigour includes:

*asking the 'hard' (and perhaps unpopular) questions;*

*providing evidence for any answers identified;*

*knowing the limitations of that evidence;*

*basing recommendations on evidence and not on personal opinion.*

When we look at any development in language education, do we always ask:

*Have we fully understood the context and the precedents?*

*Have we covered all the sources (surveys? research? inspection reports? etc?)*

*Are we comparing like with like?*

*Is there evidence of sustained success?*

*What are the costs involved?*

*Etc?*

Next steps

The above questions are likely to be pertinent when key issues, policies, practices or initiatives are considered at the Think Tank. They are offered as a start: colleagues will no doubt have many others in mind.

Alan Dobson

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Postscript: Other sources of evaluation

The work of the Think Tank should complement, not duplicate, any work by the European Union and the Council of Europe (including the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)), not least in the evaluation of policy and practice. One needs to take into account, for example, the series of 'language education policy profiles' of the Council of Europe on individual countries and any thematic surveys commissioned by the European Union (for example, on CLIL, special educational needs, teacher training) as well as studies produced by individual member states.