

Evaluation— Let's Try to AEIOU

Michael Simonson

The best way to find things out is not to ask questions at all. If you fire off a question, it is like firing off a gun—bang it goes, and everything takes flight and runs for shelter. But if you sit quite still and pretend not to be looking, all the little facts will come and peck around your feet, situations will venture forth from thickets, and intentions will creep out and sun themselves on a stone; and if you are very patient, you will see and understand a great deal more than a person with a gun does. (Huxley, 1982, p. 20)



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This marvelous quote from Huxley's, *The Flame Trees of Thika*, illustrates a metaphorical rationale for a major refocusing of procedures for evaluation of distance education systems.

Of course, most distance educators agree that evaluation is an important step in the process of offering high quality distance education experiences—after all, it is the final step in every instructional design model. Often however, evaluation is either omitted from the instructional design process, or the results are filed away without being used. One reason may be that evaluation models are not intuitive or as readily applied as they could be. Stufflebeam's context, input, process, and product model and Kirkpatrick's four-level model come to mind (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Stufflebeam, 2017).

An alternative model was first proposed by Fortune and Keith (1992). This approach is called the AEIOU approach for program evaluation, especially the evaluation of distance education projects. The effectiveness of AEIOU has been demonstrated a number of times (Simonson, 2005; Simonson & Schlosser, 1995a, 1995b; Sorensen, 1996; Sorensen & Sweeney, 1995, 1996, 1997; Sweeney, 1995).

The AEIOU approach is an eclectic one that uses quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It has two primary purposes as

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