Program Evaluation:

Master of Arts in English Education at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez

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MAEE Program Evaluation  

Introduction

History of the Program

The Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program was approved by the Council of Higher Education of the University of Puerto Rico in February of 1982, and implemented into the Department of English curriculum in August of 1982. Although originally named the MAT program, its name was changed to Master of Arts in English Education (MAEE) before the proposal’s final approval since a nearby university in western Puerto Rico offered a graduate degree in English with a similar acronym, so the name was changed to avoid confusion between the two programs.

Program Purpose

The purpose of the Master of Arts in English Education (MAEE) program is to provide students with superior knowledge in linguistics, language study, literature, and pedagogy and prepare them to be proficient teaching professionals in the field of English Education. According to the program proposal written in 1979, not only did the program intend to improve the “teaching of English language and literature in the primary and secondary schools and colleges of Puerto Rico”, but also provide graduates from this program with “the theoretical sophistication and practical flexibility to teach the language and its literature in the United States as a native or second language or in other countries as a teacher of English as a Second Language” (University of Puerto Rico, 1979, p. 1).

According to the program’s proposal for revision (1990), the profile of the majority of the students enrolled in the MAEE program were persons working in the teaching profession in western Puerto Rico’s public and private schools (University of Puerto Rico, 1990, p.1). Today, approximately 80% of the MAEE graduates are teaching professionals (Blau, Dayton, & Morales, 2004, p.1).

Present Structure of the Program

Even though the purpose of the MAEE program, as stated in the proposal of 1979, was to prepare students for teaching English at both the primary and secondary education levels, the
MAEE program’s current curriculum does not offer coursework which would meet the specific needs of primary school teachers (such as Children’s and Adolescent’s Literature). The MAEE program is instead structured for graduate students interested in teaching English in secondary schools or colleges, and because UPRM does not have an Education Department, all pedagogical coursework required from the MAEE program is offered by professors within the Department of English.

Amongst the university’s philosophies and objectives, the UPRM Graduate Catalogue states: “Since graduate schools are primarily responsible for the education of future college and university teachers, all graduate programs stress the importance of attaining a high level of scholarship” (University of Puerto Rico, 2003, p. 41). This may explain why the MAEE program provides no primary education instruction since it conflicts with the philosophy of the university.

**MAEE Curriculum and Practicum**

Since its establishment, the MAEE program has offered students diversified curricula and advanced coursework in the areas of linguistics, literature, and pedagogy. Students are required to take pedagogical courses in Foundations of English Education, Second Language Acquisition, Models for Teaching Literature, and Teaching English as a Second Language: Materials and Testing. In Linguistics and Literature, students select coursework in the areas of Topics and Theory of Sociolinguistics, Topics in Psycholinguistics, Psycholinguistics and the Reading Process, Theory and Practice of Composition, Studies in Literature I, II and III, and Bilingualism and Language Contact.

In addition, the MAEE program offers a limited number of teaching assistantships to qualified students who have completed one year in the program. Students awarded teaching assistantships teach freshman level English courses at UPRM. The purpose of the teaching assistantship is to expose graduate students to pedagogical experience, and apply the practical knowledge they have acquired. During the teaching assistantship, a graduate professor mentors, guides, and observes the student teacher throughout the semester, and prepares a final report for the department Director documenting their observations and the student’s progress.
MAEE Degree Requirements

In the program’s approved revision (1990), the department began offering MAEE aspirants the choice between two options for completing the program: the original Plan I (With Thesis), or the proposed Plan III (Without Thesis). Plan II (With Project Report) is not an option offered in the MAEE program. Students who choose Plan I complete 30 credits of coursework and write a thesis, while students in Plan III complete 36 credits of coursework, “and a written examination based on the material covered in their courses” (University of Puerto Rico, 1990, p. 3). Today, MAEE candidates who choose Plan III must complete 36 credits of coursework; pass three comprehensive exams in linguistics, literature, and pedagogy; and present written and oral presentations of a research paper. Although the above-mentioned provisions were not listed in the approved MAEE program revision of 1990, they are required today and the majority of the MAEE aspirants continue to opt for the original Plan I, (With-Thesis) instead.

Teacher Certification

The MAEE program does not require teacher certification, but students “will be encouraged to obtain certification before the degree is granted” (University of Puerto Rico, 1979, p. 3). However, the department does not provide this option in its suggested MAEE program of study, nor does it encourage teacher certification in the current student Graduate Program handbook (University of Puerto Rico, n.d., pp. 12-13). Any student interested in obtaining teacher certification would need to fulfill the teacher preparation coursework provided by the university’s Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division in addition to the MAEE required coursework. Doing so, the student would not be able to accomplish the MAEE program’s requirements in two years, as recommended by the OGS (University of Puerto Rico, n.d., p. 5).

Needs Assessment

According to the MAEE program revision (University of Puerto Rico, 1990), the most recent evaluation of the MAEE program was conducted five years after the implementation of the program, during the 1986/87 academic year (p. 1). However, the Office of Graduate Studies
(OGS) has no record of the evaluation, and has not received any additional documentation related to MAEE program evaluation even though the Council of Higher Education stipulated in its approval of the program, Certification #85, that periodic program evaluation be submitted to their office (Burgos, 1982, p.1).

In view of these facts, a formative evaluation of the MAEE program is urgently needed to examine and assess the program’s current educational significance. This evaluation, through student surveys and interviews, would help determine whether the program is meeting its original purpose and goals, or whether revision is needed to satisfy the desired outcomes of the current students.

Purpose and Goals

The MAEE program of the Department of English at UPRM clearly needs an objectives oriented evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation would determine the degree to which the present MAEE program is satisfying the ultimate objectives stated in both the program proposal of 1979, and the program revision of 1990. Gauging the extent to which the program’s objectives and goals are being fulfilled would help ascertain the direction the program needs to take to redefine it with tangible alternatives that enhance its operation, and suit the expectations of the students.

The formative evaluation would also determine whether the curriculum fulfills the objective of professionally preparing participant graduate students for teaching primary and secondary school grades, as stated in the original program proposal. Surveying MAEE students and defining their career interests would provide a profile of the current students in the MAEE program, and determine whether they fit the program’s objectives, or if these need to be revised.

Results of a survey by the Student Outcomes Subcommittee of the Graduate Committee during the 2003-2004 academic years indicated that 78% of the former students enrolled in the MAEE program of the Department of English selected Plan I, the thesis option over Plan III, the comprehensive exams option (Blau, Dayton, & Morales, 2004, p.1). Due to these findings, there is a need to evaluate Plan III, assess its criteria, and determine how the plan should be modified.
Interviewing and surveying students to determine their reasons for choosing Plan I over Plan III may be useful in reducing the deficiencies of Plan III.

Perhaps through evaluation, the Department of English may discover methods to recruit further enrollment in the program by offering a more attractive, competitive, and contemporary program structure. Approximately 80 students have completed the MAEE program since its establishment in 1982, and 36 students were enrolled in the MAEE program during the 2003-2004 academic year. Examining ways to increase these numbers through evaluating the current students and their career expectations will help refine the program’s objectives to fit the profile of contemporary students.

In addition, considering the high percentage of teaching professionals enrolled in the MAEE program, offering more teaching assistantships to different educational levels, and providing teacher certification to future English as Second Language (ESL) teachers within the program may be an added incentive for increasing enrollment. Surveying students’ career preferences may indicate their desire to obtain teacher certification. In order to achieve this, the MAEE curriculum and program of study would have to be modified to include teacher preparation coursework for teacher certification in Puerto Rico.

The original purpose of the Master of Arts in English Education program does not parallel the present condition of the program. The curriculum structure and student enrollment do not correspond with the program’s original objectives. The proposal for the revision of the MAEE program stated the following: “The goal of this graduate level program is to place well-trained teachers with solid preparations in linguistics, literature and pedagogy into close contact with their peers (University of Puerto Rico, 1990, p.1). Scholarship in English education is the goal of the MAEE program. The scholarship acquired in the MAEE program should enhance the teaching of English in Puerto Rico, and benefit the educational system as a whole. Through evaluating and revising the MAEE program, its goals and objectives will be contemporary, coherent, consistent, and clearly defined for its students.
Program Evaluation Plan and Implementation

Evaluation Model

The formative evaluation of the Master of Arts in English Education (MAEE) program will follow the objectives-oriented and the participant-oriented evaluation approaches. The objectives-oriented program evaluation will determine whether the program’s original goals and purposes established in 1979, implemented in 1982, and revised in 1990 by the English Department of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) are still relevant or whether they require modification to better serve the needs of present-day Masters Degree students. Information gathered through the objectives-oriented evaluation will examine the program’s original purposes, and determine the “extent to which those purposes are achieved... [or if the findings of the evaluation] could be used to reformulate the purposes of the activity” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 71).

The participant-oriented approach will observe, interview, and survey students to determine whether the MAEE program’s objectives and purposes correlate with the present program and its curriculum, and if students find them practical, appropriate, and directly related to their professional goals and aspirations. This utilization-focused evaluation follows Patton’s (1997) pattern of thinking (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 143) and may aid in enhancing the program’s efficacy, and contribute to increased enrollment in the program.

The internal evaluation will be managed by two professors in the Department of English with the support of two graduate students who have completed the course curriculum and are working on their theses. Since the evaluators are not directly affiliated with the MAEE program, its curriculum, the Graduate Program Committee, or the university’s Office of Graduate Studies (OGS), their relationship with the program and their findings should be regarded as more objective and impartial, and less biased. The graduate students, although directly related to the program, will provide valuable support to the evaluators through their experiences and knowledge of the program’s structural realities and limitations. They will assist in collecting and compiling data for the evaluation, but will not participate in summarizing findings or writing the
The utilitarian approach of the program will assess the overall effect that the program has on the majority of graduate students enrolled in the MAEE program. The evaluation will establish the students’ general standpoints, raise consciousness of any existent problems, and may influence policy or program modification for improvement. This approach follows House’s (1983) position that accentuates “the idea of maximizing happiness in society. . . . [and the] greatest good for the greatest number” (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 62).

The Tylerian approach of the evaluation will ascertain “the extent to which the objectives of a program are actually being attained. . . . [and] compare performance data with behaviorally stated objectives” as defined by the evaluators, and based on the program’s objectives (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 72). The evaluators will define and determine the behaviors that validate the objectives, and corroborate the presence of these behaviors while observing, interviewing, and surveying graduate students. The behaviors, responses, and data that are collected will be compared to the program’s original objectives and detailed in its final report.

*The Stakeholders*

The principal stakeholders are the present students enrolled in the MAEE program of UPRM. The current students have a direct association, interest, and stake in the present program and are the primary consumers most affected by the program. Reineke (1991) stressed the need to actively involve stakeholders early on in an evaluation (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 54). For this reason, the principal stakeholders will participate actively in the program evaluation throughout its duration. The participation of the two graduate students in the evaluation will promote more comfort for the students to complete the surveys with more opportunity to reflect their personal viewpoints, suggestions, attitudes and values impartially.

The Department of English and the MAEE program professors and administrators are also stakeholders of the program since they are the proprietors, policy makers, and practitioners of the program. Ultimately, any modifications designed for the program would affect all the
stakeholders, and program revision would be determined by the administrators of the MAEE program, and the Graduate Program Committee members.

**Evaluation Questions**

After examining the objectives of the program, interviewing graduate students, and identifying anticipated behaviors, the evaluators will have sufficient criteria to compile specific evaluation questions, along with the standards required to satisfy the objectives.

The student survey will consist of questions related to the objectives listed in the MAEE program and will ask students open and closed-ended questions regarding the following criteria:

1. The student’s motive for enrolling in the MAEE program.
2. The teaching level (primary, secondary, college) sought.
3. Students’ professional expectations after completing the program.
4. The degree of satisfaction achieved with required pedagogical courses in the program.
5. The practicality of the program to teach English as a Second Language (ESL).
6. Students’ degree of satisfaction to teach ESL in the school systems of Puerto Rico.
7. The degree of value the teaching assistantships offer in relation to students’ professional goals.
8. The choice of Plan I (With Thesis) or Plan III (With Comprehensive Exam), and the reasons for their choices.
9. The need for Primary and Secondary Teacher Certification in the program.
10. The degree of technology knowledge provided for teaching in the classroom.

**Evaluation Methods**

Each specific objective of the MAEE program will be examined during the evaluation. The researchers will utilize Sanders and Cunningham’s (1973, 1974) approach that considers both logical and empirical methods to evaluate the goals of the program (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 73). The logical approach will assemble qualitative data through observing the structure and activities of the pedagogical courses in the program, and exploring the relationship, rationale, limitations, discrepancies and applicability of the objectives to the
curriculum of the present program. The empirical approach will collect quantitative data through personal interviews and surveys to establish the value each objective has for the student within the program.

The evaluation will be conducted in three stages. The first stage will consist of 15-minute interviews with the 40 MAEE students enrolled in the program to compile quantitative and qualitative data to assess and define students’ professional goals, attitudes, values, behavior and viewpoints about the program and its curriculum, and their understanding of the program’s objectives.

The second stage will consist of collecting qualitative data through the researchers’ noted observations of student behavior and teacher interaction while attending the graduate courses in pedagogy and English education. The evaluators will assist one session of class for each of the four required courses in the program. The education and pedagogy courses utilized for collecting data will be: Foundations of English Education (EING 6005), Second Language Acquisition (INGL 6020), Models for Teaching Literature (INGL 6009), and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Materials and Testing (INGL 6010). Total session observations will sum to 12 hours of in-class observation (three hours for each individual course).

The third stage of the evaluation will consist of administering anonymous surveys to all the graduate students to compile empirical data, and corroborate the stakeholders’ judgments and values in relation to the program and its curriculum. The survey will contain open and closed-ended questions and will be administered by the two graduate student assistants. These surveys are intended to expand upon the findings discovered from the brief interviews and the in-class observations performed in stages one and two.

Through observations, interviews, and surveys, the evaluators will have sufficient data to analyze and demonstrate the values and perspectives of the participants (the stakeholders) to present the realities of the program, and identify any discrepancies that exist between the program, its performance, and its outcomes. These findings would provide a practical and informative report with both qualitative and quantitative data to determine whether the program’s
objectives require modification, or if they satisfactorily serve the needs of contemporary students enrolled in the MAEE program of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez.

**Required Resources**

A total of four persons will participate in the program evaluation. The evaluation will be managed by two evaluators, and assisted by two graduate students who have completed all but their thesis in the program. The duration of data collection and report findings will take nine months, with sufficient time allotted for thorough evaluation and presentation of the findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline and Tasks</th>
<th>Staff and Total Hours</th>
<th>Budget</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January to March, 2005</td>
<td>2 Researchers @ $50/hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 minute interviews with 40 graduate students</td>
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<td>April, 2005</td>
<td>2 Researchers @ 50/hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class observations of four 3-hour classes</td>
<td>12 hours</td>
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<td>May, 2005</td>
<td>2 Assistants @ $10/hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>One-hour surveys given to 40 graduate students (10 students/hour)</td>
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<tr>
<td>July to August, 2005</td>
<td>2 Researchers @ $50/hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Analysis and Report Writing</td>
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<td>$1000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Printer Ink and Photocopies</td>
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<td>September, 2005</td>
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<td>Final Report to policy makers, administrators, and Graduate MAEE Program Committee members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Program Evaluation Cost</td>
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<td>$2800</td>
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Data Collection Plan and Reporting Results

*Program Implementation Assessment*

The evaluator will collect qualitative and quantitative data for a mixed method evaluation of the program. Through the analysis of a combination of results in each phase of the evaluation, the evaluator will be able to build upon the information provided by the participants to determine the necessary criteria for each subsequent phase. This conforms with the iterative design suggested by Caracelli and Greene (1997) where the evaluator uses “different methodologies, from different paradigms, in sequence with the results of each informing the next stage of data collection and interpretation” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 320). The mixed method iterative design will improve the validity of the findings, and assure the involvement of the participants (the stakeholders) during all stages of the evaluation.

Students will be interviewed during the first stage of the evaluation to collect quantitative and qualitative data compiled from the following questions:

1. Why did the student choose the MAEE program at UPRM?
2. What does the student perceive as the strengths of the program?
3. How satisfied is the student with the program?
4. Which option did the student choose- Plan I (Thesis), or Plan III (Non-Thesis)?
5. Why did the student choose that option?
6. What is the student’s perception of the option not chosen?
7. What does the student perceive as the major objectives of the program?
8. Does the student feel that these perceived objectives are being fulfilled by the program?
9. What are the student’s professional or academic goals upon completion of the program?
10. Does the student believe that Primary and/or Secondary Teacher education and certification should be offered within the MAEE Program?

After responding to the above-mentioned questions, the evaluators will ask the graduate
students to evaluate the program’s objectives stated in both the initial 1979 proposal, and its 1981 revision. Using the Likert-scale items of measurement (agree – strongly disagree), the students will assess their attitudes toward the program’s objectives and follow-up with a qualitative explanation to justify their reasons.

The objectives that will be addressed and measured quantitatively are listed in the Department of English, Master of Arts in Teaching Proposal (1979), and are the following:

A. To raise the level of English skills of the Puerto Rican [elementary and secondary] students (p. 4).

B. To increase the supply of exceptionally well-trained English teachers, creating a core of such teachers who will be able to direct other teachers and the system in general toward solutions to our specific problem (p. 7).

C. To provide a basis for cooperative effort between the University of Puerto Rico and the Department of Public Instruction (p. 11).

D. To further improve undergraduate education at RUM (Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez) by the presence of the graduate program (p. 12).

E. To increase the fund of theoretical and empirical knowledge of language analysis and language acquisition in the Puerto Rican context (p. 14).

The interviews with the current MAEE graduate students will help to establish a profile of the present MAEE graduate students, determine their general attitudes towards the program, and aid in identifying and defining the anticipated behaviors that validate the program’s objectives during the second phase of the evaluation.

In phase two, the site visit and observation, the researchers will visit each of the graduate classrooms in the following education and pedagogy courses: Foundations of English Education (EING 6005), Second Language Acquisition (INGL 6020), Models for Teaching Literature (INGL 6009), and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Materials and Testing (INGL 6010). The evaluators will be “complete observer[s], making no effort to blend in with the group, but instead focusing on carefully observing the verbal and nonverbal cues of the participants”
(Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 338). During observation, the evaluators will record detailed notes of what they see is occurring in the classroom. They will note the context of instruction and its relationship to each course’s objectives; the behaviors, attitudes, and interaction between the students and the teacher; the dynamics of the group, and the general atmosphere of the class. This qualitative information will help the evaluator corroborate the program’s objectives to the observed behaviors, and uncover any common themes that are present within the courses.

The final phase of evaluation will consist of a quantitative survey distributed to all MAEE graduate students based on the responses, behaviors, and themes presented in the two previous phases. So as to assure the opportunity for students to reflect their personal viewpoints, suggestions, attitudes, and values impartially and anonymously, two graduate students (who have completed the course curriculum and are working on their theses) will administer the questionnaire to the students. The survey will ask students to rate the program, its specific objectives, the coursework, and the program’s overall applicability to students’ professional goals using the Likert 5-point scale, and multiple-choice items. This descriptive analysis will supply quantitative data to corroborate and validate the information provided in the first two phases of the evaluation.

**Reporting Procedures**

Once the data has been collected, compiled, and analyzed by the evaluators, the initial findings will be presented to the six members of the departmental Graduate Committee in an informal meeting. A description of the evaluation’s purpose, goals, plan, methodology, data collection, and findings will be narrated to the committee, and the committee members’ comments, recommendations, and feedback will be noted. In this way, the evaluators and the committee will have the opportunity to join forces, and establish a consensus for structuring, organizing, and presenting the final report to the department faculty.

After meeting with the Graduate Committee members, the evaluators will prepare their final report acknowledging the Graduate Committee members’ recommendations. The final
A comprehensive color-coded report with a brief executive summary included in the report; and one executive abstract, a condensed version of the report “that contains major findings and recommendations” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 384). This way, faculty members have the option of reading the evaluation in its entirety or reviewing the evaluation’s focus through the executive summary. Copies of both formats will be made available in the Department of English for review prior to the presentation date.

The final report will be presented by the evaluators to the entire Department of English faculty, and complemented with visual slides. The report will describe and narrate the evaluation process to the faculty, and convey the overall findings and recommendations. All positive findings will be reported prior to the negative ones, as recommended by Fitzpatrick, Worthen, & Sanders (2004). The presentation will be “communicated as carefully, sensitively, and professionally as possible” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 395), with the opportunity for informal discussion during the presentation. The unconstrained style of presentation will allow members of the audience the opportunity to interact informally with questions and answers, and encourage increased awareness and reception to the recommended program modifications.

### Implementation of Report Recommendations

The faculty of the Department of English will vote on the recommendations provided by the evaluators after the findings have been presented. The evaluators, as integral members of the faculty will vote with the faculty on accepting or rejecting amendments, modifications, or reformulations to the program. Majority vote will determine the administration of any program adjustments.

### Assessment of the Evaluation

All phases of the evaluation will adhere to the AEA Guiding Principles for Evaluators, standards that uphold “systematic inquiry, professional development, honesty, respect, and concern for society” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 449). This is intended to strengthen the evaluators’ and the evaluation’s authority and relevance. In addition, prior to the
report presentation, a summative metaevaluation will be conducted by an external source to review, monitor, and verify the evaluation design, instruments and procedures, and judge the final report. This will assure that the evaluation is constructed competently, documented accurately, and presented successfully.

The original purpose of the MAEE program of UPRM does not parallel its present condition. The formative evaluation of the MAEE Program at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez is intended to enlighten, inform, and increase the awareness of the faculty about the issues that directly affect its principal stakeholders, the graduate students, to produce a more current, coherent, consistent, and clearly defined policy.
References


University of Puerto Rico, Department of English. (n.d.). Graduate program. (Available from the Department of English, University of Puerto Rico, PO Box 9265, Mayagüez, PR 00681-9265)

