Joint efforts toward better evaluations are definite contributions to the learning process, according to Louis E. Raths, professor at New York University and executive director of the Bureau for Intercultural Education.

AS A TEACHER, my primary concern in evaluation is not so much to find out “How am I doing?” as it is to have a sound basis for guiding what I do. It is both, of course. I do want to know about the changes which take place in my students, but these changes are never absolute end-points. The information I seek will give me evidence about past progress, but it must also help me and my students to decide about next steps.

My work brings me into rather close contact with older boys and girls. Much of the curriculum that I teach is not of vital concern to them at the moment. Pressure from me, from their parents, from the whole culture, including their age-mates, and professional colleagues, coerces them into sporadic attempts to achieve aims or goals that are initially mine. As time passes the impact of the several pressures tends to make my students forget many of their own aims or to become indifferent to them, which is to say that these young people tend to lose their purposes.

Present Living vs. Long-Term Goals

If I am not careful this “either-or” situation will dominate nearly all of my teaching activities and particularly so with respect to evaluations. Should I look only for that evidence which bears directly on my purposes and, if students object, should I imply that the only other alternative is to scrap my beliefs and pay attention only to their “immature” wishes, desires and goals? I know that it isn’t “either-or,” but all too often I find myself thinking like that. In my heart I feel sure that some plan can be made which will take into consideration my concerns and those of the students too.

As a rule I try to arrange the beginning sessions of my classes in ways which will make it easier for the students to do some planning with each other and with me. I ask them to share some of their professional or vocational plans. Some students write autobiographies. In their writing they tell about their childhood, their schooling, their work experiences, their travel, their friendships, something about their present responsibilities and quite often, something about any serious concerns or problems which now bother them. As I meet with them individually I get to know more about their reading, their interests, and some deeply cherished purposes.

Joint Examination of Purposes

In the opening sessions I try to indicate the scope of the course. Many
topics and problems are listed which could be emphasized in our work together. The students add to this list. Sometimes it is so lengthy that a classification of items seems desirable. I am always called upon for my opinions as to the importance of the several categories and as to the best sequence. At this point some students rather timidly ask if they have to do what all the others do. When they find out that they may pursue their own problems, they are not at all disturbed by the requirement that they prepare some plans to guide them in their work and that I go over those plans with them at the earliest possible moment.

I have gone on at some length to describe some of the procedures of the early days of the year. I do this because it is in these activities that I try to show my interest, my concern, in the lives of my students. If I am successful in communicating to them my sincere concern about their problems and purposes, much of the difficulty about evaluations has been overcome. Let us look into this a bit further.

If purposes are really made clear to the students, if I can help to clarify them, if students are almost continually thinking about them, then it is relatively simple for them and for me to recognize their progress in achieving them. Especially so when over and over again I say to them, “How would you know that you are making progress along this line?” As they give more and more examples of what progress would mean, these examples become landmarks or guideposts of successful efforts.

This way of doing things is consistent with Dollard’s description of the learning process which states that: (1) the learner wants something; (3) the learner notices something; (3) the learner does something; and (4) the learner gets something out of his efforts. Thus my efforts toward better evaluations are contributions to the learning process.

**Teacher Clarifies Purposes**

I try to do the same thing with respect to my own purposes as a teacher. I write them on the board. I try to clarify them. I try to give examples of achievement of those aims. As students see more clearly what my aims are, they are in a better position to judge them and to make progress in aims that I set for them, as well as in those goals they have set for themselves. It is part of my job as a teacher to indicate these purposes of mine and to make them clear and to carry on some evaluation with respect to them.

In my work with students I bring to their attention various tests and examinations which relate to our purposes. I describe these instruments and ask for opinions about their worth as evidence of achievement. Where they represent acceptable evidence of achievement my students show little or no reluctance in taking them. These tests supplement the record of actual work done. They help the students and they help me—not as the index of achievement—but as additional evidence from which to draw conclusions.

**Diagnosis Important**

If I concentrate all of my attention on so-called progress charts, I may lose sight altogether of a very important point in a more complete program of
evaluation: diagnosis. In my training as a teacher I have come to know many of the more common stumbling blocks or obstacles to learning. I need to keep a weather eye open for the symptoms of these barriers to learning. My eyes and ears must be sensitive to frustrated emotional needs; to the signs of anxiety about personal problems; to portents of inadequate preparation or lack of skill in the tool requirements of the work; to overloaded schedules; to poor health; to any evidence that points to economic conditions militating against promise of success; to confusion about goals; to neglect of work and effort for a variety of reasons.

I do all this as a part of my evaluations, not because it is uniquely the teacher's responsibility to do it. I do so because it is my job to facilitate learning and if these are barriers to learning, it is my professional responsibility to do what I can to help the students overcome them.

**New Techniques Needed**

Sometimes, as the evidence accumulates, I see that our curriculum might actually be the source of some of these problems. With other teachers I can bring these matters up for discussion in faculty meetings. Some of us on the staff might be working at cross-purposes and under these circumstances students may become as confused as we are. Evaluation of the curriculum is often important because it contributes to the morale of teachers and students.

In my own work I have made extremely little use of the resources of parents or employers in efforts to evaluate the work of our schools. I do not yet know how to do this very well but I hope to get help on it in the future. In much the same way I have been handicapped in appraising the work of a group of students. I am still not clear about ways of evaluating group dynamics. I do use sociometric devices and solicit the opinions of students about our group practices, but I am not at all satisfied with my efforts to evaluate this important part of every teacher's work.

Students seem to appreciate the close attention I give to their oral and written expression. As I notice strength or weaknesses in thinking, as I raise questions about certain values that are explicit or implicit in the expression, as I challenge or explore the ideas there put forth, I seem to be making a contribution to an on-going process of evaluation which brings the student and me into closer relationship and into closer agreement about present status and next steps as these pertain to his goals and to mine.