Merit Rating: A Symposium

Nearly a year ago, ASCD's pamphlet on the controversial topic of teacher rating made its appearance. As a follow-up, three educators were asked to prepare a statement giving their frank reactions to the viewpoint expressed in this booklet. Susan Lacy is director of elementary education, Department of Public Instruction, Olympia, Washington; John L. Miller is superintendent of schools, Great Neck, New York; and Philip Wardner is past president, Department of Classroom Teachers, NEA, and is a member of the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, NEA.

Young Principal Faces Rating

SUSAN LACY

YOUNG PRINCIPAL was suddenly confronted by a request from the superintendent to rate the teachers in her building. She approached it with great fear and concern. How could she rate Carl, Grace, Mary and the rest of her fellow workers? They were friends. They were all anxious to be good teachers. They liked each other.

So Young Principal looked in all the books and articles on rating. After studying and thinking through these ideas, she finally decided on a check list which consisted of about one hundred specific items to be checked: Neatness of appearance, pleasing voice, neatness of classroom, window shades and on and on. After struggling over this list in an effort to rate each teacher, she began to see that she could check each person, but what for? The really important things about each were not listed. Did you see Mary's glad eyes when Billy's mother came to help with the pet exhibit? Did you hear Carl say the right thing when Nick thought he had let the team down by missing that long fly? When Jane's mother was ill did you know that Grace took special care to give Jane security? Did you notice how often Carl respected Billy's talent for organization and minimized his academic troubles by providing additional help and understanding? How could she check these fine people against a superficial list? She couldn't!

Teachers Are Asked To Help

Finally Young Principal asked the teachers for help in working out the problem. They didn't know how either, but helped examine many different plans. They compromised on a combination of ideas and each teacher worked with Young Principal on his own rating. Young Principal knew this was the only way she could feel honest, comfortable and happy with her fellow workers and keep a mutual warm feeling of trust and friendship.

This group of teachers had always worked together on its common prob-
lems such as reading, social studies, guidance, mental health, conferences with parents and other problems as they developed. Three of these teachers gave leadership to regular parent group discussions with the parents of the children in their own classes. They needed help in organizing an evaluation plan for themselves. They needed help in evaluating their study meetings, conferences, attendance at professional meetings, visits to other schools, extension classes, summer sessions and classroom experimentation. How effective was each activity as they worked toward their objectives for themselves and their school? They did have the ability to work together, they had faith in each other, they liked each other and were happy working together. Young Principal knew that each teacher was growing in ability to put these understandings into practice.

Good school leadership has long recognized the need for evaluating the schools and the teachers. When evaluations are developed by all concerned a long step towards mutual understanding and respect has been taken. Much working together must be done in planning and exploring ideas. Respect for and confidence in each other must be developed. Faith and integrity of purpose must be present. Then sound evaluation which stimulates growth on the part of all may develop with success.

Effective evaluation is continuous and is a part of the total planning of the objectives of the school. Like all other aspects of the educational program, teacher evaluation must stand the test of whether or not it improves the quality of experiences for the boys and girls in the school.

So Young Principal and her Staff are helped to broaden their understandings and ways of working by the work of the group which developed Better Than Rating.

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**Advancement Through Rating**

JOHN L. MILLER

I FIND myself in substantial agreement with the viewpoint that teachers should be evaluated rather than rated. We have to remember, however, that teaching is an art as well as a science; that the impact of teacher on pupil is discernible; and that evaluation, even though based on as many objective measures as possible, in the final analysis represents the best judgment of an individual or individuals. We have to remember, too, that a teacher is subject to a kind of evaluation from the day he enters training until he retires —by his college teachers, by the employing administrator, by his peers, by students and by parents.

The basic question is whether evaluation should bear any relationship to compensation. It is not enough to say that compensation based on evaluation will undermine teacher morale. After all, we have been for years trying to convince the lay public that teachers are meritorious as a group and should be paid accordingly. Lay evaluations...
of us have at times been at variance with our own evaluations of ourselves. And can we escape a certain amount of devaluation when we know that there are teachers who owe their jobs to religion, politics, localism or graft? And, incidentally, are such teachers "to be taken where they are" and worked with?

Creative Teachers Deserve Advancement

It has been my observation that the public is willing to pay high salaries for creative teaching but that it is unwilling to assume that all of us are equally creative as teachers. The result has been that we have failed many times to get the support needed for a sound educational program; that there has been a diminution of the esteem of the public for teaching; and that much of that incentive which characterizes a free enterprise system has gone out of education. Incidentally, it is not fair to pupils that the truly creative teacher can gain salary advancement only by transferring to an administrative position for which he may be neither trained nor qualified. Many cases can, of course, be cited of teachers who have excelled in administration.

If we as members of the teaching profession are to enjoy professional prestige, if we are to get increased support, and if we are to build incentive into teaching, we have, I believe, to consider unemotionally the possibilities of relating evaluation to compensation. We have to try to find ways of evaluating as fairly and as objectively as possible. Teacher evaluation of self, teacher evaluation by his peers, administrator evaluation of the teacher and of the growth of that teacher's pupils—all of these and others have to be combined to the end that pupils may profit from the service of the teacher whose performance or impact on pupils has been found to be superior. We should be studying ways of improving these methods to the maximum extent possible. At the same time we should be studying ways to protect the teacher from any abuse of the evaluative process by administrator, board of education, parents or community.

The principle of cooperative social action is a sound one. But what is the "group"? Is it just the teachers and administrators working together, or is it the teacher-pupil-administrator group, or the teacher-pupil-administrator-parent group? And what is the responsibility of leadership if it appears that the teacher group is operating contrary to the best interests of other groups or of the whole group which includes pupils, teachers, administrators, parents and citizens who are not parents?

On the score of discipline much could be said about the discipline which flows from the pressure of public opinion and about the fact that we have inadequately structured the profession so that teacher opinion would serve to discipline teachers.

Designated Leaders Have Responsibility

The section entitled "Each Professional Person a Leader" deals inadequately with the leadership role of the board of education and of the school administrator. Presumably the community group has, through the democratic process, chosen leaders—the
board of education members. And presumably this group—the board—has as democratically chosen a leader—the superintendent of schools—and charged him with certain responsibilities. If decisions of the teacher-group affected only members of that group, the superintendent might let leadership pass from one person to another. As decisions of the teacher-group affect pupils and parents and community, however, he must discharge his leadership responsibilities.

The section entitled “Better Purposes Evolve Through Group Decision” might be extended to cover teacher rating of pupil performance. In other words, it may be that such ratings produce in the pupil emotional overtones or undesirable attitudes. However, there is no evidence that teacher rating of pupils produces on pupils more emotional overtones or undesirable attitudes than would result through an absence of such rating.

This statement is, of course, consistent with the idea that we take pupils where they are. There is a difference between the pupil and the teacher, however: the latter is paid to render a service. If he is not rendering such service, is in fact incapable of making “a worthy contribution,” group interest (the interest of pupils, teachers, parents) may demand that he be removed from his position. Moreover, to contend that rating of the teacher on tenure is impractical and at the same time to stress the value of the preemployment rating is not consistent.

Cooperative Evaluation or Subjective Rating?

PHILIP WARDNER

THE pamphlet, Better Than Rating, prepared by a committee of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, is timely. Released in December, 1950, it comes at a time when the nation is acutely sensitive to the key importance of our public schools in maintaining the ideals and values of our American way of life. All over the country, communities, as well as the forty-eight states, have made and are continuing to make efforts to increase financial support for public education. Much of the increased appropriation of money for schools has been used to counteract inroads made by current inflation upon the purchasing power of teachers’ salaries.

It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that, under the guise of improving instruction, certain proposals are frequently advanced which are designed to operate as cost controls, to open the schools to political manipulation, and to destroy the influence of local and state associations in maintaining professional standards. Such proposals generally take the form of some type of “merit rating.”

This pamphlet points out the dangers in such trends in personnel policies, clearly defines the issues involved, establishes the philosophy upon which democratic education is founded, and designates the kind of human relationships within the school and commun-
ity which will bring to American boys and girls an education that will enable them to perpetuate a free and humane society in the years to come.

Does the reward-or-punishment provision implicit in most rating plans help the individual to make his greatest effort toward professional growth? Do we, in a democracy, want a type of authoritarian evaluation which guides individuals into unquestioning obedience and submissiveness to persons superior in status? Do rating plans, because of their very nature, cause tensions and anxiety? What do teachers and others say about these issues? These and many other searching questions are examined. The pamphlet asks what purposes traditional rating devices are supposed to serve, what is the validity of these purposes and the reliability of the devices used to achieve them.

The writers state that "Democracy rests upon a belief in the essential equality, worth and dignity of the individual person." Respect for the integrity of the individual requires that there be opportunity for him to secure his basic physiological, social and emotional needs. Any institution functioning in a democratic society must encourage understanding use of the method of intelligence. "All persons who are to be affected by a decision should participate in making the decision."

Chapters IV and V analyze current teacher-rating practices and their effects upon the school program. This section of the report deserves the careful study of everyone engaged in education at any level. Not only are the violations of democratic principles inherent in the subjectivity of all rating plans and their susceptibility to abuse revealed, but their unreliability is made painfully evident.

Not only are rating systems highly subjective, but they are shown here not even to measure that which the rater wishes to have measured. Furthermore, the combined intelligence, practical wisdom and good purpose of faculties are frequently stilled and made inoperative by rating systems of all types. The child is lost sight of as the product of the whole school, tending to become the victim of the tensions set up in the climate of insecurity and anxiety, like that of a disturbed family situation, in which the individual teacher works and lives.

The final chapter outlines the principles and some of the processes by which there may be developed an adequate organization for a continuing evaluation of the school program in the setting of its own community. Principles which are psychologically sound, socially feasible and professionally acceptable are outlined, together with suggested techniques for putting them into practice.

This last section of *Better Than Rating* deserves the attentive consideration of all who are engaged in instructional work in the schools; but especially is it recommended to those teachers and administrators who are engaged in the activities of our professional organizations. It will particularly recommend itself to the Department of Classroom Teachers, NEA, whose committees for the past five years have been working on the twin problems of the evaluation of school programs and the improvement of instruction, and whose conclusions parallel quite closely those of the authors of this excellent pamphlet.

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