

## Whither Evaluation?

**Cooperative evaluation based upon questions and values oriented to American ideals in a climate of support and mutuality, using new and old scientific procedure, can make teaching a profession and bring a higher quality of education to our children and youth.**

**A**NYONE reading current dailies and periodicals is not quite sure whether or not the schools are recipients of a process of thoughtful evaluation or are being used as scapegoats by a confused and angry people who are also fearful and dismayed. The best response for educators may be to seek to *ask the right questions* about the quality of experience our children have in our schools. We can take pride in the great social experiment of the American Public School dedicated (at least verbally) to the task of arranging learning conditions so that *all boys and girls* may make genuine progress toward achieving their potentials and thus live with greater happiness and contribute more constructively to society. This experiment is unique in the annals of man's history. It was and is a bold conception. Our ideal of concern for individual and group welfare has never wavered. Our ways of achieving the ideal may have fallen short. Can we afford to give up? Can we afford to panic and change our basic value system in regard to fostering the individual growth potential of all? As an antidote to some of the pressures presently exerted we may find

it profitable to reread Mann's *School for Barbarians* or Ziemer's *Education for Death*.

We cannot, however, ignore the particular pressure of today, nor can we be satisfied with the quality of education we now provide. We need to be forthright about the gap that exists between the daily classroom experiences of most children and our best hypotheses of what might contribute to a higher quality of the educational experience. For example, the relationship of feelings to learning is well established. Jersild in a poignant paragraph describes the present situation.

We contribute to the growing child's isolation and loneliness whenever we, in effect, tell him that we do not wish to know how he feels. Yet there is much in the school life of both boys and girls that would make even the sturdiest child express intense emotion if the pressures against it were not so strong. In some schools, it is true, there is much gaiety and laughter, but painful emotions are often squelched. At the elementary school level, for example, millions of children feel the sting of failure, the lash of sarcasm, and the pain of rejection. There are thousands who, week after week, know the torture of helpless rage. If all these children, and others who encounter countless hurts—some deliberately and maliciously imposed, some that arise in the natural course of life's struggle—if all these were free to cry, as well they might, there would often be a

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flood of tears at school. But such signs of distress would be unseemly. It is better for the sake of decency and order, to keep up a pretense that all is well. And by a strange irony, which persists in our culture from a more primitive time, it is more appropriate, if one is deeply moved, to show it through signs of anger (sarcastic laughter, for example) than through grief and affection. An outpouring of feeling would be frightening to teachers who have rigidly schooled themselves never to let the hurts and tender emotions of their own lives show in public.<sup>1</sup>

### What Questions Shall We Ask?

Is it not possible that we could best serve education today by concentrating on asking the most pertinent and basic questions that we can and then seeking the answers in the most scientific way that we know? On every hand now there is a rush to add science and mathematics to high school graduation requirements. Perhaps this should be done and quickly; however, there are questions that need to be asked and answered that are more basic to the problem of developing dedicated creative people who will pursue scientific explorations into the unknown. One series of questions might well pertain to our present offerings. What goes on in the typical classroom today? What opportunities are given youth to connect their classroom work with the industrial, medical, and other research laboratories of their community? How is curiosity fostered from the kindergarten through college? Do we as teachers really like unusual or penetrating questions from our students? Do we constantly utilize the resources that we have for learning, whether or not such resources are people, observations of a social or physical phenomenon, or use of such an ordinary

book as the dictionary? To illustrate, a fifth grade youngster came upon the word "causeway" and asked the teacher what the word meant. Replied the teacher, "An old fashioned word for road. Now we just call them roads."

A recent investigation of the concept of scientists held by high school youth was carried out by a social anthropologist. The investigative technics utilized, however, were those that any group of teachers might have used. The results of the investigation show that the young people hold cultural stereotypes of scientists that had not been disturbed by biographical reading and discussion, the meeting with real people, or the laboratory or other types of experiences the youth may have had.

The Jacobs<sup>2</sup> study of value change related to courses in social science in college might well stimulate us to raise different questions about education. He found very little change because of the college courses. When change occurred it appeared to be related to certain conditions that reflected a *total climate* for learning. This finding that change in behavior requires certain minimum conditions of supportive interaction rather than certain content *per se* suggests questions to us.

The Barker and Wright<sup>3</sup> study of children in a small Kansas town is challenging. The findings are based upon observer records of the behavior of children. Several complete day records were made for selected children. The author's conclusion regarding the classroom life of one seven year old cannot be ignored as we seek to raise the proper and the

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Jacobs. *Changing Values in College*. New Haven, Connecticut: Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Barker and Herbert Wright. *Midwest and Its Children*. Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur T. Jersild. *When Teachers Face Themselves*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1955, p. 68-69.

most helpful evaluative questions about our schools.

The data indicate that, in the classroom as compared with the behavior settings free of adults, Raymond's behavior was less intense or energetic, less efficient and creative or constructive, somewhat more cooperative when activities were undertaken with others, but generally less satisfying. They indicate that, in or out of the classroom in Midwest, Raymond rarely aimed to do either less or more than he was able to do; that he tried to be funny or reacted with enjoyment to something funny less often in than out; and that, in the classroom, he was much more restless.

Concerning Raymond's habitat, the data indicate that in the classroom as against the settings free of adults, the world of this boy was less clear, less genial, and smaller in the sense of offering fewer recognized and promising things to do. They indicate that Raymond was moved to do what he did more by social pressure and less by direct interest in the classroom; that, in this setting, he was more often frustrated or in conflict, but preoccupied less with the immediate present. The data indicate finally that, in the classroom, Raymond was warmed less by positive emotional expansiveness—feeling for him on the part of others—and subjected more to social disapproval.<sup>4</sup>

It does appear that we have a real task before us to raise and answer significant questions regarding educational experiences of our children and youth. Daniel Prescott<sup>5</sup> is asking one of the most pertinent questions that can be asked, "On what *basis* do teachers make the myriad decisions that they make day after day?" This is the kind of question that gets at the heart of what goes on in the classroom.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert F. Wright, Roger G. Barker, Jack Nall, and Phil Schoggen. "Toward a Psychological Ecology of the Classroom." *Educational Psychology*. Arthur P. Coladarci, editor. New York: The Dryden Press, 1955, p. 265-67.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Prescott. *The Child in the Educative Process*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1957, Part I.

## The Meaning of Self-Commitment and Self-Involvement

As our process of evaluation moves forward, we need to recall again and again that our true and basic concern must be that of furthering the ideals of a democratic society. To do this certain conditions of learning need to be present that are not necessary in a totalitarian society. Lawrence Frank has spelled them out for us.

It is becoming evident that a free society demands the highest standard of personal ethics, of self-disciplined, self-governed conduct by each individual member who respects not only the integrity and dignity of others but the dignity of the individual actor himself. In the non-free societies, the authoritarian regimes, the dictatorships, there is little need or opportunity for personal ethics since the individual is required to give submissive obedience to authority, to conform to what is required by those who are in charge.

It is also clear that for such a free-self-governing society, no one can be unnecessarily deprived, frustrated, injured, damaged, humiliated or otherwise distorted and stunted, because anyone so treated will be unable to bear the burdens of freedom, incapable of playing his full effective role in maintaining social order. Everyone in the group must be able to respect himself, to live at peace with himself so that he can and will respect others and live peacefully with his fellows.<sup>6</sup>

The school next to the home and family circle can do most to help the child become what he could become. The school can arrange conditions and relationships so that the child develops some confidence in his own powers. The school can increase his relatedness to people or in Barbara Biber's words "make an impact on the child's image of the human universe." The school can make a

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence K. Frank. *Nature and Human Nature*. New Brunswick, Conn.: Rutgers University Press, 1951, p. 174-75.

major contribution to the development of a trained and educated mind. A trained and educated mind does not come into existence as the result of a series of required courses, even though achievement in those courses is rewarded with a Phi Beta Kappa key. Such a mind comes into being through the effort and self-commitment of the individual himself. It comes through his own self-involvement.

The present state of our knowledge of human beings gives us a picture of man that must be reflected in our schools. Man is an active agent in his becoming. He is purposive. Basic evaluative questions for us become: (a) What conditions foster self-involvement and self-commitment? and (b) Are these conditions more often present than absent in the teaching-learning (interactive situation) in the schools? There is no doubt that the individual must subject himself to long and arduous training to further many of the goals of modern society and to contribute constructively to it.

The high school youth may have to give up his hot rod in order to stay in school. He won't do this unless he is involved in such a way that his own goals and aspirations can be met only by giving up the hot rod. Involved in the situation may be what we have termed the difference between the long term goal and immediate pleasure and gratification. However, it is not quite so simple as that equation would appear to make it. Does not the individual need to recognize some *value* in the experience for him as of now if he is to remain in the situation without defenses that distort the experience? We give lip service to a profound psychological truth when we say, "People perceive differently. Each one sees it his way." In such statements we recognize that each of us protects his own self system with defenses that distort reality. It has never

ceased to be a source of amazement when young people who had become accomplished musicians give up music as adults. It is quite obvious that in their training, they worked for somebody else and not for themselves and in the end did not serve themselves or the community as musicians.

An investigation at any grade level or in any subject that raised the question about the individual's self-commitment and self-involvement ought to be enlightening. Does the child ever work with figures when not required to do so? Does the child write for himself rather than under conditions of assignment? An investigation<sup>7</sup> of one group of eighth graders shows that only eight percent of their writing was unassigned. Most of the eight percent comprised the making of lists and the writing of telephone messages for their families.

Dr. Melby suggests to us that proper evaluation involves not how much the child knows and what he can do but what he is becoming. Pertinent questions then are: Is the child becoming a person who likes to read and does read, a person who is curious, a person who is moving toward people instead of away or against people, a person who has confidence in himself, a person whose perceptions are subjected to reality testing? The list is long and, of course, incomplete as herein stated. We are asking for the fullest development of each individual and that he be concerned with the welfare of all others. We seek classroom conditions similar to those described by Diana A. Stein and Rose Mukerji.

<sup>7</sup> Earl Harmer. "Identification of Situations in Which Eighth Graders Write with an Appraisal of Their Writing Competencies." Unpublished Master's thesis. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah, 1954.

## Teacher Evaluation and the Improvement of Education

This brief discussion carries the thesis that it is important now more than ever to ask the right questions about our schools. These questions must be concerned with the aspects of school that make a difference in the individual's becoming. Our questions must be concerned with the "heart" of the educational process. This "heart" is what occurs day after day in the classroom. The several authors of this issue of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* who deal with evaluation ask for more observation of the classroom to ascertain teacher and pupil behavior. Only in this way can the teaching-learning process (interactive situation) be understood.

A chief danger of evaluation and reward in terms of merit rating lies in rewarding the wrong things. Our educational goals and values must be quite clear in order to avoid such an error. The focus needs to be placed upon the *conditions* that foster growth of the individual and the welfare of all. Such conditions do not remain static nor are they of one pattern. Nevertheless, it is not helpful to announce, "Oh, well, there are many methods. One is as good as another." Whatever the patterns of the good prove to be, they must hold some elements in some degree in common. These elements have been referred to as conditions throughout this discussion. Today we have data that gives us more tenable hypotheses about positive classroom conditions than we had previously. We can put these hypotheses into operation and test them. We can be creative and human-centered in our evaluation.

A final word must be said regarding the *threat* evaluation is to most teachers. Kinney and Rose both ask, and rightly so, that teachers be more experimental

and scientific. The facts of the case are that teachers are products of their culture and work in terms of their expectations of themselves and what they perceive are the expectations of others. This concept of testing one's own procedures and being experimental is not yet built into the general texture of teaching.

If the evaluative process is to improve the quality of education in our schools, all the information that we have about the ways in which attitudes and beliefs are changed must be applied. Undoubtedly teachers will need to be helped to gather their own data on children's reactions to various aspects of the classroom situation. The habit of asking questions about one's own work is not as common among teachers as it is with others. This skill of asking questions can be quite easily acquired. The willingness to ask the question and to face the answers is another problem. To do this, requires support and expression of confidence on the part of one's colleagues and superiors, not a grade for something less than desirable. It is in the process of looking at children's reactions to classroom procedures that teachers begin to know the complexity of learning and teaching. We prate about individual differences and the acceptance of them. We have yet to make their acceptance truly creative and to order our classrooms as though uniqueness was cherished. The gap between enunciated purposes and practices is not closing rapidly enough. Such closure depends upon changed attitudes and expectations of our teachers. Cooperative evaluation based upon questions and values oriented to American ideals in a climate of support and mutuality, using new and old scientific procedure, and make teaching a profession and bring a higher quality of education to our children and youth.

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