

Self-Evaluation: The Mark of a Profession

What is a criterion for self-evaluation and how may teachers intelligently use such a touchstone for further growth?

THE PROBLEMS encountered by Rip Van Winkle in adjusting to a changed society have become part of our American folklore. It is interesting further to speculate on the additional problems Rip Van Winkle would have encountered had he been a professional practitioner. As a physician, he would have discovered immediately that his practices in diagnosis and in treatment of diseases had become obsolete. He would find some diseases which he had considered incurable when he went to sleep were now yielding readily to treatments unfamiliar to him. Similarly, had he been an engineer, the practices based on recent development in electronics, metallurgy, aerodynamics, and other sciences would for the most part be beyond his understanding.

Changes in education come more slowly than we might wish, and as we adjust to them we take them for granted. Yet Rip, as a teacher, might be puzzled by the emphasis on meaning in arithmetic which he would find in the modern textbook in contrast with the emphasis on rote memory in the 'thirties. He would need to adapt his thinking to another swing of the curricular pendulum, since the high schools are now preparing over

half their graduates for college entrance, while a quarter of a century ago only around ten percent were headed for college. His practices would need to be re-oriented to new social needs, as he learns that during his sleep we went through a depression, World War II, and are now embarked on a "cold" war with shortages in crucial areas of trained leadership.

As a member of any profession, Rip Van Winkle would have been tempted, if not required, to return to his preparing institution to bring himself up to the level of his colleagues, who, while he slept, had recognized the necessity for maintaining their professional growth. This personal responsibility of the individual practitioner for continued growth is typical of a profession. During his professional lifetime he is expected practically to re-educate himself. The procedures of any profession are continuously adjusting to advances in one or both of the two foundations on which they are based. These foundations are:

1. The basic sciences—as in medicine, engineering, and education. Scientific advances are reflected in more effective professional procedures.

2. Institutional understanding—as in law, the clergy, and education. The structure and objectives of major social institutions (such as the elementary school, legal structure and church, for example)

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change to meet new social needs. Changes in objectives are reflected in modified procedures.

The continued growth of the teacher in professional competence whether by individual effort, by organized in-service programs, or by advanced work in the preparing institutions, is accordingly a social necessity. The programs for teacher preparation reflect to some extent this necessity for self-directed growth. The teacher not only learns the methodology of his profession, but also its scientific and social foundations. Self-directed growth depends also on frequent self-evaluation of his own effectiveness, in the light of a clearly defined criterion of professional competence, on the basis of adequate evidence. Such self-evaluation is useful only for the teacher who has defined and accepted an adequate criterion, can collect evidence on his own effectiveness, and can direct his own re-education. It is worth while to consider how the programs of preparation must be designed to provide for continued professional growth.

The Criterion

The need for a criterion that can serve as a common frame of reference for all groups interested in effective teaching is coming to be generally recognized. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education has expressed it in this way:¹

"The systematic review, compilation, and extension of research in the field of teacher

¹American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, *Yearbook* (Oneonta, New York: the Association, 1954), p. 214-15. Reference is to the definition suggested in *Factors in Teaching Competence* (Washington: National Education Association, 1954); and defined in more detail in *Teacher Competence: Its Nature and Scope* (San Francisco: Commission on Teacher Education, California Teachers Association, 1957) p. 31-42.

education is recognized as a major function of AACTE. Any program or procedure, to be accepted as valid, must have been established as contributing to the preparation of expert teachers. It is recognized that a definition of this desired product, in objective terms, such as is now under study and development by the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, is a preliminary requirement for such validation.

Researchers in the field of teacher competence have pointed out how carefully the criterion must be defined. The following requirements among others are essential:

1. It must be sufficiently comprehensive to point to the expertness needed in community and professional activities as well as in classroom management.
2. The areas of expertness must be objectively defined so that there will be a common understanding among the various groups concerned with teacher competence; and
3. It must be so developed as to be adaptable to a variety of community requirements, and to the changing conditions in our society. This is possible only if it is derived from the basic purposes that education must serve in our society.

These are rigorous requirements, not easy to fulfill. Yet, unless professional competence can be defined so objectively that the teacher can appraise his own ability in a given area, self-evaluation cannot lead to measurable self-improvement. Furthermore, unless self-improvement is in an area valued by his colleagues and by the society which the school serves, motivation for self-evaluation and self-improvement is apt to be negligible. Definition of a criterion to meet these requirements deserves first priority among the projects of the profession.

What Is Evidence of Growth?

In his self-evaluation the teacher rarely has data in the form of test scores or ratings. Most commonly he must pose such questions as:

If I am competent in this area, what results will be evident in my work? What conditions would exist in my classes? What relations would I have established with the community? What contributions should I be making to the organized profession?

Ability to frame and answer such questions is typical of the person trained to think in terms of evidence. Experience in experimentation, especially in action research, leads naturally to the ability to recognize and collect the evidence needed by the teacher to establish his status in relation to his criterion. It contributes also to the ability to view objectively his current inadequacy and the directions in which he needs to grow professionally.

Aids to Self-Directed Growth

Once he has established the areas in which professional improvement is most needed, the teacher must know where to turn and what steps to take in his self-directed growth. The major source of tested procedures in any profession is found in the case studies and experiments by practitioners, as reported in the literature or at meetings of the professional associations.

The teacher is expected not only to profit from these sources, but to contribute the results from his own experimentation. This he can do to the extent that he sees any educational problems, whether the outlining of a course of study for the state, the planning of one day's work for his own classes, the designing of bus routes for the school, or a

new method for teaching a difficult topic, as a challenging experiment. Whether he deals with it casually or formally, explicitly or implicitly, his procedures should incorporate the experimental essentials:

Definition of purposes: What is this activity for, and what are the desired outcomes?

Planning of procedures: What is the most promising way to go about it?

Evaluation of results: How well did the procedures work?

The experimental point of view, developed in the preservice program, is essential both for his own self-evaluation, and for the continued growth of the profession. On this accumulated body of tested procedures depend not only the improvement of educational procedures but also the effectiveness of our programs of preservice preparation.

What Kind of Preparation?

By way of summary, it is useful to raise the question: What would be going on in the programs of teacher preparation if teachers actually were being prepared for continued professional growth? Several characteristics are clearly necessary in such a program.

In the first place, the program would recognize that the teacher, in addition to being an efficient director of learning in the classroom, must recognize and accept major obligations in the community and in professional organizations. To provide competence and a basis for continued professional growth in all of these areas is the function of the preservice program of education.

In the second place, the program would prepare the teacher for his major professional task of accumulating as well as of utilizing the organized body of validated professional procedures that

are recognized as the earmark of any profession. To be adequate for this purpose the program would include such activities as these:

1. The school would set an example of the experimental point of view by presenting evidence as to the effectiveness of its own program, and also of the procedures the teacher is expected to use. Critical consideration would be given to the manner in which recommended procedures have been or can be tested and proved, as reported in the professional literature.

2. Competence in devising and testing new and more effective procedures would be accepted as an important outcome of the program. Teachers would be prepared to appraise the effectiveness of all untested procedures.

3. Finally, the program of preservice education would explicitly prepare the teacher for effective membership in his

professional organizations. Such active membership is necessary not only to provide opportunities for the teacher to learn about, and to report, new developments in effective practices, but also as stimulus to continued activity and growth. It is this function of the professional association, rather than an economic one, that brought together the informal groups that eventually grew into the modern professional organization.

By way of summary, we recognize that the education of the teacher at the preservice level, at its best, must be limited. It is impossible to predict in advance the problems the teacher will encounter. Even if they were known, the time is not available for a program of preparation designed to meet the need. The alternative is to prepare a teacher who can deal adequately with existing problems, and who can develop whatever competence is required to meet future problems.

GALE ROSE

Toward the Evaluation of Teaching

**Major methods of appraisal of teaching are analyzed here.
Also considered are problems of objectivity and of values.**

TO CONSIDER the evaluation of *teaching* is at once to focus on a process, a complex of acts, certain patterns of behavior, rather than on the person performing them or on the consequences of his behavior. The consequences deserve the most careful study, but they should be clearly distinguished from the behavior and circumstances which pro-

duced them. Likewise, the teacher personality, and other factors which interact with environment to produce certain teaching acts, may be thought of as causes or conditioners of performance and should be identified separately from the teaching itself.

These discriminations, which were pointed out in 1952 by the special AERA

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