A Proposed Model in Evaluation

THERE are many reasons for a growing concern about the state of evaluation in our schools. Important curricular decisions are made on too narrow a basis, often with meager evidence or none at all to support these decisions. Many new developments in curricular reorganization, some of them of national scope, are justified solely on the grounds that the introduction of these programs does not reduce the amount of information learned while reducing the number of teachers per student. This seems to be the case, for example, with proposals for team teaching and the use of television. The question of whether some important objectives, other than acquisition of information, may be jeopardized is seldom raised.1

These developments tend to widen the gap between the range of objectives which curriculum is supposed to serve and those that it in fact does serve. If evidence is consistently available on only a portion of important objectives, the objectives on which evidence is unavailable are likely to be neglected in instruction and in curriculum development (Lindquist).

1 Even curricular experiments, such as certain revisions of high school biology and mathematics, which explicitly state their concern for the development of cognitive processes, tend to assess outcomes in terms of content mastery rather than in terms of cognitive processes.

The ASCD shares this general concern about the state of evaluation. To implement its concern, the Commission on Evaluation was appointed in 1960 to study and propose positive steps for dealing with this problem. At its first meeting in 1961 the commission made an analysis of its task and noted several areas of deficiencies.

Deficiencies Noted

First, the objectives which form the basis for evaluation are usually too narrow. For many reasons the range of objectives which are actually evaluated are frequently limited to recall and a few academic skills. This is too narrow a basis for making curricular decisions, large or small. Consequently, changes are made in curriculum without sufficient consideration of all the consequences on all important dimensions of learning for which the school program is responsible. It is possible to become so concerned with achievement in one dimension that negative results are produced in another. An example is being concerned with efficiency in absorbing information while disregarding the effects of this emphasis on autonomous thinking.

Second, the range of instruments and devices which are being used is often too limited. The main concentration is on
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achievement tests and measures of intelligence. Even some test publishers note with dismay that the coverage of commercial tests available to schools is altogether too limited. Other ways of securing evidence are often overlooked as are tests measuring achievement other than knowledge. Relatively few instruments of these other types are in a form to make them generally available and suitable for use by teachers. This limitation which affects both evaluation and diagnosis tends to narrow teaching to procedures which are inimical to the full development of individuals, such as exaggerated use of uniformity and controlling devices as against procedures which open up pathways to independent and individualized learning processes (Hughes).

Third, the focus of attention has been on the end product rather than on process. This has resulted in inadequate knowledge of the processes by which these end products are attained or by which they are transferred. The consequence is that curriculum planners and teachers have inadequate knowledge of causes of either attainment or failure. This makes it impossible to adapt curricular improvement to causes of difficulties in learning, and places emphasis on generalized measures which may be quite wide of the mark.

A fourth deficiency is in the interpretation of results of evaluation. Evidence from evaluation is often interpreted without adequate information about factors which affect learning and achievement. Some of these factors relate to the nature of learners, such as variations in cultural background and stimulation for learning desired in school. Interpretation of results also suffers from the lack of systematic information on the nature of teacher behavior or teaching-learning operations in the classroom. Without ac-
curate information on these matters it is difficult to formulate adequate hypotheses in curriculum studies regarding improvement of instruction, because the setting and the causal factors relating to lack of achievement are not known.

The fifth and final area of deficiency is in the translation of data into curriculum decisions. Inadequate attention to the matters mentioned above is in part responsible for the apparent lack of application of the results of evaluation to curriculum decisions on all levels, whether by teachers, administrators, district officers, or state officials. It seemed to the commission that there is not now, nor has there been, a successful method of translating what is learned through evaluation into curriculum decisions. This was, therefore, considered a major deficiency in efforts to improve curricula through use of evaluation procedures.

In view of these deficiencies, the ASCD Evaluation Commission undertook the development of a design or "model" of an evaluation program that could be implemented on a small scale. The sequence of implementation would probably begin with a trial application in a single classroom—a comprehensive study in miniature, so to speak. This would be followed the next year with applications in three or four classrooms, and later, perhaps in a larger, more representative sample of classrooms. The design is concerned with several dimensions as described in the following paragraphs.

Kinds of Data Needed

In the analysis made to determine the kinds of evaluations needed, the focus was on decisions made by teachers: what kinds of decisions do teachers make and what evaluation results would be useful in making these decisions? If one thinks

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through the typical activities and the responsibilities of the teacher, it is readily apparent that many times each day the teacher faces a moment of decision. In acting upon these moments of decision the teacher must make use of whatever results of systematic evaluations, results of informal observations or, in some cases, the vague “hunches” that he has pertaining to the decision that must be made.

1. Illustrations of the kinds of decisions considered in this connection are as follows:

a. Types of activities to arrange—kind and amount of pupil practice needed, kinds of exercises to use, deciding on focus of discussion, kinds of assignments to make, kinds of explanations to give, and method of instruction to use

b. Sequence of activities—when to move on to next unit, when to introduce certain concepts, and when to review

c. Organization of activities—when and how to form subgroups, delegation of responsibilities for class activities, and phasing and timing of activities

d. Choice of content—selection of concepts appropriate to pupil’s level of development and selection of resource materials

e. Moment-to-moment decisions regarding teacher’s own behavior—how to respond to pupil comments or actions, how to react to individual pupils when they tell the teacher their problems, and deciding what pupil behavior should be ignored.

2. Several kinds of information are needed if evaluation is to be useful in making decisions like the above. Evaluation should include all important areas of outcomes. These can be grouped into several large categories.

a. Knowledge—namely, concepts and facts that students are acquiring. The important problem here is to determine what knowledge is of most worth in this age of high rate of obsolescence and tremendous

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The data to be collected for these purposes may consist of the methods of teaching used, including the nature of teaching acts (Hughes), kinds of assignments given, patterns of pupil-teacher in-
teraction, equipment and facilities used, and administrative policies of the school.

These considerations and areas of information can be shown in a design for an evaluation program (see above). The arrows represent important relationships involved in the interpretation of results.

Instruments and Procedures To Be Used

It is readily apparent that a variety of instruments and techniques will be required to collect the wide range of evaluation data needed. Certainly one must go beyond paper and pencil tests and include devices which can be incorporated in instructional procedure (Taba, Chapters 16 and 19). Some instruments must be designed specifically for the objectives of the particular classroom being studied. Instruments and techniques that are already available can be used in other cases. Many instruments which would be useful for evaluation are hidden in the records of various research studies (Ennis, Suchman).

The commission believes that one useful outcome of its project will be a collection of instruments and procedures that are being assembled for the study. It is hoped that experiences in using these instruments and procedures in the project will lead to refinements and adaptations so as to increase the range and variety of techniques that are practical.
and feasible for teachers to use routinely—without the added stimulation and assistance provided by a special project of this kind.

For these reasons a thorough search is being made for instruments, techniques, devices, that might be useful. This goes beyond instruments available in print and includes tests and other devices used in various research studies. Extensive correspondence is being conducted with scores of specialists in evaluation and research for help in locating instruments that are already available and for advice in making new ones. The commission is also searching through existing files, such as those for the Eight Year Study (Smith, Tyler) for possible instruments or useful ideas. This intensive concentration on compiling instruments and procedures reflects the firm conviction of the planning group that the quality of the evaluation results, and the quality of decisions based on them, can be no better than the quality of the instruments or procedures used.

Only a start has been made on developing the file of instruments and procedures. When completed, it is expected to comprise a wide range of devices, such as objectively scored tests, tape-recorder techniques, attitude scales, sociometric devices, anecdotal records, diaries, and content analyses of student products.

The reader is urged to send any information that he may have on suitable instruments and procedures to the Chairman of the ASCD Commission on Evaluation, Dr. Hilda Taber, Division of Education, San Francisco State College, San Francisco 27, California.

Analysis and Use of Results

As previously noted, one deficiency of many current evaluation programs is an...
inadequate interpretation of evaluation data and faulty translation of the findings into guides for changes in curricular practice and instruction. Procedures for interpretation of the results of the project cannot be described in detail at this time. In general, it can be said that the analysis should involve the study of relationships among all of the kinds of data described here. These analyses should be made for the purposes of helping teachers to gain insights about the impact of instruction on pupils, of providing information that should be considered in the making of decisions that teachers and curriculum makers face, and of establishing proper interrelationship of evaluation with instructional planning and curriculum development, at least to the extent of illustrating the cause and effect relationship between the nature of the learning situation and the teaching-learning operations and the evidence obtained on learning outcomes. Such analyses should provide a rich source of hypotheses for further research, and should also indicate directions which further applications of the design should take in order to be most useful. Whether the commission will also be able to study the material from the standpoint of analyzing the instruments and making recommendations regarding their usefulness is uncertain at the moment.

Notes on Methods

To develop such a model in full is more than a Commission of ASCD with meager financial resources can accomplish. First, it should be made clear that the planning group recognizes that it is impossible to assess every single outcome of an educational program. It is likewise impossible to assess all factors that might have a bearing on school learning. Only a limited gesture is possible. At best only a sampling of data in each major category of objectives, on the most crucial factors and conditions of learning can be secured in this experimental project. This selectivity will have to prevail also in usual school situations. In making the choices of what to evaluate, some hypotheses should be formulated regarding the most important learning outcomes, the most crucial factors affecting school learning, the significant patterns of the teaching-learning operations, and the relationship between the three. The scope and variety of what is to be evaluated can thus be kept at a level that is realistic in terms of the resources that are available.

Second, the large battery of instruments and devices implied in the foregoing section cannot be produced or administered. The intent is to secure evidence on some important facet of each area of objectives, and the important aspects of learning factors and conditions. The longer list of instruments may serve largely as a separate contribution to make available to those who are interested in extending their facilities for evaluation. A large battery of instruments suggests, furthermore, a danger that must be carefully avoided in their uses. Students must not be continually taking tests or responding to other evaluation devices. It is anticipated that the project will call for somewhat greater use of formally administered evaluation devices than in most classrooms, but it will be necessary to use this method of data collection with caution.

Other methods of assessment must be used in obtaining a major portion of the data—methods that do not cause the student to feel that he is a “guinea pig” in an experiment. This is important in terms of validity of results as well as welfare...
of students. Maximum use must be made of such sources as students' written work and other classroom products for content analyses, observation, content analyses of tape recordings of classroom proceedings, and of exercises and assignments which are part of regular learning exercises.

Third, the analysis of results should be accomplished with the full participation of the teacher. In fact, the main purpose of the analysis is for the teacher to obtain insights into teaching-learning processes in relation to decisions he makes, hence to become more effective in his teaching role. The apparent effects of this kind of experience on the teacher's choice of procedures and plans in conducting his classes should also be noted. How does this kind of experience affect patterns of teacher-pupil interaction? Does it give the teacher a greater sense of accomplishment and a stronger sense of direction?

Finally, since in trying out such a program it would be difficult to obtain a representative sampling of classrooms, no generalizations could be made to other student populations. Generalizations will have to be limited mainly to those describing the usefulness of the design as a whole for evaluation and as a tool for instructional improvement.

Developing this design or "model" and making plans for carrying it out have been the principal activities of the Commission on Evaluation since it was appointed in 1961. It is uncertain at the moment as to just how far the present commission can progress in its actual implementation, for the terms of present members will soon expire. The commission strongly believes, however, that ways can and should be found for full scale applications of the project. This kind of emphasis in evaluation seems
urgently needed, but just how resources are to be organized for its accomplishment is yet to be determined. Persons interested in participating in a project of this kind should make their intentions known to the ASCD Office in Washington, D.C., or to the Chairman of the Commission on Evaluation.

References


—HILDA TABA, Professor of Education, San Francisco State College; and ENOCH I. SAWIN, Associate Professor of Education, San Francisco State College.

Advanced Placement

(Continued from page 33)

(this year some 250, equally divided between schools and colleges) meets at Rider College to read the essay sections of the more than 20,000 papers. The work is arduous, but the contact is stimulating. The pay is not high, but most teachers are eager to come back year after year. These reading sessions inevitably affect the way the teachers concerned plan their work.

Attention thus far has been focused on the impact of the Advanced Placement Program on curricular planning at the secondary level. The Program has almost as much effect on the colleges which receive the students. Just as there is no such thing as the college preparatory curriculum, the college freshman curriculum is no more than a myth. Colleges must, therefore, accommodate their course offerings to the content of advanced placement courses. In almost all cases, the colleges which have had experience with the Program do this gladly. In a few colleges, about half of the entering freshmen qualify for advanced placement in one or more courses; as many as 10 percent qualify for admission directly to the sophomore year. In these colleges, the impact on curricular planning, both for the colleges and the students, is as great as it is in any secondary school.

Ten years ago, the School and College Study of Admission with Advanced Standing was experimental. Today the Advanced Placement Program is an established fact, widely acclaimed by leading educators. The Program is by no means perfect, nor is it the only means for challenging the superior student, or of enriching his academic experience. The examinations definitely influence the planning of the curriculum in schools choosing to participate in the Program. Most educators agree that much of the influence is good, but compromises may be recognized. These compromises are ultimately for the benefit of the student; they are, in reality, indications of increased school-college cooperation on the student’s behalf. Above all, the compromises are symbolic of increasing measures of the precious commodity of correspondence, which alone can make the education of our young people a continuum.