

Evaluation should measure progress in terms of purposes stated for boys and girls.

The Road to Where?

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REMEMBER the advice which was given to Alice when she inquired of the Cheshire cat which way she ought to walk?

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat.

"I don't much care where," said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the cat.¹

In education today, we are in much the same position as Alice. Much change is taking place, but, in too many cases, very little thought is given to where we are going—that is, to what we are trying to accomplish.

Much of the change in education today is not well planned. How can we plan better and work toward more constructive innovations? We cannot take it for granted that any change is going to improve the educational program. We need to plan carefully for changes so that an improved program for boys and girls will result.

The ASCD Yearbook for 1967 suggested that as innovative programs are carefully evaluated, we gain valuable insights which can help us to make wiser decisions about future curriculum development. Evaluation should serve as a guide as we constantly strive for improvement in education.

Provision for evaluation of results should be made early. When we are considering a change we should ask the question, "Why? What are we trying to accomplish?" We ought to give some thought to which road we plan to travel along and why we are headed in that direction. It is very important that careful attention be given to our purposes. The statement of purpose should be sufficiently refined and should be specific enough so that, later on, the program might be evaluated by determining how well these purposes have been achieved. Growth and understanding of democratic institutions might be a very worthy goal, yet how do we evaluate whether or not a youngster has achieved this goal? We need to define objectives in behavioral terms so that progress can be observed and so

¹ Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Garden City, New York: The Country Life Press. 1893. p. 102.

that we can evaluate the outcome. Perhaps a specific objective under the broad goal just stated might be "respects the opinions of others in the class."

As purposes for the project are defined, the planners should be mindful of the evaluation which will be necessary at a later date so that these purposes are specific enough to be useful for evaluative purposes.

Each group of teachers embarking upon some change in the curriculum or in the organization of the school should not consider it necessary to start from scratch as if no one else in school work had thought of such a change before. Time should be taken to examine the research that has been done on this particular kind of project in other parts of the country, and if the research is relevant and valid, it ought to be considered in planning for change. Evaluation, then, should enter into the picture early so that it plays a meaningful role.

Evaluation for Creativity

Evaluation is necessary and is important, yet it should not stifle creativity. Carefully carried out, evaluation can serve to provide valuable information on which to base wise decisions. But we must be very careful that we do not place so much stress on evaluation in the beginning that it gets in the way of the invention of a new and promising program. Henry Brickell,² in his study of innovations in the State of New York several years ago, pointed this out very forcefully. He identified three separate and distinct phases in instructional change—invention, evaluation, and demonstration. For invention of new ideas in education we need a very permissive sort of climate with no holds barred, where the inventors feel complete freedom to try things and to develop new ideas. This sort of climate is dead wrong for evaluation. At this point we need direction and control of the forces which might influence the success of the new approach. So let us make certain that the evaluation is accomplished at the proper time.

We should not be so afraid of making mistakes that we never try anything new or so afraid of criticism that we attempt to cover up mistakes or to gloss over problems. It is necessary that we have constructive change in education, but we should certainly not be foolhardy. It is incumbent upon us always to keep in mind the welfare of children. Each new program that we try must have a good chance of succeeding, of helping us to do a better job for boys and girls. Yet if we are actually experimenting, if there is really a question to be answered, if we are really wondering whether or not this procedure is better than any we have used before, then there will be times when we find that the new plan is not as good as the old one. Sometimes we are going to fail. When this happens we need to admit it, profit by the experience, and proceed to operate the program in terms of what we have learned.

Too many times in educational change today we as school people get ourselves backed into a corner. We get excited about an idea that we want to try. We talk it up in the community. It makes a good newspaper story and we are happy for

² Henry Brickell, *Organizing New York State for Educational Change*. Albany: New York State Education Department, 1961.

the publicity. The Board of Education has recognized the project and has provided some funds to support it. Neighboring schools hear about the project and write for information. Some people even come to visit to see what is really going on.

With all of this build up, with all of this commitment, we develop the feeling that what we are doing has to be right, it must be successful, and we scurry around trying to prove that it is the thing to do. Much too often, in cases such as this, evaluation is planned in order to justify what we have done, to give it a whitewashing. The term evaluation should never be used in such a case, for evaluation ought to produce objective, impartial evidence which will help us to make wiser decisions about the educational program.

Evaluate What?

What are we attempting to evaluate? Once again we should go back to the specific purposes, stated in behavioral terms, to see how much success we have had in achieving these purposes. Too many times we evaluate only in terms of mastery of content. We give standardized achievement tests prior to the beginning of the experiment and we test at the close of the program. Then we figure out whether the students have made more than the usual amount of progress during the experimental program.

The achievement of youngsters in the mastery of subject matter is important and is a part of the evaluation. We need to know whether or not youngsters have learned more under the experimental program than they did before. Yet frequently this is just one of the purposes as stated, and does not get at some of the very important things which we are trying to do for children.

In setting up the experimental program, for instance, we may have talked about such things as helping youngsters to accept the idea of individual differences, developing a climate in the school that produces freedom from fear and helping youngsters to develop independent study skills. The scores on achievement tests tell us very little about the achievement of these purposes.

Why does most of our evaluation deal only with achievement test results? Why do we not attempt to look at some of the other objectives which most of us agree are at least as important?

The answer to this query might be found by comparing ourselves to the man who lost his billfold in a dark alley. The man was observed searching under the street light rather than in the alley. Why? Because there was more light there—it was easier. We continue to measure mastery of content because this is simple and objective and the thing which we know how to do.

It is important to evaluate in terms of all of the stated purposes; that is, if the purposes were valid and important and carefully stated in the first place. We ought to evaluate the program by examining the progress that has been made since the beginning of the project.

We ought to judge the effectiveness of the program in terms of what it has done to enhance the growth and development of pupils. Another concern should be

whether or not there has been growth among the members of the instructional and supervisory staff. Teachers, pupils, and parents ought to be involved in the evaluation of a program.

One Example

A joint effort of the Kansas City, Missouri, Public Schools and the University of Missouri at Kansas City involved twenty-two teachers and a principal in an Experimental Teacher Fellowship Program. After studying together at the University for a year, the group spent the summer in planning the curriculum and organization for their school.

In September, this total staff moved into an existing building (it is 60 years old) to open a new and different kind of elementary school for boys and girls in that particular part of the city. Careful consideration was given to an evaluation of this program during the year at the University. Considerable time was spent on the careful wording of a statement of philosophy for the school. This philosophy was then further refined by stating, in behavioral terms, the purposes to be achieved with youngsters.

Base line achievement data were provided by an extensive testing program in the spring before the change. It was agreed, however, that teachers in the school would have the first year to shake down, to try out all kinds of new things, and to depart from plans as formulated if this seemed appropriate. There would be no evaluation at the end of the first year of this program. At the close of the second year pupils would be evaluated in terms of achievement test results. Also, these youngsters would be tested in the fields of critical thinking, creativity, and study skills.

Video tapes of learning activities will be made periodically and preserved to help serve as a chronicle of the project and to show the progress of youngsters. A researcher is assigned to the program and is in the process of developing instruments which can be used to sample the changes in attitudes on the part of pupils, teachers, and parents. It is hoped that with this sort of evaluation program it will be possible to measure the effectiveness of this program in terms of the purposes stated for boys and girls.

1. Evaluation should not be an afterthought. Careful planning is necessary from the early stage of any innovative program.
2. But let us not put so much emphasis on evaluation that we kill the creative urge which teachers might have.
3. We should be willing to embark upon responsible experimentation.
4. We should be willing to live with the results and to be guided accordingly.
5. We should evaluate the achievement of pupils, yes. But we should, also, consider the evaluation of other important purposes, which for the most part have been given only lip service.
6. We should use the results to work toward constructive improvement of the educational program for boys and girls. ☛

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