

Developing Corrective Evaluation Within the Program

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WHAT particular changes in the curriculum have been made in your school system in the past five years? A change in staffing pattern? A new textbook adoption? A new math program? A change in course offerings? On what basis were those changes made? How will you determine whether or not those changes are effective?

The majority of responses to these questions would probably not reflect extensive use of evaluation data on which to base decisions for the changes implied in those questions.

Does educational leadership exist if broad-based evaluation systems are not being used continuously to provide input for the curriculum change process?

School systems have always had the responsibility of providing the best possible curricular programs for the children they serve. In the past, an acceptable format for change has been the use of achievement test data. Aimed at children in the middle range and above, achievement data are generally examined in a cursory manner. Nonachievers are labeled slow learners. If a new program in math is initiated, then achievement data are used as a product measure. Data are used for purposes of logistics decisions alone, ignoring other curriculum revision

implications. Evaluation is a statistical measurement and is usually terminal.

For evaluation to be an essential corrective tool, educators must look beyond the product of learning to the process of learning, beyond the product of teaching to the process of teaching. Educators of the seventies must look beyond the product to the process. Evaluation of the process must become an essential and continuous phase of evaluation.

Fortunately, the evaluation phase of education has been given impetus by federal involvement. Annually, an evaluation report is required of recipients of federal funds. Hopefully, this has caused educators to seek better means of evaluation and to reexamine how these data can be utilized in individual school systems.

Phases of Evaluation

Evaluation should cause educators to look both descriptively and prescriptively at the teaching act itself. The four essential phases of teaching are very much related to the phases of evaluation: (a) The first stage

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in the teaching process is pre-assessment. Some type of testing program must be developed and utilized to determine the program entry level of children. (b) In the second phase, the actual teaching takes place in accord with the specific objectives. (c) Next in the sequence is a post-test which reveals whether or not the objectives have actually been achieved. (d) The next and most critical phase of teaching and the one which is so often ignored is the reteaching phase. This might be called the prescriptive phase.

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This is the same phase in program evaluation that is ignored by a good many of our colleagues. Valuable data from evaluation could provide a basis for prescriptive teaching, for formulating hypotheses, and for indicating new or different objectives. If evaluation is to take place, then evaluative data must be put to some logical productive use. An attempt must be made to achieve the objectives which have not previously been achieved. The evaluation material should provide decision makers with relevant and timely information for making decisions as to how a program should be modified to meet the need prescribed in the program objectives. More relevant objectives may need to be provided.

Why have evaluation data not been operationalized into the curriculum process? Many educators have not found ways to organize their classrooms and schools to make use of the information yielded. In a recent survey in a Midwest school system, teachers were asked to respond to the question, "Do you feel that the present standardized achievement testing program used at your grade level helps you plan instruction?" Two-thirds of the teachers responding indicated that the testing program did not help them plan instruction. Yet it would appear

that one of the major purposes of an evaluation program should be to aid in planning and replanning the instructional program.

Evaluation of process seems to have many similarities to the principles of diagnostic teaching. Evaluation must facilitate teaching, learning, and reteaching. After every piece of evaluative data is prepared, the teacher should be a little more sure of how to proceed next. The same holds true in program evaluation. Once all of the data are in, the program planner should be able to tell how to correct the program to meet the needs of that program (the process) and the learning of the youngsters involved (the product). Evaluation should serve not only diagnostic purposes for the teacher, but the student too should know better where he stands and how to progress. Students should see diagnostic teaching as an aid to them as they plan for their future learning, too.

More Frequent Evaluation

A definition of evaluation itself stresses the importance of corrective evaluation. A definition which might be used is, "Educational evaluation is a process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging, making decisions, and choosing alternatives." Educational evaluation, then, is a process essentially continuing as long as there is something about which information is needed for making decisions—decisions regarding program correction. Ultimately, evaluation should affect the learning of boys and girls and must provide information to members of the educational community.

Too often, evaluation is done on an annual basis. Constraints must be written into the program whereby evaluation may take place at more frequent intervals. A year is a long time in the life of a boy or a girl to be subjected to an error in the learning process. A time line should be set up for interim evaluation to take place. This type of evaluation may be done by product measure devices, it may be done by process measure devices, or it may be accomplished by some sort of professional observation team. Possibly a combination of all three of

these devices would provide for a more suitable form of evaluation to take place while a particular project is in process.

Based upon all of these inputs, a needs assessment should take place as to how the program is progressing. If changes appear to be mandated at this time because of the fact that the desired products and process are not being achieved, some definite procedure for making change should be built into the system. Too often people blame the lack of change on the fact that nothing is written into the system to encourage change. The whole evaluation procedure in American public education requires a new and broader perspective.

Educators must decide upon their reasons for evaluating. If they are evaluating for a series of data to be accumulated in a central office of a school system, evaluation is serving no productive purpose. The primary purpose of evaluation is to cause educators to look at the process and the product of education and to utilize evaluation data as a corrective tool. Whether an evaluation program is comprised of professional observation, standardized test scores, or a combination of both, if this evaluation procedure does not cause a change in the teaching process, thousands and perhaps millions of dollars in education are being wasted on the collection of needless data.

Again, using the teaching model in which reteaching is the final phase, in evaluation the final phase is program correction. Once the program correction takes place, the evaluation process again begins. The cycle is endless—program preparation, program conduct, program evaluation, program correction, and the cycle begins again (Figure 1).

In summary, evaluation can be used as a corrective tool if it meets the following criteria:

1. *Relevance.* Does the evaluation provide information related to the curriculum objectives?
2. *Applicability.* Does the evaluation provide teachers and curriculum planners with data from which they can extrapolate clear indications of weaknesses or strengths in teaching strategies? A clear test is whether the teachers,

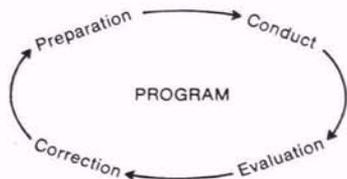


Figure 1. Program Evaluation Cycle

evaluators, and curriculum planners can realistically progress through the program cycle at their own operating level of educational experience.

3. *Timeliness and Availability.* Is the information available and timely in order for curriculum planners and teachers to use the data; or is the evaluation in October, while the data are possibly available the following August?

4. *Variety of Data.* Does evaluation give information in only a few areas, or is it broadly based?

5. *Clarity.* What is being evaluated? The child—the teacher—the curriculum—the learning process or the product—the teaching process or the product—the curriculum process or the product?

6. *Consistency and Longitudinal Aspect.* Is the evaluation that is done systemwide both consistent and accessible? To make curriculum decisions at the elementary level, can evaluation data at the secondary level be utilized, and conversely can secondary curriculum planning be based on predictions drawn from elementary evaluations? Is there a longitudinal aspect to evaluations?

7. *Ongoingness.* Does the process of evaluation go on continuously?

8. *Validity and Objectivity.* Does evaluation actually relate to the process of growth and development?

Evaluation has become a shibboleth. Let's toss out the shibboleth and take up the gauntlet. Evaluation can be the process by which education can become a meaningful and relevant experience for the students and all educators who are there to serve those students. Evaluation can be the corrective tool with which education can change. □

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