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*Each educator must clearly know his or her own beliefs and objectives and be able to plan teaching procedures and evaluation methods congruent with these objectives. An example of such practice is given.*

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## **Describing Behavior: Search for an Alternative to Grading**

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**L**IP SERVICE long has been given to the notion that the purpose of evaluation is for "the improvement of instruction." A large body of literature contends that schools ought to foster cooperation rather than competition, self-comparison rather than peer-comparison. For the most part, however, the awarding of grades continues on the basis of expediency, inability to visualize alternatives, a belief that it is necessary to label achievers and non-achievers, or the firm belief that students won't work if they aren't rewarded (and, of course, punished) by the awarding of grades. In practice, the purpose of evaluation continues to be a narrowly defined, often unjust, labeling system which fosters the acquisition of knowledge as its objective.

### **Need for New Competencies**

If we wish to change the purpose of evaluation to that of the improvement of instruction, the individual teacher must use some competencies he or she does not now possess. Evaluation cannot be devised or carried out in isolation from other competencies. Before an educator can plan evaluation procedures, his or her beliefs about the

nature of humanity and the purposes of education must be clearly delineated. This is necessary because the planning and evaluation procedures evolve from and must be congruent with these two values. Educators have not in practice made their values, objectives, teaching procedures, and evaluation methods congruent. This lack of coherence has contributed to the mounting criticism of educators. Much of the criticism is, in my opinion, deserved.

Educators do not hold common beliefs either about the nature of humanity or the purposes of education. Therefore, a common set of objectives, teaching procedures, and evaluation methods is unlikely to evolve. Nor, I believe, is this goal desirable. It is necessary, however, that each educator clearly know his or her own beliefs and objectives and be able to plan teaching procedures and evaluation methods that are congruent with his or her objectives. For instance: if one holds that people are intrinsically "evil" (as a majority of educators seem to do if one looks at their practices), that children must

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be made to learn, must be told what to do, that motivation is extrinsic—then certainly the teacher's role is an authoritarian, manipulative (however kindly) one. Combine this view of intrinsic evil with the belief that the primary objective of education is the acquisition of knowledge, and what evolves is pretty much the picture of the traditional classroom. For this viewpoint, the traditional system of evaluation is quite congruent with the beliefs and objectives of the acquisition of knowledge.

On the other hand, many educators do not hold the above beliefs. Many believe that people are basically "good," that children want to learn, that motivation is intrinsic. Often educators holding this value system espouse objectives dealing with "learning how to learn," self-concept, and self-direction. They speak of the teacher's role as one of "facilitator of learning." If one holds these beliefs, both the authoritarian role and the grading system are incongruent with the attainment of such objectives. Thus, in a search for congruency, there has been the rise of the open school, nongradedness, team teaching, and other innovations. The role of teacher as facilitator in this setting has not been clearly understood. Educators have talked of the "structured" vs. "unstructured" classroom. This is a misnomer. The open classroom with the teacher(s) in the role of facilitator is carefully structured—it is simply structured differently than is that of the traditional classroom. It is a very skillful type of teaching, requiring new competencies of the teacher. Small wonder that many open classrooms are indeed "unstructured"—or laissez-faire. One once again hears John Dewey crying, "Hey gang, that's not what I meant. That's not what I meant at all."<sup>1</sup>

Some, however, truly have been able to structure their role as a facilitator, but then have used the traditional grading system—probably primarily because of tradition and an inability to visualize alternatives. It is extremely difficult (perhaps impossible) for teachers to move from the traditional role in

which they have been trained to one of facilitator without a support system. To do so, teachers must learn new skills. They must consciously delineate their value system and objectives, then devise procedures and evaluation methods that are congruent with their values and objectives. They must have the competence to analyze their value system-objectives-teaching behavior-evaluation cycle for internal consistency. Not until teachers have conscious control over each step in this

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cycle will they truly be professionals. Most do not presently possess these competencies.

There is some evidence that teachers tend, when questioned about the rationale for their actions, to select an objective to fit their procedures rather than planning their procedures to meet stated objectives.<sup>2</sup> Teachers, however, usually have not been trained to be analytical of their own behavior. There is need for universities and school systems to develop a comprehensive, ongoing staff development program to provide the necessary support system for change. Following is a description of a school district which provided such comprehensive support for one school, the evaluation system which evolved from this school as an alternative to grading, and the manner in which it was used by the author.

## Use of the Instrument

Tucson School District No. 1 opened its first "open school," Erickson Elementary School, in 1967-68. The staff was the decision-making body. The principal was selected; she in turn selected the staff from

<sup>2</sup> Catherine L. Hartman. "Developing and Testing the Effectiveness of an Instructional Sequence for the Use of Objectives in Educational Decision Making." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1972.

<sup>1</sup> John Dewey. *Experience and Education*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938.

among volunteers, based on the results of interviews and classroom observations. Those selected did hold a value framework in common with the principal, and a commitment to develop a school devoted to fostering positive self-concept, self-direction, and "learning how to learn."

The staff was provided release in-service and planning time during the year prior to the opening of the school. Each teacher wrote what he or she perceived to be the philosophy of the school. The Research Department combined each statement into a common statement of philosophy for the school (*identification of value system*). Each staff member then wrote what he or she perceived to be the objectives of the school. Again the Research Department combined these into a common statement of objectives for the school (*objectives congruent with philosophy*).

The first year the school plant was not ready for occupancy; children were bused to empty rooms in four different schools. All staff members attempted to carry out the program as they visualized it. Some were teaming; most were not. My team member and I were responsible for 56 intermediate (grades 4-6) children. We attempted to carry out a program designed to meet the objectives—in general, those dealing with self-concept, self-direction, location of information and communication skills rather than the acquisition of knowledge. A description of our organization and procedures is not within the scope of this paper. However, we felt it required individualization of instruction—carefully structured, but structured differently from that of the traditional classroom (*procedures congruent with objectives and values*). This description is, of course, greatly simplifying the difficulties experienced.

As with all schools, there was the necessity to "evaluate pupil progress." Because we had devised no alternative, we used the traditional report card, with its A-F grading system, assessing children in both Subject Matter and Citizenship. At this point we discovered we had certainly met one of our objectives in developing children who would

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1. *Feeling Tone (emotional climate)*
    - a. Positive self-concept: the pupil feels good about himself or herself.
    - b. Positive interpersonal relations: the pupil recognizes himself or herself as an individual and respects the individuality of others. The pupil works satisfactorily as part of a group.
    - c. Self-direction (discipline): the pupil accepts the responsibility for his or her own actions.
    - d. Aesthetic sense: the pupil has an awareness of his or her environment and a sensitivity to non-verbal communication.
  2. *Intellectual Growth and Development*  
Skill development—thinking and communicating.
  3. *Physical Growth and Development*
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Figure 1. Goals of Pupil Behavior

"state their own opinions even though in disagreement with authority figures." They told us our grading system was not fair. They were correct, of course. It wasn't (*evaluation procedures incongruent with procedures, objectives, and philosophy*).

The faculty had been aware of this problem, and a committee had been formed to devise our own evaluation system based upon our objectives. The resulting instrument (Figure 1) was, to me, a useful tool. A glance at the instrument shows it to be much more specific in the affective area. This was intentional. It was desirable that the instrument be limited to one page so that it could be used as a report card. The school, although not slighting cognitive and psychomotor learnings, was heavily emphasizing the affective domain—an area less familiar to parents. (The committee also developed supplementary material, citing behavioral examples for each objective.) We also found it necessary to develop sub-objectives for Categories 2 and 3, for instance:

- a. Locates needed information, using a wide variety of resources, for example, indexes, card catalogs, magazines, globes, maps, encyclopedias, and films.
- b. Communicates information clearly and correctly, using a variety of methods and media, for example, written reports, outlines, panel discussions, graphs, art, music, and drama.
- c. Writes legibly.

In order to use the instrument, a teacher must be competent in *describing* behavior rather than making inference statements.

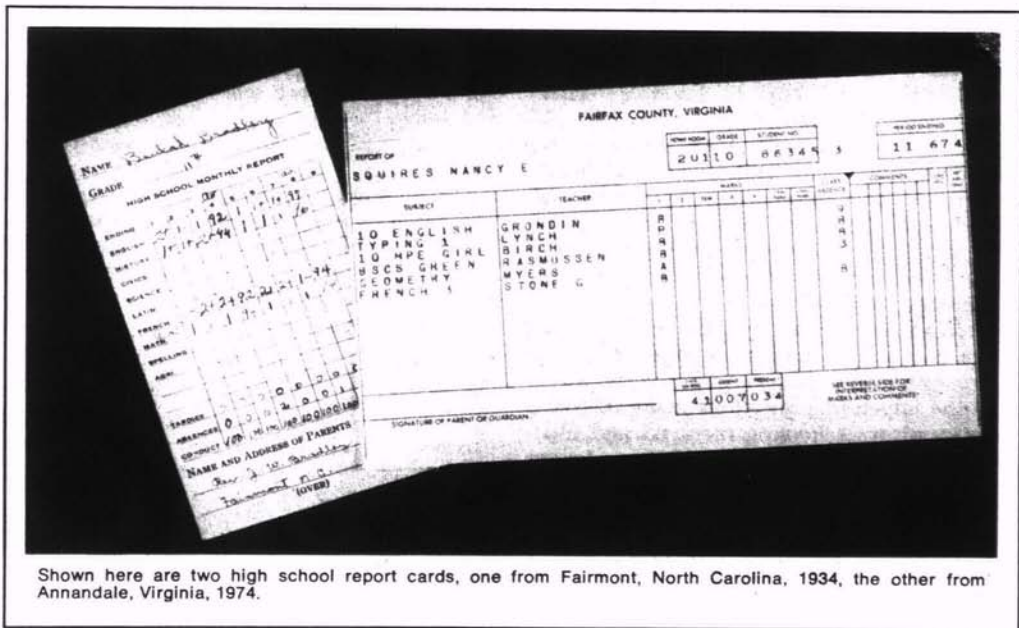
Most are not. Nearly all evaluative statements made about children are statements of inference, and as such are as unfair as A-F labels. ("Sally is so vacant." What is a vacant child? Is it one who has no internal organs?) Behavior description is a competency not widely taught at either the pre-service or in-service level. Fortunately, I was concurrently involved in a staff development program in the district, the "Teacher Self-Appraisal In-service Program,"<sup>3</sup> in which I was developing behavior description and other useful competencies.

As I am unable to describe accurately the practices of the other staff members, I shall describe how I used the instrument the second year. I introduced the evaluation instrument to the children, thus sharing the objectives. I had prepared a file box of 8" x 5" cards, each card containing a child's name and filed in alphabetical order. I ex-

<sup>3</sup>This staff development program is now operating as the "Teacher Self-Development Program," under the direction of the author as consultant for the Metropolitan Public Schools, Nashville, Tennessee.

plained that each time I saw the pupils doing something that showed they were meeting an objective, I would describe their behavior on their card, indicating the date on which it was observed. They could do the same on their own or another's card, signing their name. At parent-child-teacher conference time, the reporting system, anecdotal cards, and all supplementary supporting materials were used as a basis for discussion. A written report, using the instrument, was sent home at alternating reporting periods.

The advantages I found in using this instrument were in communicating objectives to children and parents, in having behavioral evidence of the child's progress, in helping the child assess his or her behavior toward meeting the objective rather than comparing him or her with another child, and in helping me to both plan and assess my teaching procedures for congruency with my objectives. Certainly the instrument is imperfect. Nevertheless, I felt the evaluation system, combined with certain other competencies, did permit *congruency of values, objectives, procedures, and evaluation.* □



Shown here are two high school report cards, one from Fairmont, North Carolina, 1934, the other from Annandale, Virginia, 1974.

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