

# Teacher Evaluation and Educational Accountability

Pamela J. Eckard and James H. McElhinney

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*Skills of teacher evaluation and accountability in education must, according to these authors, be given increased attention by all educators. Only so can school people demonstrate that their contributions to learners are indeed successful.*

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Teacher evaluation and accountability are little more than vague conceptualizations in the minds of most professionals and lay citizens. Yet many persons value these processes because they believe some such procedures are necessary to produce a better quality in educational outcomes. Some professionals, especially teachers, also are frightened by teacher evaluation and accountability. This fear may be understandable because teachers exercise the power of evaluation constantly, and, as evaluators, they know how destructive the misuse of the great power of evaluation can be.

Teacher evaluation and accountability are especially advocated by the professionals who judge the processes to be necessary components in improvement of educational programs, and by students, parents, and employers who judge educational outcomes to be inadequate. Assurances from inside the profession of the overall goodness of "our school" become increasingly unacceptable.

Teacher education and accountability are complex, filled with opportunities for error, and call for competencies not widely possessed by professionals. With formal education increasingly the major vehicle to economic viability, political stability, cultural development, and self-realization, professionals must begin to minimize the errors and master the competencies.

## Teacher Evaluation and Educational Accountability as Practiced

Teacher evaluation and educational accountability in the mid-1970's are usually based on objectives that are not clearly identified, utilize procedures that are incomplete, employ measures that are inadequate, and are not completed in the allotted time.

Educational evaluation is usually limited to the evaluation of teachers, ignores objectives, utilizes a simple design, obtains data from three processes, and is implemented by a building principal as one more year-end responsibility.

The three sources of data usually include: (a) pupil scores on standardized tests, (b) notes made following two or three classroom visits, (c) and completion of a judgmental checklist of behaviors not related to pupil outcomes.

Most standardized tests are masterpieces of measurement and statistical technology. Professional literature includes many logical and emotional evaluations of them. Yet standardized achievement tests measure content and competencies that are not the exclusive domain of the school, but are widely available in the culture, and therefore do not exclusively measure instruction. Completing batteries of such tests is usually a foreign experience for learners. Content measured by the tests is often only obliquely related to school objectives. Most tests report scores in terms that are meaningless or misleading except to technicians. Few tests identify strengths or weaknesses of the program or teaching practices. Manuals accompanying most tests may imply, but do not necessarily claim, that "growth" from an instructional program causes changes in scores. One almost certain way to obtain higher scores on tests is to let a year of time go by.

When standardized tests are chosen for correspondence between test content and program content; when pupils are given practice in test-taking competencies; when standardized tests are given under conditions similar to learning conditions; when scores are reported to teacher, pupil, and parent in terms that are meaningful and diagnostic; when individual and group responses are analyzed to the degree that the tests are diagnostic; when the change in pre- and post-test scores is more a function of the program than of the pretest; and when the period of time between

the pre- and post-test is great enough to greatly exceed the measurement error, a few standardized tests used judiciously may have wide application as one component in teacher and program evaluation.

The two or three classroom visits made by the principal, acting in the infrequent role of supervisor-evaluator, are often made without prior knowledge of the instructional objectives, are too infrequent to serve as a basis for help in instruction, too unstructured to be anything but superficial, and often do more to build resentment than to improve learning.

The third source of data is one of many checklists or rating scales that characteristically collect judgments on teaching behaviors without criteria. Rating scales include items such as the planning the teacher does, how the teacher fits into the total program, and whether appropriate relationships with peers are evident. The list is rated by the supervisor and is sometimes followed by a conference with the teacher. As with all instruments that collect judgments rather than evidence, often the teacher is rated high or low depending on how well the teacher is liked and personally accepted by the supervisor. With successful suits for not assigning the highest possible ratings, supervisors rate most teachers very highly.

## Developments in Evaluation and Accountability

Pressures from dissatisfied constituencies, genuine concern by professionals for processes to strengthen curricula, some acquaintance in formal education with program evaluation techniques, and mandates from state and local governing boards have stimulated increased activity in teacher evaluation and educational accountability. In some districts, teachers and teacher organizations are not questioning the need for teacher evaluation, but are questioning the competencies of supervisor-evaluators to design and conduct adequate evaluations.

Teacher organizations are insisting on their rights to have input into the objectives for instruction, the criteria and the processes by which they and programs are evaluated, and in identifying the learner behaviors that will be accepted as evidence of quality in teaching and learning.

The evaluation of teachers is a professional task. Pupils and parents should serve as sources of data, but they should not participate directly in professional decision making. Items used in collecting data from pupils and parents should mostly be reporting items rather than judgment items.

Evaluation and accountability are more widely practiced with teachers than at other levels in school organization, but wider acceptance of due process and the occasional lawsuit—in which teachers charge that they were neither appropriately informed concerning areas of performance that needed strengthening nor given appropriate help to overcome deficiencies—are causing increased performance evaluations at supervisory, administrative, and service levels. Systematic evaluation of all levels of educational personnel, by clients, peers, and supervisors, is not far away.

### **Productive Evaluation and Accountability Practices**

In one successful model of teacher evaluation and curriculum implementation, the elementary building principal and the faculty follow a well-defined planning, implementation, and evaluation cycle each week to produce predictable outcomes in learners.

The 24 teachers are grouped in teams of three. The principal observes each team every week using a structured observation guide. Also, the principal meets with each team for one hour every week to report on progress being made on commitments made at the previous meeting, to accurately describe the significant teaching-learning experiences of the week, to judge the quality of the teaching in terms of long-range and short-range goals, to plan appropriate modifications, and to make plans and commitments for the following week.

The model assumes that the supervisor and evaluator are the same individual; that evaluation is a necessary component of supervision; that the ideal relationship between supervisor and teacher is very similar to the ideal relationship between teacher and learner; that supervision of instruction is the most important responsibility of the principal and has first call on his or her time and talents; that teachers working in teams inevitably

produce peer supervision; that appropriate teaching behaviors move learners toward established objectives; that a skilled supervisor using an appropriate observation guide can accurately observe and record teaching and learning behaviors; that obtaining accurate descriptions is a joint responsibility of supervisor and teachers; that judgments of quality must be withheld until judg-

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ments of accuracy of description are jointly established; that criteria for quality based on objectives are often difficult to agree upon and are also difficult to apply to accurate descriptions of teaching behaviors; and that this complex process must be skillfully repeated each week to produce predictable outcomes in learners.

### **Cycle of Supervisor-Evaluator and Teacher Interactions**

1. The supervisor-evaluator, using the broad educational goals of the district, will establish the parameters for program objectives within the building and will work cooperatively with teachers to establish the program objectives for which teachers and supervisor will be accountable. The supervisor-evaluator is also responsible for articulation of instruction between teacher teams. Clear, comprehensive, and balanced objectives, long-range and short-range, become the bases on which learning experiences are built or selected and are the sources of criteria by which learner outcomes are judged.

2. In an evaluation-planning conference, supervisor and teachers will jointly identify the immediate short-range objectives that will guide the teaching-learning activities for the subsequent week and will jointly identify appropriate criteria for determining quality in learner outcomes.

3. During the week, the supervisor, using an appropriate and descriptive observation form, will

complete a systematic observation of a sample of the teaching-learning episodes to gather accurate descriptions of instruction. During the year, the supervisor is responsible for the collection of additional data through such methods as interviews, questionnaires, and diagnostic tests.

4. At the following weekly conference, teachers can present their observations by submitting an identical observation form that they have marked, or may question the one completed by the supervisor. When there are disagreements in descriptions, both the supervisor and the teachers cite the specific teacher or learner behaviors that led them to mark the observation form as they did. At this step, limit the examination of the descriptions to *accuracy* of the descriptions. Judgments of quality are not pertinent at this step. When teachers and supervisor cannot agree on an accurate description, the judgments of each will be accurately recorded, but the judgments of teachers will prevail until subsequent observations clearly indicate that the teachers' judgments are inaccurate.

6. After reaching agreement on what happened during the observed teaching-learning episode, criteria for quality will be applied jointly by the supervisor and the teacher. Portions that went well will be examined, and the sources of strength identified. Portions that need strengthening will be examined, and possible behaviors to strengthen these portions will be noted. If weaknesses persist, appropriate in-service activities will be established.

7. The agenda for the weekly conference will also include a review of all major teaching-learning activities for the past week comparing them to the short-range goals and to the evaluation criteria from the previous planning session. Objectives satisfactorily met will be replaced by succeeding objectives. Alternative learning activities will be planned for objectives inadequately met. Instruction and evaluation plans will be made for the following week.

8. The agenda will also include any item deemed important by any member of the teaching team or the supervisor. Examples include individual or group motivation activities, discipline problems, public relations activities, learning problems of individuals or groups with possible remedial activities, planning for resource persons, planning

field trips, sharing of ideas gained from professional reading, school visits, and course work.

9. Objectives for the week will be identified; teaching-learning activities will be planned; and evaluation procedures will be agreed upon. Each teaching responsibility will be assigned, and each individual will make commitments for the following week.

10. The supervisor will always participate in the selection of objectives, the planning of instruction, and the planning and implementation of evaluation of learner outcomes. At the close of most sessions, the supervisor will also have commitments to meet before the next planning and evaluation session. In many situations, the quality of instruction will improve if, at least once each year, the supervisor participates directly in the instruction with each team she/he supervises.

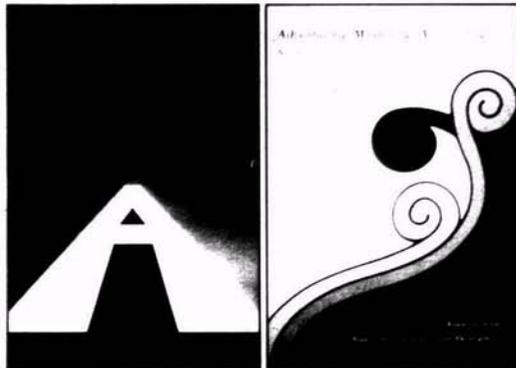
11. Near the close of the session, each individual present will summarize the commitments made, with the supervisor accepting responsibility for balance and direction, and for recording the commitments.

12. Each systematic observation form, each set of plans and commitments, and any other paper generated by the supervision-planning session will be dated and signed by all participants and will be filed where there is access by all parties. These materials will be one source of data for later evaluation of teachers and supervisor.

13. Individual problems may require supplemental meetings between a teacher and supervisor.

14. Direct peer evaluation can also be an agenda item in these weekly meetings. Manuals accompanying Individually Guided Education (IGE) advocate this practice. Constructive peer criticism can be a powerful tool in improving instruction and stimulating professional growth, but few are skilled at peer evaluation, and planned in-service is needed to develop the skills and provide the practice needed to use the skills constructively.

In conclusion, maintaining existing competencies and acquiring new competencies is an expected component of continued professional employment. It is reasonable to expect that educators should increase the level of effectiveness they exhibit each succeeding year. It is also



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reasonable that individuals will need assistance in acquiring or applying new proficiencies.

Personnel are the major program component. Strengthening individual and group performance is a necessity in strengthening an educational program.

Educational programs call for a variety of competencies. Individual teachers need not possess all competencies, but each should possess and develop competencies that, when combined with those of other personnel, will provide appropriate coverage and balance for quality implementation of the educational program.

As goals and emphasis in programs evolve, the need for competencies will change and additional competencies may be required. Satisfactory performance one year may not be satisfactory another. Individual teachers and groups of teachers must acquire competencies appropriate to current needs.

Supervisors have leadership and staff development responsibilities to identify and develop their own competencies in order to stimulate teachers to master and utilize competencies needed by the current program.

The complex and powerful tasks of teacher evaluation and accountability in education must be given increased attention by all educators. Administrators, supervisors, and teachers should acquire the evaluation skills necessary to determine the degree to which teaching behaviors effectively contribute to the academic program, the learner, and themselves. These skills must be acquired in order that educators can more responsibly demonstrate to parents and learners that their contributions to the learner are indeed successful.



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