

# Reforming Teacher Evaluation: Naturalistic Alternatives

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*“Teacher evaluation is today shrouded with a false sense of scientism.” Assumptions underlying the prevalent technical/rational approach appear, to this author, to be less than adequate. Suggested here are some naturalistic assumptions that may be worth trying.*

Let us assume that you are at a workshop for supervisors and others with responsibility for teacher evaluation. The workshop leader asks you to write three statements, each of which expresses a personal feeling or belief you have about teacher evaluation. First, write a *public* statement that you would be willing to share with teachers, board members, and parents; next a *confidential* statement that you would be willing to share only with trusted colleagues; and finally a *private* statement that you would not readily share with others.

Chances are that doubt in the credibility of present practices characterizes your confidential and/or private statements. Don't feel guilty; many others with responsibility for teacher evaluation share your doubts. Indeed, the quandary I describe turns to quagmire when one realizes that the same teacher evaluation practices that

raise doubts of credibility are today being implemented with more fervor and on a wider scale than ever before. Let us assume for a moment that my hypothesis—“by-and-large supervisors and others responsible for teacher evaluation privately view the procedures as lacking in credibility”—is correct. What are the likely effects of participating in a system characterized by such doubts? I've noticed that the system takes on a certain artificial or mechanical quality, a routine function that becomes an end in itself.

## **Prevailing and Alternate Assumptions**

This article reviews some of the assumptions basic to present teacher evaluation practices. It also contrasts these with alternate assumptions and practices that I believe hold promise for increasing meaning in the process of teacher

evaluation and that seem more naturally compatible with the work of educational enterprises. At present, the dominant view of teacher evaluation is characterized by a commitment to technical/rational values. These values are expressed in the form of predetermination and the scientific method. Predetermination is evidenced by establishing, before a teaching episode, outputs such as specific objectives and competency levels to be exhibited, and by otherwise specifying the rules of the game or the blueprint for evaluation.

The scientific method is evidenced by an emphasis on objective design characteristics in the evaluation process and on a primary concern for precision in measurement. Rating scales are emphasized as means to measure predetermined competencies, and effectiveness in teaching is defined as the accomplishment of predetermined intents, sticking to predetermined rules or displaying predetermined behavior.

In recent years, a number of prominent program evaluation experts have developed and begun to test alternatives to this technical/rational approach that rely far less on the scientific method and far more on the intuitions, aspirations, and capabilities of those involved at both ends of the evaluation.<sup>1</sup> Theirs is a more naturalistic approach that sees value in discovering as opposed to determining and in describing as opposed to measuring. Though the primary focus of this pioneering work is on program evaluation, its underlying assumption, characteristics, and design features apply to teacher evaluation as well.<sup>2</sup>

Let us contrast some key assumptions and practices (Figure 1) associated with technical/rational approaches to teacher evaluation with those associated with more naturalistic approaches.

Why is it important to describe prevailing assumptions behind teacher evaluation practices? Technologies are associated with ideologies, and the language and values of science (objectivity, rationality, reliability, and precision) have been found to be irresistible. Present classroom observation and evaluation technology is shrouded with a sense of scientism often not even found in the more legitimate sciences. This phenomenon flies in the face of what most educators down deep believe—that teaching is a far more artistic enterprise than scientific. That being the case, it may

be that we have adopted a technology of teacher evaluation ill-suited to the nature of the educational enterprise. In the sections which follow, work being done to develop naturalistic alternatives to teacher evaluations more compatible with the nature of education is highlighted.

### Connoisseurship and Criticism

It would be difficult to discuss naturalistic alternatives to present teacher evaluation practices without reference to the work of Elliot Eisner.<sup>3</sup>

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Eisner is concerned with developing, in supervisors and teachers, the qualities and skills of appreciation, inference, disclosure, and descrip-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Robert E. Stake. *Program Evaluation, Particularly Responsive Evaluation*. Paper #5 in Occasional Paper Series. Kalamazoo: Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University, November 1975; Robert E. Stake, editor. *Evaluating the Arts in Education: A Responsive Approach*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1975; Elliott W. Eisner. "Emerging Models for Educational Evaluation." *School Review* 80 (4): 1972; Decker Walker. "A Naturalistic Model for Curriculum Development." *School Review* 80 (1): 1971; Michael Scriven. "Goal-Free Evaluation." In: Ernest House, editor. *School Evaluation: The Politics and Process*. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1973; and George Willis. "Curriculum Criticism and Literary Criticism." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 7 (1): 1975.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Elliot Eisner. "The Perceptive Eye: Toward the Reformation of Educational Evaluation." Invited address, Division B, Curriculum and Objectives, AERA, Washington, D.C. 1975; Morris Cogan. *Clinical Supervision*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973; James Raths. "Teaching Without Specific Objectives." *Educational Leadership* 28 (7): 1971; Thomas J. Sergiovanni. "Toward a Theory of Clinical Supervision." *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 9 (2): 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Elliot Eisner. "Applying Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism to Educational Settings." Stanford University, Department of Education, undated. Mimeographed.

tion. He refers to these qualities as the cultivation of educational connoisseurship and criticism. It is through the art of connoisseurship that one is able to appreciate and internalize meanings in classrooms, and through the skill of criticism that one is able to share or "disclose" this meaning to

Figure 1. Contrasting Assumptions and Practices in Two Approaches to Teacher Evaluation

<i>Technical/Rational Assumptions and Practices</i>	<i>Naturalistic Assumptions and Practices</i>
1. Evaluation is viewed as a process designed to determine the worth of something—a teacher, teaching episode, or performance.	1. Evaluation is valuing something. Before one can begin to value something fully, he/she needs to understand it. Therefore, evaluation is seeking to understand something. What is going on in this classroom and why? What does it mean?
2. The emphasis is on observing words and behavior and not on intuition and understanding. Indeed intuition is something to be controlled because of its impressionistic rather than scientific nature, and understanding is a luxury that may distract the evaluation process from its true course.	2. Words and behavior are viewed only as proxies for understandings and meanings and therefore much is missed by focusing only on the proxies. The evaluation is designed to inform the supervisor's intuition, not to replace it.
3. The evaluator follows a blueprint and evaluates the teacher according to the specifications called for in the blueprint.	3. The evaluator develops a representation of events that have taken place—a portrait of the teaching episode. Thus, "specifications" not previously determined are included in the evaluation.
4. The blueprint characteristic of the evaluation specifies what is of worth and defines meanings and understandings. This is an exclusive process.	4. The portrait characteristics of the evaluation assume that multiple and sometimes contradicting understandings and meanings exist. The evaluator's job is to identify and describe them. Portraits of teaching episodes often reveal a hidden curriculum more potent than that intended and the achievement of unanticipated intents that may have more value than those intended by the teacher or specified in the lesson plan. This is an inclusive process.
5. What is important to the evaluation are the stated intents of the teacher and the predetermined objectives held for students.	5. What is important to the evaluation are the implicit assumptions and guiding platform statements that teachers bring to the class, the manner in which these assumptions and platform statements are articulated into classroom activities and practices, and the implications and effects of these activities and practices.*
6. The evaluator is primarily concerned with methodology. He/she asks, how can I be sure that I can describe and measure, without error, the extent to which predetermined objectives are being met by the teacher and/or that this teacher exhibits pre-determined competency levels in teaching.	6. The evaluator is primarily concerned with discovering, describing, and measuring important things that occur. He/she is willing to choose methods suited to important things even though they may be weak or considered by others (particularly technical/rational evaluators) as subjective or impressionistic.

7. The evaluator relies heavily on rating scales and other teacher evaluation instruments. These help him/her to be objective, to treat all teachers the same, and to ensure that the focus of the evaluation is on important events.

7. The evaluator believes that rating scales and other teacher evaluation instruments often prevent him/her from fully understanding classroom events and prevent the evaluator and the teacher from becoming personally involved in the evaluation process. The evaluator prefers to use data from the situation at hand to help define the parameters of the evaluation and to help understand crucial evaluation issues. He/she prefers to use videotape, teacher and student interviews, artifact collections, and evaluation portfolios and considers these as better methods of representation than instruments and rating scales.

8. The evaluator is primarily concerned with estimating the worth of a particular teaching performance and by inference the teacher. The teacher assumes a subordinate role in the process. The evaluator is the expert. Evaluation is something done to teachers by evaluators.

8. The evaluator is primarily interested in increasing understanding, in stimulating thought, and in extending the experience of the teacher being evaluated. The teacher assumes a key role in the process. Evaluator and teacher share the expert role, and evaluation is something done together.

\* Thomas J. Sergiovanni. "Toward a Theory of Clinical Supervision." *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 9 (2); 1976.

others. Eisner uses references to wine connoisseurship and art criticism as illustrative of these concepts. The art of appreciation is the tool of the connoisseur and the art of disclosure the tool of the critic.

Cross uses the example of sports commentators and writers to illustrate the combined application of connoisseurship and criticism.

Most of us are familiar with some of the techniques employed by commentators in describing and remarking on well-executed plays or potentially victorious strategies. Athletic plays executed with finesse are often seen in stop action, instant replay, slow motion, or are recounted in stirring detail on sports pages. One of the major contributions of these commentators is their great knowledge of sports, familiarizing them with possibilities so they know whether a flanker reverse, off-tackle run, screen pass, or drawplay was used or has potential for gaining yardage in a given situation, or when the bump and run, blitz, or single coverage was used or likely to prevent gain. Knowledge about educational potentials is also necessary. The potentially worthwhile tactics of teaching or those in use—the bump and runs or flanker reverses of schooling—need to be described and conveyed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> James Cross. "Applying Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism to Supervisory Practices." *Educational Administration and Supervision*, University of Illinois, Urbana, 1976. Mimeographed.



*Teachers should develop a portfolio—a file or collection of artifacts, records, and other materials designed to represent some aspect of the classroom program and teaching activities.*

The commentator's ability to render play-by-play action in a fashion that permits us to see and feel the game as he/she does depends upon a feel of intimacy with the phenomena under study not permitted by mere attention to game statistics and other objective information and a quality of disclosure more vivid than a box score.

### Clinical Supervision

Many forms of clinical supervision resemble naturalistic approaches. Such forms are naturalistic when they rely heavily on developing a complete representation of a teaching episode and when they use this representation as a basis for making inference and building understanding of events. Videotaping is the most common method of representation associated with clinical supervision. Clinical supervision uses the data at hand (actually generated from the environment and activities being evaluated) rather than data that fit a preconceived rating form or a set of instrument specification and which place the teacher in a key role as generator, interpreter, and analyst of events described.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes clinical supervisors take too seri-

ously the need to "scientifically" and "objectively" document events. Sometimes they focus too intensely on the step-wise or work flow aspects of clinical supervisors. Sometimes they rely too heavily on predetermined objectives or on specifying detailed blueprints and plans that subsequently determine the direction of the evaluation. But clinical supervision can be geared to discovering and understanding rather than determining, and in that sense it has naturalistic potential. Alan Simon in another article in this issue of *Educational Leadership* describes work on developing a hybrid of clinical supervision that incorporates naturalistic features.<sup>6</sup> (See page 580.)

<sup>5</sup>Clinical supervision, generally associated with Morris Cogan's book, *Clinical Supervision* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973], developed as a result of the pioneering work of Robert Anderson, Morris Cogan, Robert Goldhammer and others first at Harvard in the late 1950's and early 1960's and now at Pittsburgh and other locations.

<sup>6</sup>See also: Alan Simon. "Videotapes Illustrating Concepts of the Argyris and Schön Model in Instructional Supervisory Situations." Doctoral dissertation, Educational Administration and Supervision, University of Illinois, Urbana, 1976.

## Artifacts Analysis and Portfolio Development

Videotaping can provide a useful and readily accessible representation of teaching episodes and classroom activities. But because of the selective nature of lens and screen, this technique can also frame perception and evoke slanted meanings. Further, what the screen shows always represents a choice among possibilities and therefore provides an incomplete picture. And finally, some aspects of classroom life do not lend themselves very well to lens and screen and could be neglected.

Artifacts analysis and/or portfolio development, when used in conjunction with videotaping, can help provide a more complete representation of classroom life and therefore can increase meaning. These approaches, however, can stand apart from videotaping and indeed can stand apart from each other.

Imagine a classroom deserted suddenly 20 years ago by its teacher and immediately sealed. Everything else remains exactly as it was at the moment of desertion—desks, chairs, interest centers, work materials, test files, homework assignments, reading center sign-up lists, star reward charts and other “motivational” devices, bulletin boards, workbooks, student notebooks, grade books, plan books, library displays, teacher work-room arrangements, student lounge area arrangements, and so on.

Twenty years later, you arrive on the scene as an amateur anthropologist intent on learning about the culture, way of life, and meaning of this class (its goals, values, beliefs, activities, norms). As you dig through this classroom, what artifacts might you collect and how might you use these artifacts to help you learn about life in this classroom? Suppose, for example, you were interested in discovering what was important to this teacher, how this teacher viewed his/her role in contrast to that of the students, what youngsters seemed to be learning and/or enjoying, and how time was spent? In each case, what might you collect? What inferences might you make, for example, if you were to find most of the work of students to be in the form of short answer responses in workbooks or on ditto sheets, no student work displayed in the class, all student desks containing identical materials, and a teacher

test file with most questions geared to the knowledge level of the taxonomy of educational objectives?

Portfolio development represents a teacher evaluation strategy similar to that of artifacts analysis but with some important differences.<sup>7</sup> The intent of portfolio development is to establish a file or collection of artifacts, records, photo essays, cassettes, and other materials designed to represent some aspect of the classroom program and teaching activities. Though the materials in the portfolio should be loosely collected, and therefore suitable for rearrangement from time to time to reflect different aspects of the class, the portfolio should be designed with a sense of purpose. The teacher or teaching team being evaluated are responsible for assembling the portfolio and should do so in a fashion that highlights their perception of key issues and important concerns they wish to represent.

Like artists who prepare a portfolio of their work to reflect a point of view, teachers prepare a similar representation of their work. Together, supervisor and teacher use the collected artifacts to identify key issues, to substantiate teacher educational platform dimensions, and to identify serendipitous but worthwhile outcomes. A portfolio collection could be used for example to examine such issues as:

1. Are classroom activities compatible with the teacher's espoused educational platform and/or that of the school?
2. Do supervisor and teacher have compatible goals?
3. Are youngsters engaging in activities that require advanced cognitive thinking or is the emphasis on lower level learning?
4. Do youngsters have an opportunity to influence classroom decisions?
5. Is the classroom program challenging all of the students regardless of academic potential or are some youngsters taught too little and others too much?

<sup>7</sup> See: Patricia Scheyer and Robert Stake. "A Program's Self-Evaluation Portfolio." Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, undated, mimeographed, for a discussion and application of this concept for program evaluation.

6. Are the youngsters assuming passive or active roles in the classroom?

7. Is the teacher working hard? That is, is there evidence of planning, care in preparation of materials, and reflective and conscientious feedback on students' work or are short cuts evident?

8. Does the teacher understand the subject matter?

9. What is the nature and character of the hidden curriculum in this class?

Though portfolio development and artifacts analysis share common features, the most notable of which is the collection of artifacts, portfolio development is the responsibility of the teacher. The teacher decides what will be represented by the portfolio and the items to be included in its collection. Together, the teacher and supervisor use this representation to identify issues for discussion and analysis.

I have argued that teacher evaluation is today shrouded with a false sense of scientism. Approaches following this thinking have simply not been effective. The proposed solution is to tighten up existing procedures, to get serious, to increase objectivity—or to otherwise emphasize even more present technical/rational procedures. What we may not realize, however, is that the defects of technical/rational views are not just in the procedures, but are inherent in underlying assumptions. One cannot promise that practices based on naturalistic assumptions will be more effective, but, if my original hypothesis is true, the assumptions suggest alternatives worth trying.

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# National Curriculum Study Institutes



## Summer 1977

### Leadership Role of Parents and Other Community People in Curriculum Development: Concepts and Strategies

July 25-26, Anaheim, California (Grand Hotel)

Increasingly, educators are recognizing the need for parents to be actively involved in curriculum development and other aspects of the educational process. This institute is designed for (1) parents and community people who are involved or want to be involved effectively in curriculum development; and (2) for professional educators who want to involve parents/citizens in curriculum work, or want to improve their effectiveness in working with parents/citizens. This institute will use a workshop format and conferees should come prepared to be active participants.

Consultants: Institute Director—*Delmo Della-Dora*, California State University, Hayward; *Michael Connors*, California State University, Long Beach; *Donald Davies*, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, Massachusetts; *Nettye Goddard*, San Jose Unified School District, California; *Carl Marburger*, National Committee for Citizens in Education, Columbia, Maryland.

Registration must reach ASCD by July 15.

### Guidelines for Planning and Conducting Curriculum Evaluation

August 10-12, Seattle, Washington (Washington Plaza Hotel)

This institute is a two- and one-half-day workshop on practical topics related to planning and conducting educational evaluation studies. It is intended to serve practicing evaluators, administrators, and other personnel who use evaluation information in universities and colleges, school systems, and state departments of education. Participants will engage in a number of different activities including lectures, small group discussions, and sessions designed to provide practical skills in planning and conducting evaluation studies.

Consultants: Institute Director—*James Sanders*, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo; *Mary Ann Buda*, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo; *Daniel Stufflebeam*, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo; *Adrian Van Montrans*, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Special required laboratory fee—\$40. Because this institute requires the production of special materials, registration must reach ASCD by July 11.

#### NCSI REGISTRATION FORM

- Humanistic Education (June 20-21, Louisville)  Packet  
 Middle Schools (July 11-12, Minneapolis)  Packet  
 Instructional Leadership \* (July 21-22, West Village, Colo.)  
 Role of Parents (July 25-26, Anaheim)  
 Curriculum Evaluation (Aug. 10-12, Seattle)  
 Required Laboratory Fee

\* Because the host Stonebridge Inn is operating on the American Plan (\$50 per day for room, board, etc.) we are establishing a special fee of \$50 for members and \$75 for nonmembers for this institute only.

Name	_____	
Title	_____ Institution _____	
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Registration fee:	\$75.00 ASCD member	\$100.00 nonmember
Leadership Institute fee:	\$50 member	\$75 nonmember
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<input type="checkbox"/>	My check (payable to ASCD) is enclosed.	
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