

Curriculum Evaluation and Persons

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This author holds that the person is central to evaluation, and that persons have the power to experience meanings which they perceive, create, discover, enjoy, and act upon. She explores this notion of meaning and its significance for evaluation.

There has been considerable writing on curriculum evaluation. Much, if not most of such writing, however, seems curiously unrelated to the events we are familiar with when evaluation is practiced, observed, or experienced in any schooling situation. There seems to be considerable discord between our everyday experience and our conceptualization of it.

On the one hand, there is our concrete human experience of writing tests, of giving grades, of having taken tests, of being frightened or anxious about taking examinations, of anxiously preparing for job interviews, of fears about evaluation in general, and last but not least, our own critical self-evaluations. Yet when evaluators, including myself, write about these human events, we usually reduce them to concepts of validity, reliability, objectivity, criterion vs. norm-referenced testing, and the like. All the life has been removed.

The purpose of this article is to explore curriculum evaluation from a perspective that will reduce this disharmony between our experience and our conceptualization of evaluation. Only by reducing this lack of harmony will curriculum evaluation serve all of us well. My thesis is that the person is central to evaluation, that persons have the power to experience meanings that they

perceive, create, discover, enjoy, and act upon. It is this notion of *meaning* and its significance for evaluation that will be explored in some detail.

Why Meaning?

If we wish to live to our fullest—as completely conscious of our behavior as possible, vibrant with warm, satisfying, caring-for relations with some significant others, knowledgeable about the world around us, and helping to improve the quality of life for others—it will be necessary to create and deepen the meaning of our lives.

As adults, we are all aware of some of the sources of meaninglessness: rapid change, technology, distrust, depersonalization, immorality. To be distinctively human is a difficult and never-ending struggle and many quality experiences are necessary if children, youth, and adults are to have meaningful present and future lives. My thinking about education and in particular, meaning, is grounded in what can be called assumptions. Among the 10 or 15 assumptions that I value, there are four that I think most need to be

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made explicit so that we can be critical of my stance.

First, it is as individuals make decisions and act upon them that they grow and develop. It is harmful to persons if they are unable to influence the environment in which they live and to make decisions about it.

A second assumption is that if our understanding of human behavior and education is to be deepened, we must ascertain what the meanings of school, curriculum, evaluation, and teachers are. We are all becoming increasingly aware of the importance of understanding the meaning of dreams, jokes, and slips of the tongue. For example, we laugh at the Schultz comic¹ in which Linus asks Lucy whether the little boy who sits in front of her at school cried again today. Lucy replies, he cries every day! He has all the simple childhood fears . . . fear of being late for school, fear of his teacher, fear of the principal . . . fear of not knowing what room to go to after recess, fear of forgetting his lunch, fear of bigger kids, fear of being asked to recite . . . fear of missing the school bus, fear of not knowing when to get off the bus, fear of . . . Linus mutters, good grief! Most of us laugh, what does that laughter mean? In our response to this comic, the laughter (pleasurable) is a manifestation of the relief that occurs when we no longer need to repress our fear feelings.

Third, the idea that mind and body are inseparable, the significance of which on the surface seems obvious, has been much overlooked. Our language provides many illustrations, such as, "He gave birth to an idea," "A seminal contribution," "I had to eat my words," "Let's provide feedback," "pregnant with thought," and "I couldn't stomach him." The meanings that people articulate have gone through a long developmental history, but originally are grounded in our bodies.

And finally, central to the development of meanings are personal relationships. A certain quality of relationship is essential if meanings are to be significant.

Curriculum Evaluation—What Is It?

There are many ways of viewing curriculum evaluation. From my orientation, however,

schools are established to provide a setting for learners that facilitates their growth. Therefore, for purposes of this paper, curriculum evaluation is concerned with ascertaining the worthwhileness of the meanings students have regarding purposes, learning opportunities, and evaluation.

Comments About Evaluation Situations

Occasionally, I have found it useful to recall my own experiences about an occurrence if I am

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to deepen my understanding about it. Therefore, I should like to suggest that you try the following. Even more illuminating might be to ask a friend to join you in the activity.

1. Recall your thoughts and reactions when you heard about studies reporting the effectiveness of schooling.
2. Recall some of your most vivid memories of evaluation situations and reflect on who was involved and what your reactions were.
3. Recall your thoughts and feelings when you explained to a child, youth, or adult his or her grades or examination results.

Probably you will have experienced some of the same thoughts and reactions to evaluation situations that I have heard about or experienced.

1. I get butterflies in my stomach when I think of the exams.
2. I felt good about my grade because I had worked hard.
3. Mr. James, the principal, isn't going to be happy about these test results.

¹Charles M. Schultz. *You're the Greatest, Charlie Brown*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1964.

4. I was distracted because of the noise of the lawn-mower.

5. I wrote a few truths about the stupidity of behavioral objectives.

6. I was so nervous, I could not understand the question.

7. Gosh, I passed, I can't believe it!

8. Our children are not learning mathematics fundamentals. The new math should be eliminated. Let's return to the fundamentals!

9. Those test results can't be right. Something must be wrong with the test scoring machine.

10. I studied hard, and I passed.

11. What kinds of questions are going to be asked?

12. I wouldn't deal with that question with a ten-foot pole.

13. If I could just have got started on the questions, I could have gone on.

14. This test does not measure what I am teaching.

15. Six hours of exams. What an endurance contest!

Making Sense of Evaluation

What kind of meaning can we make of such responses? One field of inquiry that has given primary focus to the significance and development of meaning is psychoanalysis. And it is Erikson's well-known schema of the development of a healthy personality that may be most fruitful for deepening our understanding of evaluation. Erikson² outlines, identifies, and designates the critical steps in psychosocial development as well as the outcome of each as follows:

Basic Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope
Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt	Willpower
Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose
Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence
Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity
Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love
Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care
Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom

In Erikson's elaboration of his schema,

numerous comments and illustrations are given of the individuals, groups, and institutions with which the growing person interacts. Erikson says, "the human life cycle and man's institutions have evolved together." For example, in his discussion of industry vs. inferiority (whose outcome is competence), Erikson says, "he now learns to win recognition by producing things." Similarly, "Literate people, with more specialized careers, must prepare the child by teaching him things which first of all make him literate, the widest possible basic education for the greatest number of possible careers." Both of these comments serve to make explicit that adults and institutions are essential for healthy development.

Not so well-known as these stages are Erikson's³ comments on some of the fears that can occur and that are tied to the experiences of growing and developing. A very young child because of his/her immaturity (mentally, physically, emotionally) has limited abilities to differentiate between real and imagined, inner and outer concerns and is in need of adults' reassuring emotional and intellectual support.

Five of the most common fears that may have usefulness for us will be briefly sketched. *Fear of Suddenness*,—babies and young children are startled by sudden noise, light, or lack of support. They can learn to fear sudden changes. *Intolerance of Being Manipulated*,—this fear occurs when controls from outside are imposed that are not in accord with inner controls. *Fear of Losing Autonomy*,—a fear first experienced by many in relation to toilet training when children lose their insides either by pressure from unfriendly outsiders or inner forces. *Fear of Being Exposed*,—as the child develops, he/she wishes to stand up and be admired, which requires inspection that may be negative. *Fear of Not Being Guided*,—as development occurs there are not clearly defined limits so that a child has difficulty in expressing himself or herself. These fears, as described here, are as they emerge in the child's early development. However, in later life, these fears become inextricably interwoven with current relationships, that is, with peers, teachers, and adults. So, refusal or hesitancy to contribute to class discus-

² Erik H. Erikson. *Childhood and Society*, 2nd Ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 403-24.

sion, or taking an examination can be understood in terms of fear of exposure. If we keep in mind the stages of development, for example, trust vs. mistrust, as well as some of the fears, we can make some meaning of the responses that people have given to evaluation.

You will recall the earlier list of comments, as well as your own responses to evaluation situations. Erikson's material was given as a possible theoretical framework to use in understanding the possible meanings that persons give to evaluation. If you have discussed any evaluation situations with others, I think you will find there are some meanings⁴ we have in *common* with each other. For example, a feeling of fear of exposure. Many, if not most of us, at times, are apprehensive about taking any examination for fear of exposing our self-perceived weaknesses to others. For the person who is able to write a "few truths about the stupidity of behavioral objectives," the meaning may be that he/she is now secure enough to be ready to present a personal position on a particular issue. This could be considered a *special* meaning. For a person who recently failed an examination in mathematics, the math examination to be taken tomorrow will have a *unique* meaning.

Toward Meaningful Curriculum Evaluation

By utilizing insights derived from Erikson as well as awareness of possible meanings for learners and teachers, the following are some recommendations for improving curriculum evaluation. While I like charts because they help me to systematize ideas as well as to be self-critical, I have not as yet been able to clarify my thoughts sufficiently to provide one for this paper. Therefore, I shall indicate a few recommendations with regard to meaning because it has been so central to this article, as well as a few that I have inferred from Erikson's senses of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, as well as from a few of the fears.

Meaning

1. To realize it is essential to grasp students' perceptions of the curriculum and of the evaluation situations.

2. To be sensitive to the meanings that students express or create in regard to curriculum evaluation.

3. To realize that there are some common, special, and unique meanings about curriculum and evaluation.

4. To be able to accept the varied meanings that students create out of curriculum evaluation.

5. To provide opportunities so that students can acquire new meanings that facilitate growth.

Senses

Trust

1. Adults will plan and provide evaluation situations that are characterized by a sensitivity to students' individual needs and a sense of personal trustworthiness within the context of schooling.

2. Adults must be able, by their behavior, to communicate to learners that evaluation is an integral aspect of teaching. Evaluation is not an "after-thought" but is essential for both teachers and learners if more meaningful experiences are to be created.

Autonomy

1. Students should be involved in as many aspects of curriculum evaluation as possible. For example, students should be involved in selecting purposes, selecting ways to gather evidence of progress, suggesting kinds of analysis to be made as well as to whom results should be made available.

2. Students should not be shamed nor dominated by others in evaluation situations. Well-planned experiences should be provided that help a student develop decision-making and a feeling of goodwill.

Initiative

1. Students should be given opportunities to cooperatively work with other students and teachers for developing programs of evaluation.

2. School and the ideal adults in them can take the place of earlier held heroes and heroines.

Industry

1. Adults provide opportunities which admit

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

students to an understanding of the meaning of education and of institutions.

2. Learners begin to apply their skills to evaluation tasks which require steady attention and persistence.

Fears

Suddenness

1. Evaluations should not be "sprung" on learners.

2. The physical conditions and atmosphere during evaluations should be supportive—not strained nor unpleasant.

3. All aspects of evaluation should be known, for example, how long, when results will be available, what will be done with results.

Losing Autonomy

1. Students should have as much freedom as possible to decide when to participate in evaluation situations.

2. Students should be given choices as to kinds of evaluation situations, for example, book

reports, questionnaires, take-home project, interviews.

Being Exposed

1. Evaluation situations should make it possible for students to express their sentiments about the examinations.

2. Results of evaluations—particularly if they are to be returned to students—should be returned as promptly as possible and discussed personally.

3. Evaluation devices should provide opportunities for students to express more and more intellectually independent judgments. [E]



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