DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 274 SP 010 309

AUTHOR	Cook, Ann; Mack, Herb
TITLE	The Word and the Thing: Ways of Seeing the Teacher. A Statement Regarding Teacher Education, Teacher Accountability, Evaluation and the Teacher as a Researcher.
INSTITUTION	Wisconsin Univ., Madison. African Studies Program.
SPONS AGENCY	Rockefeller Bros. Fund, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	Dec 75
NOTE	31p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota 58201 ($2.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Curriculum Development; *Educational Accountability; Educational Assessment; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Field Experience Programs; Field Instruction; Open Education; Planning; Program Development; *Program Evaluation; *Teacher Education; Teacher Evaluation; *Teacher Role

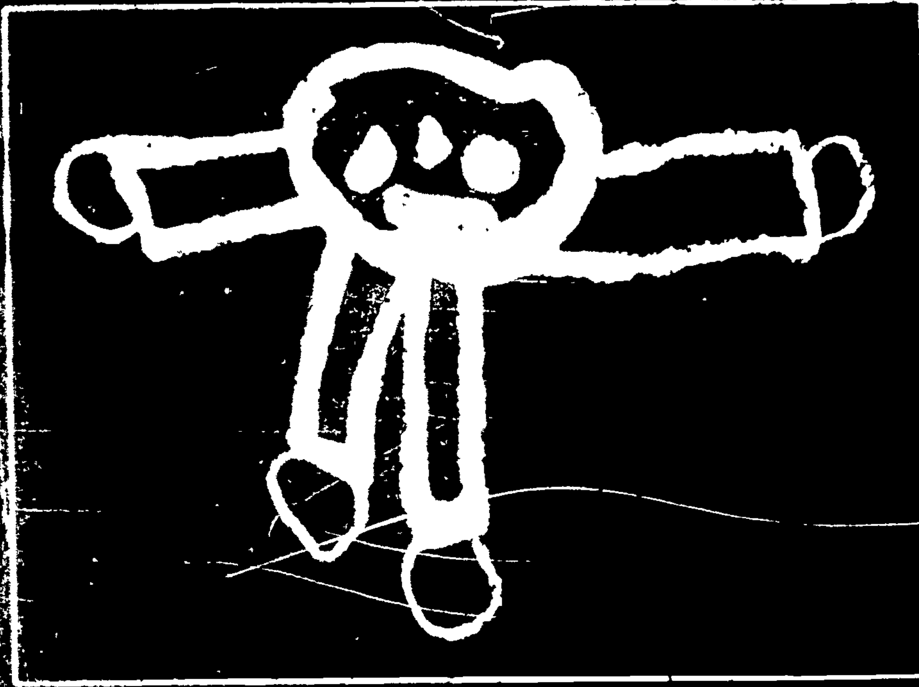
ABSTRACT

One of a series of monographs to encourage reexamination of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling, this booklet is a statement on teacher education, teacher accountability, evaluation, and the teacher as researcher. Included are an introduction and five subsequent sections: (1) Educational Jargon; (2) The Open Education Experience; (3) The Teacher as Planner; (4) The Teacher As Researcher; and (5) Implications for the Future. It is made clear that such problems as the misuse of language, the inexpensive quick solution, inadequate teacher preparation and support, emphasis on one-dimensional evaluation schemes, and a lack of attention to process skills can be identified and attacked. However, while an attempt to redress some of the worst excesses in these areas may be essential, it is important to understand that the overall changes required are more fundamental. The requisite bureaucratic and institutional reorganization will not be achieved quickly. Strategies designed to effect change in large systems will not be uniformly accepted nor uncritically adopted. Results will not be achieved overnight. While professionals, laymen, and parents alike must certainly begin by defining problems and by being prepared to confront them, while they must be willing to examine attitudes, risk mistakes, and nurture individual strengths; they must also understand the full implication of the undertaking. A well-organized and long-term effort will be required if the ultimate goal is to affect the quality of life in the society. (DMT)

Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original.

ED127274

North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



Ann Cook and Herb Mack

THE WORD AND THE THING: WAYS OF SEEING THE TEACHER

A statement regarding teacher education, teacher accountability, evaluation and the teacher as researcher.

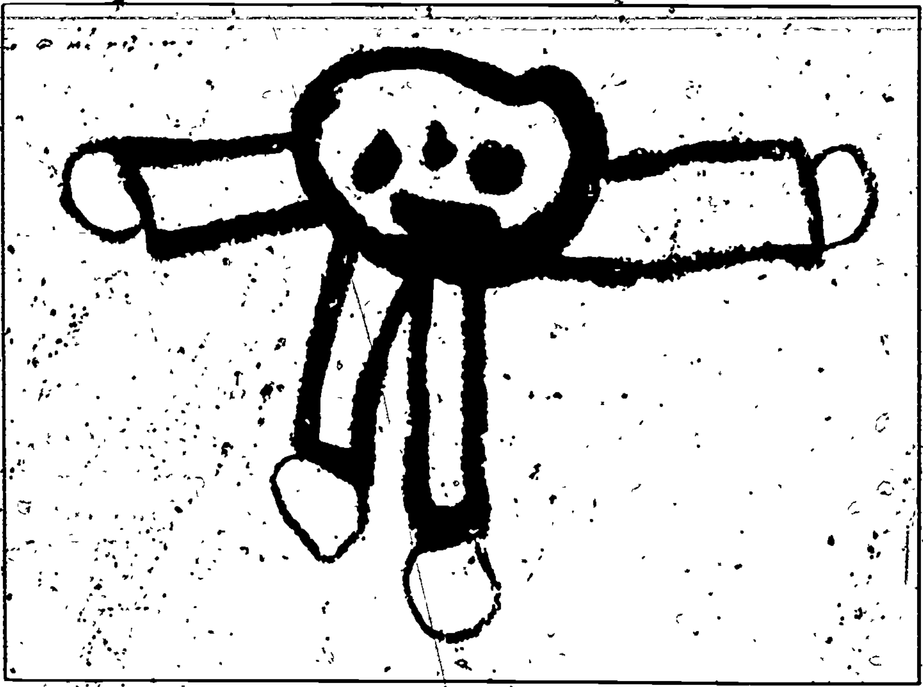
U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
North Dakota Study Group
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

ERIC
Full Text Provided by ERIC

North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



Ann Cook and Herb Mack

THE WORD AND THE THING: WAYS OF SEEING THE TEACHER

A statement regarding teacher education, teacher accountability, evaluation and the teacher as researcher.

University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, North Dakota
December 1975

ERIC
Full Text Provided by ERIC

Copyright © 1975 by Ann Cook and Herb Mack

First published in 1975

North Dakota Study Group
on Evaluation, c/o Vito Perrone,
Center for Teaching & Learning
University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, N.D. 58201

Library of Congress Catalogue
Card Number: 75-20751

Printed by University of
North Dakota Press

A grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund
makes possible publication of this series

Editor: Arthur Tobier

In November 1972, educators from several parts of the United States met at the University of North Dakota to discuss some common concerns about the narrow accountability ethos that had begun to dominate schools and to share what many believed to be more sensible means of both documenting and assessing children's learning. Subsequent meetings, much sharing of evaluation information, and financial and moral support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund have all contributed to keeping together what is now called the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation. A major goal of the Study Group, beyond support for individual participants and programs, is to provide materials for teachers, parents, school administrators and governmental decision-makers (within State Education Agencies and the U.S. Office of Education) that might encourage re-examination of a range of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling.

Towards this end, the Study Group has initiated a continuing series of monographs, of which this paper is one. Over time, the series will include material on, among other things, children's thinking, children's language, teacher support systems, inservice training, the school's relationship to the larger community. The intent is that these papers be taken not as final statements--a new ideology, but as working papers, written by people who are acting on, not just thinking about, these problems, whose implications need an active and considered response.

Vito Perrone, Dean
Center for Teaching & Learning,
University of North Dakota

U

We have the word and the thing, but the one is not the other.

Alfred Korzbyski

Contents

Introduction 1

1 Educational Jargon 2

2 The Open Education Experience 5

New Advisories

Assessing Support Programs

3 The Teacher as Planner 10

4 The Teacher as Researcher 14

5 Implications for the Future 23

Introduction

After more than a decade of turmoil, America's persistent crisis in education continues--it is tempting to add, continues to be manufactured. 'New' curriculum innovations, 'solutions' designed to meet the latest 'Why-Johnny-Can't' crisis, continues to surface. A 'we-need-the-solution-now' attitude pervades the educational marketplace. Educational packages are purchased for vast sums, imposed with minimal regard to quality, and assessed by evaluators even before they can be completely unpacked. In addition, packages of inservice training programs 'guaranteed' to alter teaching behaviors are making their appearance. An emphasis on a product rather than on a process dominates much of the teacher training literature.

Without question, the problems in our schools require emergency attention. To act, however, on the premise that because a disastrous situation exists quick solutions can be found, only serves to compound the situation. The time has come to abandon the quest for 'instant' answers, the 'perfect' system, or the 'teacher-proof' curriculum that can be measured and judged 'successful' by some computer-scored, standardized test. It is time that we turn, instead, to the complex task of making the most of the resources available--specifically those human resources already existing in our schools, colleges, and communities.

Such a strategy is neither obvious nor widely accepted. Most teachers continue to attend traditional inservice sessions primarily to qualify for salary increments. Whether such courses are offered by Boards of Education for 'professional' improvement, by universities for higher degrees, or are merely random credits totalling a required number of hours, results seem to be reflected more in higher personnel budgets than in enriched classroom experiences for children. When teachers phone those offering inservice courses to say: "I must take your course; it's the only one offered from 4:30 to 6:30 on Thursday for 2'D' credits," and when universities continue to rely on monies generated by graduate teacher education courses, while permitting such courses to contribute little in the way of classroom quality, it is clear something is seriously wrong.

Ann Cook and Herb Mack are Assistant Professors at Brooklyn College and co-directors of the Community Resources Institute, a teaching and learning center supporting work in curriculum and staff development. The activities described here were conducted under the auspices of the Institute.

1

Educational Jargon

Such problems have been further compounded by semantic acrobatics; that is, by the practice some have of misusing the latest educational terminology to give shopworn practices exciting labels. 'Relevant,' long a favorite, has been so overused that it has virtually lost any meaningful descriptive value.

Other phrases describing innovations have been similarly distorted. To understand the implications of such ambiguity, it is useful to describe one extended example: Consider the concept of 'field-based' (or field-centered) teacher training.

When the idea of the field-based training program first took hold, it was meant to serve the need that many university education departments had at the time of cutting into their isolation from day-to-day classroom realities, particularly in order to provide a better setting in which to train student teachers. The watchwords were educational quality and commitment to new strategies of teacher training. But, quickly, the meaning of field-based experience got lost in the shuffle and what is now implied by the label, 'field-based,' is a gross distortion of its original. Frequently, economies and not educational quality, external pressures and not commitment to new strategies of teacher training, account for the establishment of such programs. Because of difficulties entailed in instituting and supporting effective field-based operations, the term is often misused to connote inexpensive, adjunct-operated training programs in which nontenured faculty are recruited from the schools. Student teaching assignments are made for convenience rather than because classroom settings offer interesting learning situations. Generally little attention is paid to a school's or a classroom teacher's educational philosophy and how it might affect the student-teacher intern. In short, the rigor and the quality of the field experience often receives insufficient attention.

To fully appreciate what is meant by 'field-based,' one needs a glossary of terms. For 'clinical professor' read 'untenured instructor'; for 'field-study-course' substitute 'largely unsupervised on-the-job credits'; for 'internship' read 'an indiscriminately chosen work assignment with infrequent conferences'; for 'community participation' understand that the district superintendent and his deputy (and perhaps a principal or two) may sit on, and even attend, several university committees. The list is long, but the results for children and the communities served usually are negligible.

But even where the capacity to be rigorous exists, the political pressure to do otherwise is substantial. Often newly initiated 'field-based' programs may enjoy only a precarious existence. They may receive only provisional approval and then must frequently depend on 'soft money' for major fiscal support. They are, therefore, constantly in danger of being phased out.

Moreover, to establish a functioning field-based operation, the field-based faculty needs to commit itself to intensive work developing contact with community leaders, teachers, local administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, and community agencies. Where this is understood, and the time is given to it, field-based faculty members risk isolation from their colleagues. The lack of day-to-day contact on the college or university campus, where critical decisions affecting university policy are made, can be fatal. In other words, field-based operations that focus on the needs and desires of the local clientele may not be regarded as effective by campus-based faculty, who find it easier to understand university-centered activities.

Often the time field-based faculty members spend with classroom teachers, helping them to provide worthwhile learning experiences not only for children but for pre-service student teachers or interns, doesn't generate revenue-producing credit; therefore, it is frequently ignored when calculating faculty teaching hours. In order to fulfill university contact hour requirements, the field-based faculty must take on 'official' campus-based courses. The consequence of this is that the time required to accomplish what may be their most productive work must, in effect, be donated. It is not surprising that field personnel become dissatisfied knowing that not only do they spend many volunteer hours in the field but that their campus-based colleagues are able to more effectively marshal the major resources of the college for their own campus-based activities.

Furthermore, a field-based program requires flexibility on the college's part. Students are not drawn solely from the college campus; they may be attracted to the program by the existence of the center itself. That their first on-campus experience should be a computerized registration process is highly undesirable. In the case of paraprofessionals and parents drawn into a college program by a center located within their school or community, alternative admissions procedures may be required. If university regulations are inflexible and there are no faculty on campus to deal with bureaucratic detail, the student will experience time-consuming, demoralizing procedures. Eventually the pressures and the lack of both university commitment and rewards may well result in the severing of the university-school connection, leaving intact only the terminology.

It is rare that a field-based program--where field-based faculty hold appropriate rank, and where undergraduates are placed with teachers who are themselves involved in an ongoing program and who show some degree of success in the classroom--is permitted adequate planning time. More often only the superficial structures are maintained, with minimal effort, and the wastage is borne by the schools.

There are many reasons why such situations develop. Academic departments and faculty members ascribe great importance to being seen doing their part in coping with current problems. To be successful in today's tight budget situation, it is necessary not only to hold down costs but at the same time to demonstrate commitment to community needs. One way of doing this is to have the 'real' faculty member either make infrequent appearances or visit a number of classrooms and to define this function as that of a 'field-based coordinator.' Such practices often reduce costs and satisfy the community involvement issue. They do not require faculty retraining--a necessary prerequisite before most present faculty members would be qualified to offer the type of concrete support required in an operational field-based program.

Finally, an important factor affecting the functioning of field-based centers is how well those being trained may or may not recognize quality. Without some critical framework (even if it is only a healthy skepticism), a cooperating school staff--never having experienced a rigorous, quality-oriented training program either as professionals or as teachers-in-training--may welcome inadequate support without even recognizing it as such. Thus, the poor standards and low expectations in the field of teacher education become self-perpetuating and contribute to the tendency to grasp at 'solutions' without assessing their value.

2

The Open Education Experience

Turning from this extended example of field-base terminology to the broader concern--that of improving the quality of education in both schools and teacher training institutions by drawing upon existing human resources--it is necessary to examine the issues involved in some detail. It is helpful in this regard to focus on a particular effort to achieve change, the move toward 'open' education in the United States during the past five years.

As 'open' education (another term subject to the wildest definitions) has attracted increasing interest, and as teachers have attempted to 'open up' their classrooms, pressure has grown for universities to offer courses in this area. The response to these demands has varied. In some cases, one day fee-charging 'open education conferences' have been held. Usually such sessions provide no followup support for the teachers who attend and subsequently try to alter their classroom approach. In other instances, the universities have provided open education courses, often called 'workshops.' A few years back, such courses were welcomed enthusiastically by teachers anxious to receive support for changes they were attempting in their classrooms. Unfortunately, they seldom resulted in concrete, practical help. Faculty members conversant with developmental literature and theory had little or no practical classroom expertise; the affect of course work on the functioning of classrooms was minimal.

Teachers are now heard describing such university offerings as 'useless' in actually supporting classroom changes. Significantly, classroom teachers seem to have become far more critical of the failure of these courses than the failure of traditional offerings. Perhaps the fact that they used their own initiative in trying to accomplish something, only to be disappointed, deepened their critical framework. In a few cases, teachers have rejected the university's credit-bearing course work approach to participate in special programs, which, although they may not offer credits, do provide practical support.

New Advisories

Over the past five years, numerous advisory projects have been launched to initiate or to support teachers attempting more informal learning environments. While some were created within a university framework, most had to struggle to establish their legitimacy; few were wholly supported by university funds budgeted through normal channels. Most continue to depend on outside funding in order both to exist and to employ as staff members those individuals who, though lacking qualification by university degree standards, actually possess the classroom skills to help beginning programs develop. The inability of existing institutions to provide an effective response to needs expressed by those in the field, therefore, resulted in the establishment of these alternate structures.

From such straightforward beginnings there has come the rapid proliferation of 'teacher centers,' 'workshops,' and 'open education' degree programs. Again the terms have become suspect. It is necessary to carefully inspect programmatic claims so as to distinguish between myth and reality. But having eliminated the pseudo-programs, which simply adopt the rhetoric, there is further need to examine the strategies adopted by the remaining programs in order to understand why many have been failing to deal effectively with problems confronting them.

Assessing Support Programs

In working with teachers in day-to-day classroom situations, open education advisory groups have consistently emphasized practical approaches. In workshops, teachers have been expected to use the materials they have in their classrooms, working in a way that gives them an experience of learning analogous to a child's. 'Advisors' rather than supervisors have been assigned to work with small clusters of classroom teachers, offering support and advice rather than traditional supervision. While most advisors have paid a good deal of attention to child development theory and have stressed the value of encouraging children to be independent learners, many have been under, and given into, considerable pressure to concentrate on 'how-to' problems: How to arrange classrooms; how to use specific materials in math, science, or art; how to deal with reading and writing; how to provide functional sand, water, woodwork or cooking areas. Having taken on the difficult task of 'opening up,' teachers understandably focus on practical ideas and techniques that feed directly and immediately back into their classrooms. As a result, where traditional university programs overemphasized theory and avoided practical aspects of training (where expertise is lacking), advisory groups have frequently taken the opposite tack, overstressing the concrete, practical 'recipes.' In assessing support systems, therefore, it is critical to determine the context within which this practical support is offered.

Moreover, any analysis of advisory support needs to look critically at the advisors themselves. Some have had no classroom experience; often they are subject specialists primarily versed in a particular field who pick up practical classroom know-how as they work. Other advisors are recruited after brief experiences in an 'open' classroom, or because they are informal leaders of newly formed school programs. Such individuals can function adequately, even outstandingly, in an advisory position. They can; but those who do are the exceptions: Advisors who have run effective 'open' classrooms and are able to work sensitively with other teachers are rare. The experience and skill of the advisor, the pattern of advisory work, the effect of the new structures and traditions on the larger system--all these must be considered in assessing impact of the advisory concept.

An equally important, though often overlooked, question is whether participants in school programs are encouraged to develop internal strengths sufficiently independent of advisory support. Are teachers becoming more self-reliant, able to determine not only what to do with children but *why* to do it? Are they able to evaluate the degree of their success in a particular subject or with a specific child? Are they prepared to establish rigorous standards as well as pleasant atmospheres for learning?

While advisory programs must allow teachers to develop at their own pace and draw on their personal strengths and individual starting points, they must also emphasize the need for growth and introspection over a long period of time. Without question, it is simpler to teach teachers how to use a new piece of equipment or material, to arrange a classroom, even to ask different kinds of questions, than to be thoughtful, analytical, and independent professionals relying on their own initiative and critical judgment. But the importance of emphasizing the latter qualities is made crystal clear when teachers say, "That workshop two weeks ago was terrific. What do I do now?" Or when, after four years of advisory support, they state, "I just want them (the advisors) to bring in materials and give me curriculum ideas to use."

Teachers may well react to, or even resent, advisors who press them to think independently in much the same way children do when initially responding to nontraditional teachers; they reject the ambiguity and the unfamiliar classroom procedures, demanding that the advisor "teach" them something. If the advisor responds to this type of demand too religiously, then she begins to take the place of the college professor; one 'expert' to whom the teacher turns for the correct answer is substituted for another.

By the same token, it is deeply human to sympathize with teachers who are feeling the overwhelming pressures of day-to-day preparation. The effort and understanding involved in giving support while encouraging individual initiative, as contrasted with doing the job oneself or telling the teacher what to do and precisely how to do it, is immense. Yet, the consequences of giving 'answers' are immense, too. It may result in a harmful dependency, a loss of self-confidence in one's own capacity to follow through, a sense of inadequacy in dealing with new and difficult situations.

Teachers who have themselves never become independent learners may find it difficult, even impossible, to help their students gain independence and pursue open-ended inquiry. It is far more likely that teachers who trust themselves and who have gained confidence in their own abilities will recognize and understand the difficult task they have set and be prepared to sustain the long-term fundamental changes that are required to affect the children. As part of this development, it is necessary for advisories to help teachers evaluate the relationship between the content areas, where so much demand is made, and the process involved in dealing with these content areas. The way in which the content areas are approached must be explored with some consistency, for often process is ignored while subject areas, specific materials, even child development theory and educational philosophy receive reasonable attention.

In many instances, educators confuse process with methodology (the 'how-to' of presentation). Ignored or underplayed is the need to teach teachers how to listen to and respect what children express about themselves, how to ask questions that provoke thinking and independent exploration, how to understand the quality of the inquiry process. These are seldom considered essential teacher skills, and yet they are critical to the learning potential of a classroom.

For example, emphasis is often placed on 'task' cards, which are designed to promote independent student work. While these cards do ask questions, rarely is the type of question explored. While perhaps stimulating project work, they usually lead to predetermined, factually-correct responses. Examination reveals that in using such cards the teacher maintains control while the student follows invisible (or not so invisible) guidelines, beginning with an initial problem, followed by a middle exploration, and ending with the expected conclusion.

By contrast, the 'activity' card, a different type of assignment card, implies a focus that stresses the process involved in the task rather than simply the product (or answer). The activity itself and the way in which the particular problem is approached become central. The end product, while important, is less predictable and would probably suggest additional problems to explore. Teachers using activity cards are more likely to be surprised by what students choose to do, and the conclusions they reach, since questions are raised in an open-ended fashion. The focus is on *how* a student approaches a problem, not simply on *what* conclusion he draws.

This distinction is important, for many advisory groups have placed particular value on experiential learning. They often refer to the proverb, "I see and I forget; I hear and I remember; I do and I understand." While the concrete experience is not to be underrated, there is a danger that the quality of the process, the emphasis upon reflection, will receive inadequate attention. After all, it is the rare school in American society that has fostered an atmosphere in which critical analysis or introspection is encouraged. Rather, schools have encouraged conformity, and the products - the teachers of today - are teaching the way they were taught, in teacher-directed, fact-oriented classrooms, where good memory and adherence to the rules are standards of success.

If teachers teach as they have been taught, they are likely to think in patterns they have learned as well. In other words, they may regard the pursuit of interests over extended periods of time, the initiation of one's own learning, or the challenging of statements made by 'authorities' as problems rather than goals. While it is possible to break this cycle (teachers do change, as evidenced by the considerable number of 'open classrooms'), the issue is to what extent and how significantly?

The arrangement of classrooms may shift, the materials available may be different, the day's schedule may be radically altered, and the atmosphere made more pleasant. Does the teacher's understanding of the learning process also change? Does he or she listen more perceptively to what children are saying? Are the children who are now permitted more physical freedom also able to pursue a consuming interest; are they challenged to think through questions and problems? How much of the day is predetermined simply by instituting alternate ways of scheduling reading, writing, and math? Is there a new awareness of the interrelationships between subject areas, or is such integration regarded as a luxury, to be pursued *after* academic subjects have been completed. In short, where room arrangements and schedules have been altered, has the classroom, with traditional perceptions of what learning is, remained intact?

The old one-room school house, so frequently mentioned as the original 'open classroom,' was not, in fact, 'open.' It does, nonetheless, provide an apt analogy. In that one room, the teacher moved among different groups of children. Each group had its task (not activity) to pursue when the teacher was not available. A workbook-infested 'open' classroom is not far removed from this one-room schoolhouse of yesterday -- decentralized, but very teacher-centered. This is not to say that a teacher-centered 'open' classroom is not a step in the right direction; it can be. What is critically important, however, is that it be recognized as the *first* stage in a process of development and not misinterpreted as the final destination.

3

The Teacher as Planner

A further issue relating to teacher growth concerns the point at which planning and assessment should receive some of a teacher's attention. Frequently the argument is heard to "let evaluation and curriculum development wait until teachers are ready; in the beginning, it is important to offer practical support." Such a view should be seen as a denigration of the teacher's professional integrity, which works against personal growth and long-term success; it perpetuates an attitude of low expectation and becomes, in turn, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

From the outset, advisors must believe the people with whom they work are capable of standing on their own feet and of relying on their own judgment; they must convey these feelings to those receiving support. To foster confidence and independent judgment, an advisor must value these goals and find ways to achieve them. Teacher mistakes must be permitted so that meaningful growth can occur; it is through mistakes that one gains insights into what does and doesn't work. Toward this end, evaluation procedures appropriate to the particular stage of the teacher's development must be redefined *with* teachers and made immediately useful to them. Teachers should be encouraged to spend time each week talking with, observing, and recording activities of individual children. This might involve collecting work from particular children and attempting to diagnose progress or difficulties. Logs might be kept of teacher observations and reflections, including notes taken of the interaction with children in particular activity areas. Teachers might choose to focus on particular problems and the strategies they have devised to effect change during a specific period of time, or they might attempt to monitor their interaction with children through audio or video tape, note-taking, or student interviews. Clearly, the inexperienced teacher will choose to monitor less complex situations. Even so, by stressing evaluation and not only documentation, a framework is established that, in addition to encouraging the extension of valuable classroom activities, creates analytical habits that result in continuing growth on the part of the teacher. Thoughtful evaluation--the ability to assess, choose, and develop necessary materials--becomes a key factor in determining whether the more visible and quickly instituted physical changes will support a process that will be sustained and developed over time and not simply result in superficial physical alterations.

Curriculum development is another area where a 'deal-with-it-at-a-later-stage' attitude is often expressed. Here, again, such an attitude undermines the teacher and misses the central importance of the inquiry process. If teachers alter their methods in the classroom, it is, one would hope, because they desire something different for the children and for themselves. This requires that they understand their goals not only emotionally and intellectually but practically, as well. Developing curriculum is a concrete way to achieve this, for in preparing materials goals are translated from theory to practice. Developing curriculum requires an understanding of what a curriculum seeks to do for the students and how it intends to do it. In developing a reading curriculum, for example, one must be concerned not only about the skill of decoding, but about the use to which the acquired skill will be put and the attitudes children will develop regarding reading. Will the child want to read? Will he be a discerning reader?

In history, will the curriculum teach the 'facts' and chronology, or will it challenge the learner to think about the ambiguities, the conflicts, the interpretations, and the questions inherent in the subject? Will students be able to recite dates and places or will they, having learned the 'basics', be able to debate ideas and events with which they come in contact? For example, though students read textbooks to 'learn' history, are they also expected to analyze these textbooks, to identify their stated and unstated assumptions, to understand whether they fit within one particular school of historiography or another? In short, are students given a rote education or are they prepared to become perceptive assessors of information with which they will be presented throughout their lives? One must be clear about what one wants in order to proceed. Once goals are defined the challenge of developing materials creates a practical framework for the continuing analysis of central concepts and approaches. In structuring questions, one needs to examine whether those with predetermined answers have been avoided; in constructing activities, one needs to examine whether they are genuinely inquiry-based rather than tasks with clearcut conclusions.

An example may illustrate the role curriculum development can play in helping teachers understand the process they wish children to express. During a series of seminar sessions that we held, a group of public secondary school teachers explored inquiry techniques, defining their goals and analyzing the strategies employed to achieve these goals. They did so through discussions, role playing, devising games, preparing displays, prioritizing and debating educational options, attempting surveys, and exploring alternate forms of documenting observations and information. In addition, they participated in practical workshops in several content areas and were expected to utilize these practical experiences to spark work they would do with their students.

One participant with a deep concern for the problem of pollution presented a series of slides depicting his views on the matter. He then described how he would use photography as an integral part of the unit he prepared, presenting both a flowchart of activities and a day-to-day lesson plan. In the discussion that followed, a number of points emerged. First, it became apparent that the flowchart and the lesson plan were in direct conflict with one another. They represented two radically opposing approaches: one was a step-by-step sequential development, predetermined by the teacher for the entire group; the other was an interest-based design that invited a range of activities in which individual student interest was identified and extended. Secondly, the step-by-step lesson plan began from some minutely defined mapping skills and led to the 'exciting' photographic activities only after the 'appropriate' skill had been achieved. In contrast, the flowchart plan utilized high-interest areas as starting points; skills and techniques were learned as an integral part of an activity, not as a prelude to it.

Thirdly, it became clear that the choice of pollution as a topic for student investigations was based on the assumption that students would 'inquire' into the problem and discover what was wrong with the existing situation. Thus, the inquiry process was equated with the simple act of asking questions and not related to the type of questions asked or the openendedness of the subject being pursued. The desired student conclusion was clearly defined: pollution was a societal evil. As outlined in the daily plans, the problems to be confronted were ones to which acceptable and unacceptable answers existed, at least in the teacher's mind. Even in the flowchart, the investigation was expected to produce predictable results.

Following a lengthy discussion, it became clear that the topic of pollution could be opened up. Controversial areas were defined that required teachers as well as students to question their ideas and to find evidence supporting their own beliefs. Thus, when questions were rephrased to provoke investigation, rather than simply to lead to an opinion concerning pollution, issues such as individual liberty, restrictions on private choice, employment policies, income distribution, and life styles were raised for open-ended inquiry. A game was constructed in which group members were constituted as a small town council mandated to decide whether to legislate against paper diapers as a pollutant. Represented in the town council were laundry truck drivers, supermarket managers, ecology group representatives, mothers, and so on -- all able to bring realistic, conflicting values to the discussion.

Had the teachers not participated in a concrete activity, had they not explored their goals in a very practical way and attempted to implement them, many problems subsequently investigated would have been overlooked. For although each participant in the group would have said he or she favored an emphasis on inquiry techniques, would have supported open-ended questions, and would have opposed indoctrination, it was only through involvement in the actual development of curriculum that the generalities were more precisely defined and the contradictions and disagreements were able to be realistically explored.

The experiences of teachers in developing this pollution unit not only indicate the role curriculum development can play in clarifying goals and testing strategies but also underline the need for those who deal with children to examine how their own beliefs influence those whom they teach. Often implicit *assumptions* and values are not recognized consciously by those who make them.

All attitudes, however, are not equally amenable to investigation. Individuals who come expecting practical day-to-day classroom advice do not anticipate nor are they prepared to readily accept discussions regarding their racial beliefs, or their opinions about social class. Yet, at some point, such introspection becomes essential, for there seems little doubt that teachers' attitudes and expectations play a major role in determining classroom results.

4

The Teacher as Researcher

These problems relate to yet another focus of attention in education, that of teacher accountability: how to hold Ms. Jones responsible for Maria's progress--or lack of it. So far, while many have struggled with this problem, those responsible for making judgments still fall back on a few very narrow and suspect criteria, such as interaction scales or classroom observations where they note the noise level of Ms. Jones' classroom or the neatness and organization of the classroom bulletin board. Even reading tests, somewhat mistakenly viewed by some as a measurement of a child's progress, are used as indicators of teacher competency.

Rather than assessing what is done now and determining what might be done differently, many educators seem content to rework old practices. Thus, at the same time that teachers are attempting and being encouraged to establish new kinds of learning environments for children, the development of ways to assess the effectiveness of the teacher lags far behind. Solutions such as performance-based competencies, which are now being demanded by a few states, seem of questionable value because they leave large areas of disagreement about what to measure and how to measure it.

From the perspective of improving practice, at least three major criticisms can be made of current methods of teacher accountability. The first is irrelevance; that is, the information gathered has no real relationship to the ongoing classroom situation, no connection with a child's learning (or lack thereof). For example, handsomely scripted compositions or neat bulletin boards are taken as evidence of a teacher's competence. What, after all, do these handsomely scripted compositions displayed on a bulletin board have to do with real learning? What if the author already wrote like that at the beginning of the school year, or if the script is beautiful but the ideas muddled? And how often do observers notice that the critical comments that express a teacher's focus on a student's growth are generally absent from such essays.

A second, perhaps more serious, criticism is that current evaluation practices pay little, if any, attention to how the information gathered is incorporated into ongoing planning. Frequently, findings are reported only after the particular group of children observed has moved on into other classes. The result is nonsituationspecific information, which doesn't tell the teacher very much that is helpful. Most often, there is little or no followup work to help the teacher become more effective. This is especially true of so-called diagnostic-prescriptive inventories now being purchased at considerable expense by school districts across the country. To begin with, such devices are most often based on grossly inadequate standardized tests. Further, the inadequacy of this approach as a teaching tool is evident when one examines the recycled information, which directs teachers to reteach already-taught material with no suggestion as to how to make the second effort any more effective than the first.

Finally, almost all evaluations, even those that attempt to go beyond the test scores and bulletin-board displays, take place without the teacher as a participant. If the evaluation is not an external measure such as children's test scores, then it relies on external professionals--college or university faculty--who come with 'expertise' in assessment and evaluation design. Most are versed in using particular instruments (such as the Flanders scale) and believe in objectivity, which, translated, means: they are the only ones who can understand what is *really* going on in the classroom. Many have never taught children or spent time in a particular classroom trying to understand the dynamics of the situation or the goals of the teacher. Some even boast of not having been inside the schools from which the data on which they work have been drawn.

Generally speaking, outside evaluators do not concern themselves with the goals of the teacher or the growth points of students. Rather their assumptions are conclusions based on what they, not the teacher, think is important. As so many have observed by now, interpretations of the same event vary according to the values held by the observer.

The significance of this becomes apparent when an observer indicates that a classroom seemed noisy without amplifying the observation with information such as whether the noise was productive or not. Or another observation may indicate that children ask a lot of questions, but may say nothing about the nature of the questions. Rarely does the outside evaluator concern himself with where the children were in their development when the teacher began working with them, or where the teacher seems to be going developmentally, and how he or she proposes to get there. Often, the external observation is designed to check up on the teacher -- to make sure he or she is not 'goofing off.' Consequently, the observation, which usually takes place once a year or once a semester, is made as a token gesture in response to the requirements of bureaucracy. As such, it encourages the setting up of a lesson that may be different from any other during the entire year.

Rarely is the teacher expected or even invited to prove her worth by reflecting on what it is that she is trying to do. Hardly ever is she held accountable for determining how to monitor her goals, for determining whether the techniques and strategies in use are effective with the children. This leads to the "I taught them and they should have learned it" refrain. Teachers can resort to and believe such statements because the institution doesn't demand they take on the critical responsibility of determining what needs their students have and of figuring out what strategies to use to help students gain the 'Requisite Masteries.' Too few teachers look closely at what is happening in their classrooms because no one has ever expected that of them. Indeed, teachers are expected not to look closely, as evidenced by the lack of emphasis placed on research methods during their training and the deference paid to evaluators who come from outside.

Yet it is the teacher who knows the classroom and the students better than any outside observer - be she principal or university professor. As we have described, the teacher is aware of not only where the student is, at one particular point in time, but also what the starting point was and what problems have been encountered and dealt with in the course of a year. Teachers are intimately aware of students as individuals--able to interpret specific behavior within a meaningful context, rather than viewing a student as an unknown quantity acting in a particular way. Being far richer and multi-dimensional, the teachers' knowledge offers a more meaningful context for interpretation than that of a skilled observer who necessarily has a more limited experience. Such knowledge should be exploited, and made part of an ongoing and more genuinely helpful and legitimate form of evaluation. How can this be accomplished? What can be done to bring evaluation and assessment into line with the reality of the classroom and the needs and concerns of teachers?

One approach is to regard the teacher as a researcher--someone who can define the areas to be studied, and determine the problem to be tackled, the method by which it will be dealt with, and the means by which the effectiveness of the method will be judged. The support and expertise of outside evaluators might well be required in such an approach, but the evaluator's role would be clearly supportive, focusing teachers where needed on the questions they might attempt to answer, on how to formulate the questions for research, helping to add specificity to the list of problem areas, exposing teachers to techniques that might assist them in monitoring developments within the classroom. The outsider might help the teacher set up an ongoing problem-solving process, where the problem defined might not necessarily be solved but rather clarified and redefined. The outsider's role might, as one teacher put it, be valuable simply "to push me to do what I really want to do anyway, but don't because I keep letting other things get in the way."

Fundamentally, however, the primary initiative must be taken by the teacher who sees herself as a researcher, developing concrete ideas about needs, planning strategies to effect those needs, and then determining how to document the success and failure of the strategies. For example, one group of teachers working in child-based 'open' classrooms, in discussions with one another, defined the following as a problem they faced:

> One specific activity attracts more than the number of children able to work effectively at one time. Some are told to wait their turn, and subsequently lose interest.

With each statement of a problem, the teachers defined what the problem was preventing them from doing--which is simply another way of defining goals. In this case, the 'goal' was stated in this way:

> This prevented children from being able to followup their interests at the time those interests are expressed.

Here are a few of the problems and goals listed and pursued by the teachers:

PROBLEM	GOAL
Children flit from one activity to another without finishing or really getting involved.	This prevents children from developing self-direction and responsibility to follow through on things independently.
Children too dependent on the teacher. Come to the teacher to get assistance and grow impatient when others are getting help.	This prevents children from relying less on the authority of the teacher, and from developing the responsibility to follow through on things independently.
Discussions dominated by certain children--less involvement by other children. Children talking through teacher, not to one another.	This prevents children from relating to one another and to the group. Children should talk and listen to one another.

For our purpose here, we will focus on one problem in depth to explore some methods and techniques that can be, and in this case have been, used by the teachers in their research. The third problem listed above was one about which everyone expressed concern--the overdependence of children on the teacher or adult authority figure. Since examples of the problem were initially stated impressionistically, the teachers began to observe children more systematically trying to determine more precisely what was happening. They discovered, first of all, that the requests for attention were of different kinds. They observed (1) children who always came to the teacher needing resassurance because they really did lack confidence in themselves; (2) children who were seeking information; and (3) children who were capable of (and often did make) decisions but seemed to want to check, in particular cases, that they were making the 'right' decision. Analyzing this information led one teacher to observe:

> I feel the children have the least to do with making a change towards becoming more independent thinkers and decision-makers. The responsibility really lies with me.

Asked to elaborate, the teacher commented:

> I feel very definitely that I give kids a double message and that that's at the root of this problem. There are certain things that children just don't feel comfortable doing without checking first about it with me. I think they have a sense of knowing that certain things are expected of them and that I place more importance on certain kinds of work than on others.
>
> Today I observed the following situation: A child was working in the sandbox and he wanted to go work with the blocks. He could have just gone from the one activity to the other without my telling him and he would have gotten into something there. But I said, "no" even though I was calling both of them 'work.' They were really both play things to me. So the kids are really getting a double message. On the one hand, I'm saying, "well, find something to do," but then I'm also saying "you can't do what you want to do."

In analyzing this, the teacher commented:

> I think a lot of the problem in my room comes from this double message the children get--getting a feeling that I want them to do what they want--but, on the other hand, getting unclear feelings of what's expected. For example, a child like....gets wise to it. She doesn't know what to do -- she'll pick up a game -- a reading game. It's like homebase -- go to the reading area; no one will bother you there.

This teacher felt that these double messages resulted in children coming to her for approval when really they were capable of making decisions for themselves.

Frequently, in the discussions about this problem, teachers referred to the types of questions asked by children. In general, their comments were interpretations of what children meant when they requested permission, asked for approval, or sought direction. This led the teachers to wonder if their impressions were correct. What precisely were the questions raised by the children in their classrooms and with what frequency? To find out, it was decided to devise a Frequency Scale, which would be used to determine a more precise picture of the children's questions. Beginning with the questions the teachers thought children were asking, the following tally sheet was developed, making use of a shorthand terminology:

Date:____________ Class:____________

FREQUENCY SCALE

I finished

Bathroom

Water

What Next

Where's The...

Hit me/bother

Look at This

Dictionary

How To

Can I

The chart permitted the teacher to note a child's initials according to the type of question asked. Data was collected at least one hour each week. During the period selected, any question asked by a child would be entered on the scale. The outside advisor suggested that a list might also be kept of any questions asked that did not appear on the scale.

Significantly, probably because the project grew out of teachers' real interests and concerns, the paper work involved (not to mention the time spent in the analysis and conceptualization process) was regarded as neither an imposition on nor waste of teachers' time and energy. Further, because the process involved the teachers from the outset, a close link existed between the analysis of classroom interaction and the development of strategies to deal with specified problems.

An analysis of the questions collected by the teachers led to an exploration of specific examples. The 'I finished' question appeared to be the most frequently asked. Curious about this, teachers decided to study their own responses and devised the following sheet:

I finished	*Child*	*Response*

etc.

The results indicated that teachers were responding to such children by taking them to a particular area and saying: "this is what you can do;" or by giving a child a quickly devised task to do ("why don't you read a book, write a story, observe animals, do something in the art area, etc"). One teacher commented, "Sometimes it's easier to give a child a task to do, like when there's three or four asking 'what should I do now...' and I'm busy with another child." An analysis of these responses indicated that the teacher was reinforcing the child to come back for further direction: As one individual commented: "If I tell them, they keep coming back to me asking again and again, when really they could handle it themselves." Consequently, it was determined that the teachers would try one or more of the following strategies:

1. Let the children find something on their own.

2. Turn the child's question back to him, saying, "I'm sure you'll find something to do."

3. Ignore the question and seeing if, after a few times, the child will begin to think: "Well, she's not going to tell me, so I better find something on my own."

4. Discuss the problem with the children to see if they can come up with a solution.

5. Talk over the problem with the children, and suggest that they try not to ask the teacher what to do, but rather think it through first and choose something themselves.

In suggesting these strategies, it should be noted, the teachers assumed that there would be sufficient activities in the room for children to go to, and that the strategies would not apply to all children (not, for example, to those children who were seen as needing help in making decisions).

In turn, the results of applying these strategies were monitored by the teachers in a variety of ways. Observations, taping discussions, keeping a log in which notations were made at the end of the day, and video-taping of selected interactions in the classroom were all utilized as a means of documenting what effect the strategies had.

Other questions raised different issues, demanded different solutions. For example, finding a high percentage of "Where is the..." type of question might suggest faulty classroom organization, leading the teacher to rearrange materials so that children would know where to find things. Or it might not. The appropriate strategy might depend on when, during the school year, such questions were asked. Finding a high percentage of such questions in October at the outset of the school year might require a different response than if it were asked in May.

One particularly interesting issue arising from the Frequency Scale concerned the type of questions *not* asked by children. In categorizing the questions, the teachers had observed that the children asked many questions involving *Where*, *What*, *When* and *How*. None, however, seemed to inquire *Why*? To check the accuracy of their perceptions, the teachers devised a simple chart to keep track of all *Why* questions:

	Child	*Question Asked*
asked by children		
asked by teacher		

Looking at the results at the end of the week, the teachers found their perceptions accurate. Some saw a connection between the few number of *Why* questions and the number of times children sought guidance on what to do next. It seems possible that the more accustomed children are to formulating open-ended questions for themselves, the less inclined they might be to seeking specific "What do I do now" tasks from the teacher.

The group considered the connection between the children's and the teacher's behavior. Where would the children learn to ask *Why* type questions, the teachers asked themselves, if not from the teacher? Isn't it the teacher, after all, who sets up the learning situations which generate the curiosity? Perhaps the questions that the teachers posed were lacking in possibilities for a genuine investigation, in which several possible ways could be employed to find answers, or where, because of the controversial nature of the questions, no one answer could be obviously 'correct.'

Again, it was decided to carry the inquiry into the classroom to take special note of the kinds of questions teachers ask children. A listing was kept by each of the teachers, supplemented by observations made by colleagues sitting in one another's rooms. Following the collection of data from this inquiry, new strategies were formulated to raise more open-ended questions with the children. It was hypothesized that children would begin to formulate such questions themselves. The documentation of this line of inquiry is still in progress.

It must be emphasized that this description has concerned only one teachers' group. Other groups of teachers, working as part of the Teacher as Researcher project, formulated entirely different kinds of questions. Some were curious about how to help high school students accept greater responsibility for their own learning in independent projects; here, the strategies employed were monitored through student questionnaires. Others, interested in discovering whether utilizing student-suggested topics would improve the quality of discussion, invited an outside advisor to interview students. Still others were concerned about reading; they investigated the problems of how to attack skills, and how to motivate students to become more self-directed and enthusiastic readers.

There are other such examples, each of them revealing in their own way. It is not the intent here to chronicle each specific case. Rather, we have simply tried to indicate how such a method of evaluation and assessment can work--how it can be utilized to provide immediate feedback to participants. In each case, the teachers began the process by defining the problems *they* had, followed by discussion and analysis of the problem. Once initial speculations had been formulated, strategies designed to deal with the problem were developed, tried out, and documented. Documentation aimed at measuring their accomplishments so as to inform the way they would proceed.

For those teachers involved, this many faceted approach has proved to be challenging, and not simply an interesting exercise. The results are producing valuable data about the learning environment and the children, as well as providing a mechanism by which teachers can systematically improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

In our search for new, more effective methods of holding teachers accountable for their actions, perhaps we need to judge teachers by the degree to which they show themselves capable of both analyzing their goals and problems, and devising new strategies to solve the problems. We need to encourage teachers who are creative in discovering their actions, so that the resulting information is of use to them in becoming more effective professionals, and of meaningful, immediate value to the children they serve.

5

Implications for the Future

It is clear that such problems as the misuse of language, the inexpensive, quick 'solution,' inadequate teacher preparation and support, emphasis on one-dimensional evaluation schemes, a lack of attention to process skills can be identified and attacked. However, while an honest attempt to redress some of the worst excesses in these areas may be essential, it is important to understand that the overall changes required are more fundamental. Even with the best intentions, the requisite bureaucratic and institutional reorganization will not be achieved quickly. Strategies designed to effect change in large systems will not be uniformly accepted nor uncritically adopted. Results will not be achieved overnight.

While professionals, laymen and parents alike must certainly begin by defining problems and by being prepared to confront them, while they must be willing to examine attitudes, risk mistakes, and nurture individual strengths, they must also understand the full implications of the undertaking. A well-organized and long-term effort will be required if the ultimate goal is to affect the quality of life in the society.

Also available as part of the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation series:

Observation and Description: An Alternative Methodology for the Investigation of Human Phenomena
Patricia F. Carini

A Handbook on Documentation
Brenda Engel

An Open Education Perspective on Evaluation
George E. Hein

Deepening the Questions About Change: Developing the Open Corridor Advisory
Lillian Weber

Alternative Evaluation Research Paradigm
Michael Quinn Patton

The Teacher Curriculum Work Center: A Descriptive Study
Sharon Feiman

Single copies $2, from Vito Perrone, CTL
U. of North Dakota, Grand Forks, N.D. 58202