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ABSTRACT

This module attempts to develop the abilities of school personnel to find out precisely what in a school situation needs to be evaluated. Its main purpose is to foster the development of relevant questions. Specifically, this module focuses on the following terminal objective: satisfactorily identify and order the evaluation priorities in a given school situation. This terminal objective will be tested by the pre-assessment exercise, a group discussion, and the post-assessment exercise. The module also presents a number of activities which will assess and develop the participant's ability to accomplish the enabling objectives that underlie the terminal objective. Some of these will be paper, pencil, and reading exercises; others will be practical, field-based activities. The terminal objective assumes that the participant accomplishing it will be able to: (1) accumulate the necessary data for identifying evaluation priorities; (2) specify evaluation priorities; and (3) compare and order evaluation priorities. The self-instructional materials contained in this module packet will lead to the accomplishment of these objectives, or outside suggested readings may be used. (MM)

TOWARD COMPETENCE

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

COMPETENCY BASED TEACHER EDUCATION PROJECT
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
315 PARK AVENUE SOUTH
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IDENTIFYING AND ORDERING EVALUATION PRIORITIES

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Center for Advanced Study in Education of the City University of New York, 1974

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WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION?

The set of materials you are about to begin using represents a new direction in teacher education. Called competency-based teacher education, this approach to training teachers emphasizes the teacher's performance--what he or she is actually able to do as the result of acquiring certain knowledge or skills.

Performance in a specific area is referred to as a competency. Thus, what we expect the teacher to be like after completing his education can be described in terms of the competencies he should have. The emphasis is on doing rather than on knowing, though performance is frequently the result of knowledge.

This shift in emphasis from knowing to doing accounts, to a great extent, for the differences you will notice in the format and content of these materials. To begin with, the set of materials itself is called a module because it is thought of as one part of an entire system of instruction. The focus has been narrowed to one competency or to a small group of closely related competencies. The ultimate aim of the module is expressed as a terminal objective, a statement describing what you, the teacher, should be able to do as a result of successfully completing this module.

Your final performance, however, can usually be broken down into a series of smaller, more specific objectives. As you achieve each of these, you are taking a step toward fulfilling the ultimate goal of the module. Each intermediate objective is the focus of a group of activities designed to enable you to reach that objective.

Together, the activities that make up each element, or part, of the module enable you to achieve the terminal objective.

There are several kinds of objectives, depending on what kind of performance is being demanded of you. For example, in a cognitive-based objective, the emphasis is on what you know. But since these are behavioral objectives, what you know can only be determined overtly. An objective can only be stated in terms of your behavior--what you can do. You might, for instance, be asked to demonstrate your knowledge of a subject by performing certain tasks, such as correctly completing arithmetic problems or matching words and definitions. In addition to cognitive-based objectives, there are performance-based objectives, where the criterion is your actual skill in carrying out a task; consequence-based objectives, for which your success in teaching something to someone else is measured; and exploratory objectives, which are open-ended, inviting you to investigate certain questions in an unstructured way.

Along with the assumption that the competencies, or behaviors, that make for successful teaching can be identified goes the assumption that these competencies can be assessed in some way. In fact, the statement of objectives and the development of assessment procedures form the main thrust of competency-based teacher education. The module, and the activities it contains or prescribes, is just a way of implementing the objectives.

But the module does have certain advantages as an instructional tool. For one thing, it enables you to work on your own and at your own pace. The activities are usually varied so that you can

select those which are best suited to your learning style. And the module enables you to cover certain subject areas with maximum efficiency; since if you pass the pre-assessment for a given objective, you are exempted from the module implementing that objective. What matters is not the amount of classroom time you put in on a subject but your ability to demonstrate certain competencies, or behaviors.

OVERVIEW

The ability to evaluate school programs is a primary component in the total array of competencies which a school administrator brings to his job. It is an ability which underlies all other areas of competency and functions both to relate these areas to one another and to validate them in a field situation. "Evaluation" here is used in a very broad sense to denote all the activities which are required for an administrator to determine the educational priorities in his total school situation and to structure and carry out an evaluation based on those priorities.

Evaluation is essentially the "knowing" process for the school administrator. How does he know whether or not his goals are being reached? How does he know whether or not his goals are legitimate ones? If they are legitimate and are not being reached satisfactorily, how does he know what to do about it? All of these questions are the province of "evaluation" as the word is being used here.

This module is titled "Identifying and Ordering Evaluation Priorities" and attempts to develop your abilities to find out precisely what in a school situation needs to be evaluated. In other words, its main purpose is to help you develop relevant questions.

Keep in mind the purpose of the present module while you

are working through it. Before an evaluation is executed or even designed, it is imperative that decisions be made concerning the priorities upon which that evaluation is to be based. This module will help you in developing the skills and understandings to do this. Specifically, this module focuses on the following terminal objective:

> You will satisfactorily identify
> and order the evaluation priorities
> in a given school situation.

This terminal objective will be tested by the pre-assessment exercise, a group discussion, and the post-assessment exercise. You will also be engaged in a number of activities which will assess and develop your ability to accomplish the enabling objectives which underlie the terminal objective. Some of these will be paper, pencil, and reading exercises; others will be practical, field-based activities. The terminal objective stated above assumes that the person accomplishing it will be able to:

1. Accumulate the necessary data for identifying evaluation priorities.
2. Specify evaluation priorities.
3. Compare and order evaluation priorities.

In accomplishing these objectives you may follow the self-instructional materials contained in this packet very closely or

you may branch out to the suggested readings. The decision to use one or the other of these instructional courses for each enabling objective will be made by you and your instructor following your completion of the pre-assessment exercise.

Prerequisites

Prior to beginning work on this module, you should have successfully completed instruction in the areas of community power systems, organizations, and curriculum. You should also have practical knowledge of test interpretation.

If you are unsure whether or not you meet these prerequisites, you might find it profitable to take the pre-assessment anyway.

How to Take This Module

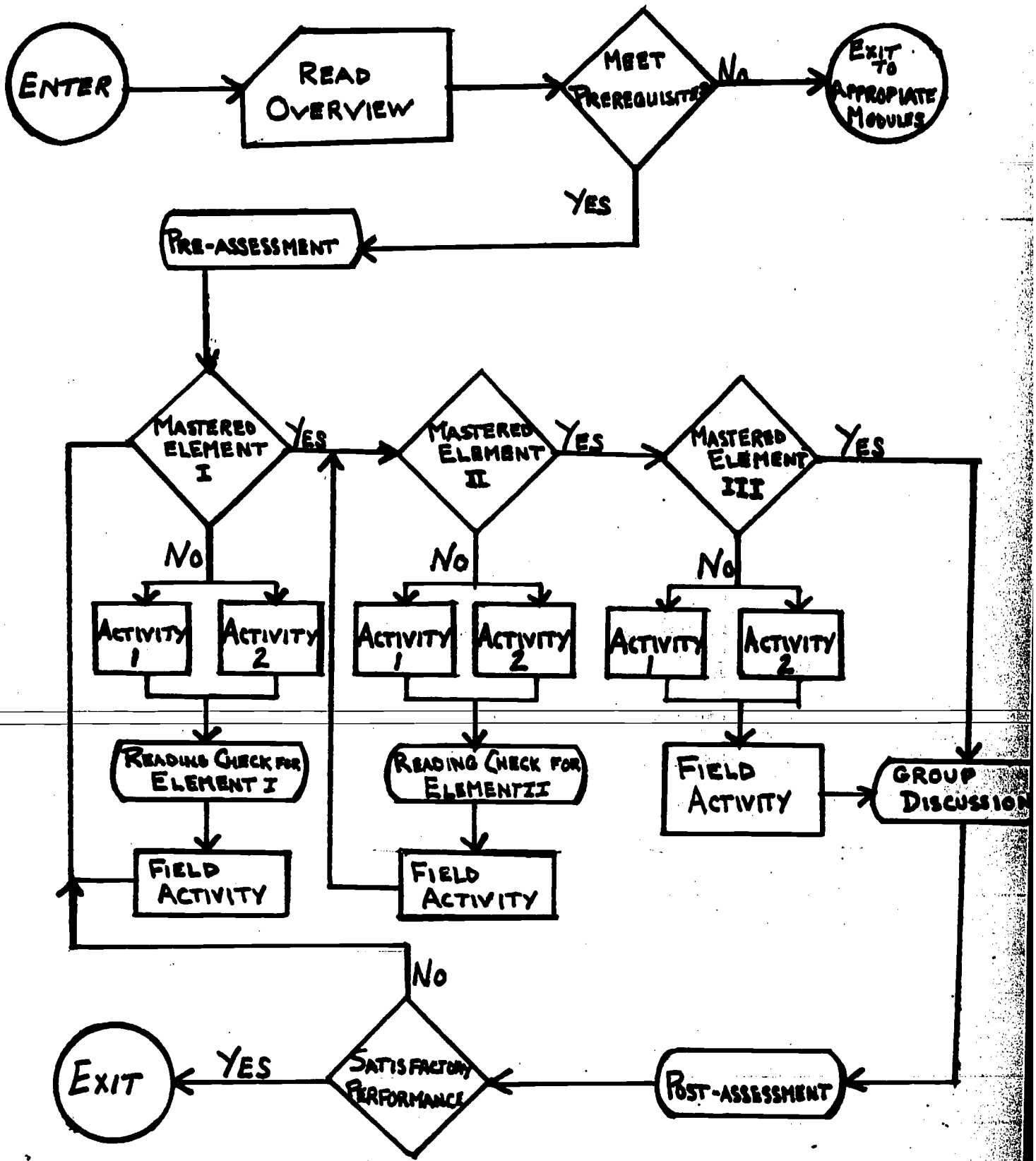
Now that you have read the overview and the prerequisites, you can decide whether you want to go ahead with this module. (You should think of the module as the equivalent of a three- or four-week course. The time will vary according to the field activity chosen.)

If you continue, you will be asked to complete four basic steps. The first is a pre-assessment, which measures your ability to evaluate a particular school from a lengthy written description. If you meet pre-determined criteria, you can exit after completing the pre-assessment. In other words, success on the pre-assessment indicates that you don't need this module. However, don't regard lack of complete success on the pre-assessment as failure. Your

instructor will have a conference with you to review your work on this first step and will use what you have written as a guideline to help you plan your work in the rest of the module. Your instructor may decide that you can enter at some later point than the beginning. At this conference, you will also discuss which activities within each element you will pursue and whether you will work on some activities alone or with others.

The next step is the completion of the elements. There are three elements in the module and you may be working through all three or only one or two. Whatever your individual work prescription is, you will be doing one reading activity, one field work activity and possibly some group discussion for each element. When you complete one element to the satisfaction of your instructor, you may proceed to the next. Work on the elements is followed by a group discussion that serves as a final review and feedback session before the post-assessment. The post-assessment is structured like the pre-assessment, but with a different school for you to evaluate. When you successfully complete the post-assessment, you have finished the module. If you do not satisfactorily complete it, your instructor will confer with you about what to do next.

These steps are shown in graphic form in the flow chart on page 5. Look at it before turning to the directions for the pre-assessment on page 6.


ENTER
READ OVERVIEW
MEET PREREQUISITES
No
EXIT TO APPROPIATE MODULES
YES
PRE-ASSESSMENT
MASTERED ELEMENT I
YES
MASTERED ELEMENT II
YES
MASTERED ELEMENT III
YES
No
No
No
ACTIVITY 1
ACTIVITY 2
ACTIVITY 1
ACTIVITY 2
ACTIVITY 1
ACTIVITY 2
READING CHECK FOR ELEMENT I
READING CHECK FOR ELEMENT II
FIELD ACTIVITY
GROUP DISCUSSION
FIELD ACTIVITY
FIELD ACTIVITY
No
EXIT
YES
SATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE
POST-ASSESSMENT

PRE-ASSESSMENT

On pages 1-7 of the Case Study Manual, you will find a description of Woodrow Wilson Junior High School (not its real name, of course). Read the material a few times, think about it, then, on separate paper, write your answers to the following questions. (You may also, with your instructor's permission, record your answers on a cassette.)

1. Based upon the information given in this case study, how would you evaluate affairs at Wilson Junior High School?

2. What do you consider to be the chief strengths of the school? The chief weaknesses? On what basis do you classify certain things as strengths or weaknesses?

3. What personnel changes do you feel need to be made at Wilson Junior High School? On what basis do you make these judgements? Are such changes likely to be easily made? What other things might you do?

4. What information do you have about the community's attitude toward the school and the things that are happening in it? Is this information important? Why or why not? How would you go about further assessing the community's attitude and its impact upon the school's operation?

5. What information is not given in this case study that you would need in order to evaluate adequately the situation at Woodrow Wilson Junior High School? If you took Edward Sherwin's

place as the principal at Wilson, how would you go about obtaining this information? What steps would you take to make sure that you obtained new relevant information as the situation changed?

When you have finished this pre-assessment, give it to your instructor for evaluation. If your instructor decides that you have completed it successfully, you may exit this module with full credit for this competency.

If you have not completed it successfully, you will meet with your instructor to plan your work prescription--that is, what elements and what activities within each element you will need to work through in order to achieve the objectives of the module. (A sample prescription sheet is given on page 8 to serve as a model.)

Begin Element I on page 9; Element II on page 41; Element III on page 54.

SAMPLE

Work Prescription Sheet

Complete the following module activities scheduled with your instructor at the pre-assessment conference.

	Pre-assessment questions	Satis-factorily attained? (X)	Self-instructional materials?	Other materials?
Element I Accumulating data for identifying evaluation priorities.	5		___No ___Yes (Turn to page 11)	___No ___Yes (Turn to page 10)
Element II Specifying evaluation priorities	3,4		___No ___Yes (Turn to page 43)	___No ___Yes (Turn to page 41)
Element III Comparing and ordering evaluation priorities	1,2		___No ___Yes (Turn to page 55)	___No ___Yes (Turn to page 54)
Terminal Objective: Identifying and ordering evaluation priorities in a given school situation.	1,2,3,4,5		If satisfactory attainment is indicated in pre-assessment, you may exit.	

ELEMENT I

Objective:

You will demonstrate your understanding of the need for full and accurate information as a first step in evaluation by collecting sufficient and relevant data for identifying priorities for

1. a school described in the Case Study Manual
2. a school or department of your choice

In order to complete this objective, you must do three things. First, you must complete a reading task, using either the selected outside reading materials suggested in Activity 1 or the self-instruction materials contained in Activity 2. Second, you will be asked to answer questions to check on your understanding of the reading. This Reading Checkup can be evaluated either by one or two peers or by your instructor. Third, you must complete a field activity (Activity 3), again, evaluated either by your instructor or by your peers.

Remember, choose either Activity 1 or Activity 2. You must complete the Reading Check and the Field Activity. When all your work has been judged satisfactory, you may proceed to the next element that is on your Work Prescription Sheet.

Activity 1

Perhaps the most common flaw in evaluation studies is that too narrow a range of data is considered in shaping the evaluation. The selections listed below should help develop your thinking about what is the legitimate scope of evaluation. For your convenience, these readings are taken from a single source:

> Ernest R. House, editor, School Evaluation: The Politics and Process (Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1973).
>
> The readings taken from this book include the following:
>
> David A. Erlandson, "Evaluation and an Administrator's Autonomy," Chapter 2.
>
> Gordon Hoke, "An Evaluation Needs Assessment," Chapter 3.
>
> Ernest R. House, "The Conscience of Educational Evaluation," Chapter 10.
>
> Michael Scriven, "Goal-Free Evaluation," Chapter 20.

In addition to the above selections, you may find it useful to read Eugene J. Webb et al., Unobtrusive Measures (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1966). This volume deals with the problem of overcoming bias in soliciting responses. It will be valuable for work in this module and for your subsequent work on evaluation.

Use the questions listed below to guide you as you read these selections:

1. What is the purpose of a school evaluation? What should be the scope of an evaluation?

2. Who should determine the goals of an evaluation? How can the goals of an evaluation best be served?
3. What dangers are likely to be encountered in setting up evaluation priorities?
4. What can be done to ensure that the scope of evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive?

When you have finished reading and analyzing the above selections according to the suggested questions, turn to the Reading Check for Element I on page 39 and complete it.

If you choose Activity 2 in each of the elements your Work Prescription calls for, you will be reading a specially written text that has some of the features of a "branching program" in programmed instruction. In other words, you will be asked to read a block of text, then choose one answer from a group of answers that best reflects your understanding of the situation. At the end of the paragraph you have chosen as your answer is a direction to turn to the page where your answer will be discussed. When you have completed all the reading, turn to the Reading Check on page 39

There is little of traditional testing in a program like this, so relax and read.

Activity 2

Evaluation priorities are closely related to educational priorities. In fact, the establishment of any type of priorities in an educational organization requires some kind of evaluation, however rudimentary. An evaluation, if it is to have any validity at all, must in turn respond constructively and specifically to the

question: "What needs to be evaluated?" And if, as we might reasonably suppose, it is impossible to evaluate everything in a school, then we must decide what elements of the school operation should be evaluated first, and precisely what about those elements it is that we wish to know.

Having stated the need for assigning priorities for evaluation, we must point out that the assignment of such priorities is a highly elusive task. As Stake and Gooler have pointed out, the assignment of quantitative designators of priority is likely to be meaningless:

> We could say that the importance of writing good essays is 19, but that is not very meaningful. We could say that the importance of writing good essays is nineteen times greater than the importance of writing good budgets, but even that is not very meaningful. Nineteen is a very precise amount, but we do not know what it is an amount of. We do not have a meaningful scale for expressing our priorities. *

Nor is the answer likely to be found in a simple preference hierarchy of goals. Stake and Gooler indicate that this would prove to be unworkable because different people have different preferences, and all of them change their preferences from time to time. What they suggest is a scheme for assessing priorities in terms of the different ways these priorities are expressed. In other words, the importance which people allegedly attach to educational goals and the time or the money which they are willing to allocate to ensuring that these

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*Robert E. Stake and Dennis D. Gooler, "Measuring Educational Priorities," School Evaluation: The Politics and Process, Ernest R. House, editor(Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1973), Chapter 20.

goals are reached may well yield different orders of priority. Also, if such a scheme is to be workable, these various expressions of priority must be collected from different groups of people such as students, teachers, parents and lay citizens.

By way of example, consider the situation described in the material on Wilson Junior High School which you read during your pre-assessment exercise. Consider yourself as moving into the school to replace Edward Sherwin as principal. The situation is obviously not entirely a healthy one, but how do you go about evaluating it to determine what needs to be done? (If you feel unfamiliar with the particulars of that case, reread or review it as necessary before going on. See pages 1-7 of the Case Study Manual.)

Choose from the options given below the course you consider most appropriate to take first in order to evaluate your program as you assume your new duties as principal at Wilson Junior High School. Then turn to the page indicated for a discussion of your choice.

a. I would have an informal meeting with the entire staff to allow them to air their differences and to get their feelings about change and curriculum development out in the open. I would seek a consensus on which we can build. Then I would repeat this process with parents and community representatives. Finally, I would bring the two groups together to work for an overall consensus.

(Turn to page 15.)

b. I would find out what the school district's

directives, guidelines, and policies are concerning curriculum development, personnel matters, and community relations. Then I would determine whether or not these directives, guidelines, and policies were being followed at Wilson.

(Turn to page 17)

c. I would look at the results of the school's testing program over the past few years, and where these did not give me definitive information, I would initiate additional batteries of tests. Then, from an analysis of test results, I would see where the program was weak and could communicate these weaknesses to staff, parents, and community. Then I would use this information to direct the appropriate changes.

(Turn to page 19)

d. I would turn matters of curriculum evaluation over to my department chairmen. They are the specialists in their particular areas and are in the best position to assess and to bring about improvement. I would turn matters of discipline, professional personnel, and community relations evaluation over to my three assistant principals in accordance with their individual strengths.

(Turn to page 22)

Discussion of option a

There's no question that, if properly handled, the technique of giving your new staff and/or the community the chance to let off steam and voice their grievances can have a therapeutic effect and can give you much valuable information for determining your course of action. Remember, though, that this type of procedure must be handled carefully and with discrimination. Some of the unspoken differences which now lie dormant may be forced into the open and may produce deep wounds and open conflict. If this happens, what do you do? Emotional conflict which may be incited in such an atmosphere takes time to settle within a group process, and it's doubtful that you're going to have the necessary time to handle this open conflict within the limits imposed by the time and work schedules of staff, parents, and community personnel. When it's all done, you may have to settle for an armed truce, which can hardly be considered a productive atmosphere.

On the other hand, don't assume that you have to build a consensus. The differences among the members of your staff, the parents, and the community are probably deep seated, and an effort to unite them as one "big happy family" may merely force these differences underground. Remember that your purpose here is not really to produce a surface unity but to uncover reliable data about genuine differences so that you can deal with them and shape your course of action.

Also, you should keep in mind that such a technique, if used, is only a first step. You can get some valuable insights into the feelings of people, and you can obtain much good direction for your evaluation; but you need more precise data than you can get in this manner. Don't forget either that none of these groups has a monopoly on determining educational or evaluation priorities. Evaluation priorities should not be based upon any one group's perceptions and preferences. The students, the staff, the community, the parents, and other groups have legitimate inputs into this process of determining objectives and priorities.

(Turn to page 24).

Discussion of option b

Certainly, you will need to ascertain the school district's procedures, and if you're unfamiliar with them, this may well be your first step. But, having done so, you need to ask yourself a pair of questions:

1. Do the district's policies, directives, and guidelines really meet the specific needs of the situation at Wilson?
2. How do you plan to enforce these procedures at Wilson?

Let's consider these questions one at a time:

1. Meet specific needs at Wilson?

In many school districts policies are quite sketchy and tend to neglect key areas (such as curriculum development). Where they do exist, they are often general and vague. This may be so because the people who shaped the procedures were unable to agree on specifics, but it is also a frank recognition that the needs of separate schools (even within a relatively small school district) are unique and diverse and only the most general prescriptions can be applicable to all. Whatever the reason, district policies, where they exist, are not likely to be written in behavior terms except where they apply to routine procedural matters. They must be supplemented by considerable original, innovative activity at the individual schools.

If you, as principal, find a very specific set of district guidelines and procedures, you need to be suspicious. Ask yourself very carefully: "Do they really apply in all respects to my situation?"

In determining your answer to this question, don't forget to take into consideration the needs and aspirations of your staff, your students, the parents, and the community.

2. Enforce these procedures?

What makes you think you'll be any more successful than Edward Sherwin in getting the cooperation of the Wilson staff, the parents, and the community? Keep in mind that Sherwin has tried to do a lot of different things and has met with failure in most of them. Remember also that it was very hard for him to pinpoint just why he was failing.

With perhaps one or two exceptions, he probably would have had a hard time documenting a case which demonstrated incompetence, laziness, or insubordination on the part of his staff. The staff may not have been very eager about curriculum development work, but is there any reason to believe that they'll be more enthusiastic about any set of procedures which call for some significant work?

And what do you do with the parents and the community? The school district's policies and procedures can only suggest how to work with them. Unlike the teachers, they are not employees of the school (in fact, they're the employers of the school district), and they don't have the same legal compulsion as teachers to follow policy. Can district policies really solve your problem here?

(Turn to page 24).

Discussion of option c

You never can have too much information about how things are going in your school, and checking your test results is a good place to begin. But even before this you'll probably want to raise some other basic questions:

1. What are you looking for in the test results?
2. What do you intend to do with the information you acquire?
3. What kinds of information do you need that you can't get through these test results?

Let's consider these questions one at a time:

1. What are you looking for in the test results?

A raw reading score (or even one translated into percentile rank) is, by itself a pretty useless statistic. It tells you nothing about what the student has done before, what he should be expected to do, how his reading ability compares with his development in other areas, or what kinds of learning activity he needs in the future. The reading scores may be a necessary part of your information package, but they're not the whole package. Only as they're related to other questions, considerations, and information do they really become useful to you.

You did indicate that you would initiate further tests to fill in the gaps in the information which the present standardized tests give you, but how do you know which gaps need to be filled? As we indicated earlier, you can't evaluate everything. How do you make

decisions about what items have priority for evaluation? Have you, for instance, considered measuring the attitudinal and emotional development of students as well as their academic development? Test results are most useful when they are used to answer specific questions which reflect genuine evaluation priorities.

2. What do you intend to do with the information you acquire?

This question is, of course, related to the previous one. Endless test scores and other statistics may be highly interesting and very impressive, but by themselves they don't improve anything for the students in your school. The information you acquire needs to lead to action decisions even if the decision is to take no action in a particular case. If you don't change anything in the school because of your testing program, you might seriously question whether your testing program is really telling you anything essential. In other words, a good battery of tests should not only indicate that something needs to be done but should help you identify precisely what needs to be done.

3. What other kinds of information do you need?

Standardized test results can provide much useful information about student development, but there are other kinds of valuable information which they don't furnish. Knowing what needs to be done for the students is only half the story. Knowing how to get it done is the other. You may not care too much about the organizational climate of your school or the attitude of your community for their own value. But these factors have important implications for what you'll be able to do and won't be able to do in your school.

It would pay to have a very thorough knowledge of these factors and the ways they affect your school.

(Turn to page 24).

Discussion of option d

Knowing how and when to delegate authority and being willing and able to do it are admirable characteristics in a school administrator. Furthermore, in our large, modern, complex schools, the ability to delegate wisely is almost a precondition for retaining the administrator's effectiveness (to say nothing of his sanity). However, before you delegate evaluation matters, it would pay to look at exactly what you're doing. Evaluation, very simply, is the means of accumulating the necessary data to make rational and appropriate decisions about your school's operation. If you delegate evaluation too completely to a subordinate, you may in fact be turning over the operation of the school to that person. The decision to collect certain types of information and not others is a major factor in determining the shape of the action which is ultimately taken. Yet you're the one who is still going to be held responsible for the operation of the school. Of course, from your position of authority, you can always disavow the evaluation results which the subordinate produces; but such a practice, if done regularly, is organizationally wasteful and is almost certain to lead to frustration and disenchantment among your subordinates.

The answer, obviously, is somewhere between these two extremes. It would be wasteful of your time and energy as an administrator for you to become involved in all the minutiae which accompany any sophisticated evaluation. Much of the detail and paper work needs to be delegated. In fact, very substantial portions of the evaluation (including the choice of evaluation instruments) can often be

delegated. But all aspects of the evaluation should be directly responsive to questions which you have formulated or approved. The purpose of an evaluation is to provide data for running the schools. To make sure that you get this data in the form that you need it, you are going to have to be actively involved in the establishment of evaluation priorities.

(Turn to page 24).

Self-Check on Initial Data-Gathering Efforts

Consider again the four options listed on pages 13-14. Do you feel now that you have determined the best initial effort to make in accumulating the necessary data for identifying evaluation priorities? If you do not feel that you have or if you are uncertain, turn back to pages 13-14 and make another selection. If you feel that you have selected the best option or if you have exhausted all the options given, write a brief description of the initial action which you have elected to take. (This initial action may be any of the four options, a combination of the four options, or an entirely different option.) Then write a paragraph or two explaining your choice of initial action. This explanation should consider the strengths and weaknesses of each of the options given on pages 13-14. Ask your instructor to review your work before going on. Then turn to page 25 for the continuation of the text.

In determining evaluation priorities it is important, first of all, to identify the sources which must be considered in assigning these priorities. Since evaluation priorities are a function of educational priorities, even the novice school administrator recognizes that, in a very practical sense, the assignment of evaluation priorities should reflect the educational priorities which are held by important persons and groups in the community and in the school organization itself. At the same time evaluation priorities should step beyond the context of a single school and its immediate community environment. Attention should be paid to larger trends in the city, the state, and the nation and should reflect familiarity with what recognized authorities in the areas of curriculum and school management are saying.

Your earlier study of community power systems should help you identify those persons and groups in the community whose priorities need to be assessed. If you feel the need for review in the area of community power systems, you might consult the materials from your earlier study.

Similarly, your earlier study of organizations and their interaction and influence patterns should help you to assess priorities held by various persons and groups within the school. If you feel the need for review in this area, you may wish to read over the materials you acquired earlier on organizations.

Once again, if you feel that your background in curriculum is inadequate, you might refer to the materials you acquired during your study of that area.

Once you have determined who the important and influential persons are in the school and community, you need to find out what they recognize as the important issues. You could, of course, simply ask these persons what they think needs to be evaluated in the school situation. But this type of question is not very likely to produce very usable data. For one thing individuals are likely only to respond in general or vague terms or in reference to those items which have most recently and pointedly been impressed upon them. Also, different individuals will respond in particular language forms and structures which are difficult to compare to responses as worded by other people. This makes it extremely difficult to compare the responses you get or to assess the relative weight which should be given to any item.

Another way you might get at this information would be to make a checklist of various items in the school situation which might be worthy of evaluation and ask the selected individuals to designate them in order of priority. On the surface this method does appear to get rid of some of the ambiguity of the open-ended questions suggested above. But you still run into ambiguities caused by different interpretations of the items listed and the use by your respondents of different criteria for assigning priority. In addition, there is the very real danger of too narrowly limiting the range of evaluation possibilities by biasing them in favor of our own perceptions.

Your scheme for determining evaluation priorities should have these characteristics:

1. It should be sensitive to the entire range of evaluation possibilities in the school situation.
2. It should establish the criteria for priority assignment by the respondents.
3. It should use words and other structures that provide for narrow divergence in interpretation.

Let us briefly consider each of these characteristics:

1. Sensitivity to the entire range of evaluation possibilities in the school situation.

As noted above, there is a danger that the person seeking to determine evaluation priorities for a school situation will bias his findings in terms of his own perceptions. Other kinds of bias may also creep into his work. For instance, through a faulty analysis of his organization or the community, he may give undue weight to the priorities perceived by certain individuals or groups. Or certain kinds of data may be screened out by calling for direct overt responses. For instance, if you ask a teacher if classroom discipline is a major concern of hers, she may, because of a desire (conscious or unconscious) to repress her true feelings about the discipline problems she is having, reply in the negative. Yet, if you were able to get at her true feelings, you might find that it is indeed a major concern of hers.[1] You obviously must be careful in

[1] The whole problem of getting around the bias of "socially acceptable" responses solicited by overt questions and statements is dealt with in Eugene J. Webb et al., Unobtrustive Measures (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1966). This excellent little volume would be well worth your reading, both for this module and for subsequent work on evaluation.

soliciting responses to your questions in order to avoid this type of bias. Furthermore, your search for evaluation priorities should be open to unsolicited data. If you would uncover the entire range of relevant data, you must be prepared to carefully observe events and make pertinent inferences.

2. Establishment of the criteria for priority assignment.

Stake and Gooler found that they received different results when they asked teachers and laymen how much time should be devoted to an educational goal and when they asked how important that goal was. It appeared, from their work, that the most important objectives in school don't always require the greatest time allocation.*

This, perhaps, is little more than common sense, but it is an often overlooked reality and serves to point up the fact that priorities are going to be differentially arranged when we state different criteria.

In establishing priorities for evaluation, one important criterion is intensity of feelings. If a group of community militants is getting ready to forcibly close the school because of displeasure with some aspect of its program, it does little good to be able to present logical, broadly supported evidence that their irritation centers on only a very minor aspect of the total school program. One of the things you need to do, obviously, is to determine on what parts of your school operation you need to get reliable, comprehensive data immediately.

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* Robert E. Stake and Dennis D. Gooler, op. cit.

However, if you focus your evaluation solely on immediate, explosive issues, you'll be running from crisis to crisis without getting any data on the long-range issues which are at the heart of solid instructional development. The situation might be analogous to a man running from place to place in a large building to put out fires only to have the building collapse around him because the structure has been eaten by termites. You need to know what the overall orientations of the people in your school organization and community are, and you need to know what effect future events are likely to have on these orientations.

3. Restricting divergence in interpretation.

Suppose, as the superintendent of a K-12 school district, you have been given the information that the mathematics program in your district needs to be evaluated. Does this tell you what to do? Think about this for a minute. Is the problem one simply of looking at standardized test scores? Or does the problem come from the complaints of junior high school mathematics teachers that students from the elementary schools don't know their multiplication facts? Or do elementary teachers feel uncomfortable with the "new math"? Is there concern at the high school that students aren't interested in mathematics? Do community employers complain that your graduates can't add or subtract? Each of these questions or some combination of them leads you to a somewhat different type of evaluation. Knowing that the mathematics program needs to be evaluated is only a first step. Your methods for collecting data on evaluation priorities should seek data that provides as much specific direction as possible.

Any specification of priorities which can be done at an early stage will more than pay for itself in the time it saves later in the evaluation process. At the same time you must be careful in collecting your data that you are not so restrictive as to screen out valuable data.

With these principles in mind, write your responses to the questions below on a separate sheet of paper. (You may tape your responses if you wish, but check with your instructor first.)

1. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in a series of hour long faculty "bull sessions," as a device for gathering information about evaluation priorities?

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

2. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in seeking priorities from the officers of the Parents Association?

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

3. What information can students furnish about evaluation priorities? How would you get this information? What cautions must you use?

4. What would be the advantages of asking each teacher to list the five most critical issues in the school on a piece of paper? What problems are likely to result from this? What modifications would you make in this procedure?

5. With whom else (other than teachers) might you use the procedure described in 4 above? What modifications would you make in the process?

6. How can you get inputs on priorities from parents and other persons in the community?

7. What are the advantages of surveying the literature to determine priorities for evaluation? What are the disadvantages with this method?

8. What are strengths and weaknesses of using a detailed questionnaire that asks questions such as: "Do you believe that the current plane geometry textbook is too difficult for our students?" or "Do you believe that the Distar reading program should be used in our school?"

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

After you have completed your responses - either in writing or on tape - turn to page 33 for a discussion of possible answers. If your answers match in most instances, consider that you have mastered the material enough to continue. If you seem way off the mark, ask your instructor's advice.

The answers suggested below are not necessarily exhaustive or complete; they are merely some of the critical factors to which you should be attentive:

1. Series of hour-long faculty "bull sessions"?

   Strengths:

   -informal, relaxed atmosphere fosters honesty

   -forum for administrator-staff interaction

   -sharing process builds a common foundation

   -elusive elements of truth are brought out in this way

   Weaknesses:

   -much rambling and inefficient use of time

   -information gathered may be too nebulous.

   -information gleaned is strongly biased

   -entire faculty likely to be too large for a worthwhile session

   -puts the administrator on the hot seat

   -likely to turn into a gripe session

   -counterproductive to morale

   -may focus on irrelevant factors

   -lack of focus

2. Inputs from officers of the Parents Association?

   Strengths:

   -good public relations; builds support for program

   -an additional valuable input to decisions

   -adds political strength to educational process

   -positive inputs may boost staff morale

Weaknesses:

-lack of expertise

-negative inputs may demoralize staff

-biased; partial inputs may not reflect all parents

3. Value of student inputs?

-highly relevant information; the student is what education is all about

-students benefit from participating

How to obtain student inputs

-informal discussions and interviews

-tape-recorded sessions

-questionnaires

-student members on governing committees

-student organizations

-seek descriptive data rather than ratings

Cautions

-bias; selected students may not represent all students

-lack of expertise

-age of students is an important factor in the method used for obtaining information and in the type of information sought

4. Lists of critical issues from teachers?

Advantages:

-obtain data from a cross-section of staff, including minority viewpoints

-help to pinpoint issues; help to specify evaluation priorities

-not too time-consuming

Disadvantages:

-problem of collating material

Possible modifications

-work through a committee of teachers

-don't require or limit to five issues

-propose general categories for critical issues

-let teachers select critical issues from a proposed checklist

-use collected items to prepare a general list of issues which can be distributed to the staff as a reliability check

5. Lists of critical issues from others?

-administrators, aides, guidance personnel, custodians, security guards, students, alumni, parents, community groups

6. Parental/community inputs?

-formal meetings, personal visits, telephone calls, parent/community membership on school committees, open school to parents and community, Open House, questionnaires, consultative council, buzz sessions

Getting useful inputs from parents and from the community is becoming increasingly crucial in the operation of today's schools.

However, many of the old, tested procedures for obtaining this input - such as formal meetings, teas, and open houses - are no longer sufficient in many community settings, particularly large urban centers. Yet such input is needed. The establishment and maintenance of communication links between the school and the home and community becomes a first order of business for the administrator, and he must be prepared to adopt innovative and ingenious methods to do it. The information he can get in this way is vital, and his methods are likely to be unique to his situation. He must discover what works in his own community.

7. Surveying the literature?

Professional books, journals, newspapers, and television can provide a wide theoretical and practical foundation and furnish direction for an understanding of what is happening in the schools and their environment. They touch upon crises and present alternative solutions to these crises in a sometimes dramatic way that can greatly extend the administrator's awareness and sensitivity to problems in his own school and community. But he must remember that they don't replace the need for hard, basic work in developing an evaluation/action plan to the needs of his own community.

8. Detailed questionnaire?

Strengths:

-specifies priorities and thereby gives direction

Weaknesses:

-a "no" answer to either of these example questions is a dead end. (Although these questions could be improved to overcome this particular difficulty.)

-danger of bias. It is difficult for a questionnaire, without becoming prohibitively lengthy, not to limit its questions to those which its author considers important. These questions may screen out equally important or more important issues from consideration in the evaluation process.

Now let's take another look at Woodrow Wilson Junior High School (Case Study Manual, pages 1-7.) On the basis of the information given in that case summary, what evaluation priorities are you able to at least tentatively establish? What vital information about evaluation priorities are you not able to get from that case study? How would you go about getting that information in a real-life situation? Go back through the case and develop a new set of procedures for establishing evaluation priorities. (You may write or tape your responses.)

After you have developed a set of procedures for establishing evaluation priorities, compare your procedures against the criteria below. You procedures should:

1. Ensure that you are getting all the pertinent data from all elements of the school and community which are concerned with the process of education in your school.

2. Take into consideration the priorities established by the society as a whole and by likely future developments.
3. Serve to clarify as precisely as possible what needs to be evaluated.

When you feel that you are ready, go on to the Reading Check on the next page. This will give you a chance to demonstrate what you have learned.

Reading Check

As a final exercise in identifying evaluation priorities, read the case study on the Carstens School (pages 8-11 in the Case Study Manual) and tentatively establish the evaluation priorities for the situation described in it. (You may write your description or tape it.) Also, describe in some detail the procedures you would use for obtaining complete information about the evaluation priorities.

When you have completed your response, you may give it to your instructor for evaluation or you may exchange work with another student who has completed Activity 2. (You will, of course, evaluate the other student's paper or tape.)

The criteria for evaluation are on pages 37-38. When you have completed this check satisfactorily--either with instructor or peer approval--turn to the Field Activity on the next page. If your response is not approved, ask your instructor how to proceed.

Field Activity

Collect data for identifying the evaluation priorities of a specific educational organization. The organization you select for this purpose should be no smaller than a high school department and no larger than a single school district.

a. Develop a plan for obtaining this data, including in it the individuals and groups from whom you will solicit the data and the techniques you will use to obtain it.

b. Submit this plan to your instructor for approval.

c. Gather the data.

d. (1) Report your finding to your instructor for his evaluation and feedback.

OR

(2) Together with other students engaged in this field activity, meet in a learning group to assess each other's data-gathering efforts and to provide appropriate feedback and direction to one another.

When you have completed this Field Activity, and your instructor has approved your work on this element, turn to page 41 and begin Element II.

ELEMENT II

Objective:

You will demonstrate your understanding of the need for precision and depth in evaluation statements by satisfactorily composing a five-item list specifying evaluation priorities for

1. a school described in the Case Study Manual
2. a school or department of your choice

As in Element I, in order to fulfill the objective for this element, you are to complete one reading activity, the accompanying check, and the field activity. When your work has been judged satisfactory, you may go on to the last element, Element III.

Activity 1

Evaluation is never "just" evaluation. You must evaluate something, and the degree to which your evaluation is useful depends, to a great extent, upon the degree to which you specify what it is that you wish to evaluate. In other words, if you ask the question: "How good is the reading program?" we are apt to collect a variety of responses which yield equally correct but widely divergent data. Precisely what is it about the reading program that you wish to know? The selections below should help you in specifying objectives to a useful level.

Benjamin S. Bloom, "Some Theoretical Issues Relating to Educational Evaluation," Educational Evaluation: New Roles, New Means, Sixty-eighth Yearbook (Part II), National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), Chapter II, pp. 26-50.

Robert E. Stake, "The Countenance of Educational Evaluation," Teachers College Record, 68: 523-540, 1967.

Robert E. Stake and Dennis D. Gooler, "Measuring Educational Priorities," School Evaluation: The Politics and Process, Ernest R. House, editor (Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1973) Chapter 20.

Use the questions listed below to guide you as you read these selections:

1. Explain how apparently minor differences in the wording of a question which seeks to discover evaluation priorities can cause great differences in the focus of evaluation priorities.
2. How can Stake's "Countenance " model be used to help focus and specify evaluation priorities?
3. What problems are likely to result if evaluation priorities are not adequately specified?
4. Why should evaluation priorities be specified? How explicitly should they be specified?

When you have finished reading and analyzing the above selections according to the suggested questions, turn to the Reading Check on page 51 and complete it.

Activity 2

The first part of this module dealt with the question of how you acquire the data you will need to establish evaluation priorities. This second part deals with the means by which you can specify precisely what you need to find out in your evaluation. The third (and final) part of the module will be aimed at helping you determine what things need to be evaluated first.

Consider these statements:

a. We need to evaluate our reading program.

b. We need to find out the mean Metropolitan reading scores for grades four, five, and six in our school.

c. We need to find out why our graduates aren't able to handle their subject matter texts in junior high school.

d. We need to find out how we can more completely individualize our reading program.

e. We need to find a way to get our students to become genuinely interested in reading on their own.

f. We need to find out why our school's standardized reading scores have been dropping.

First of all, notice the wording of these statements. They are all statements of evaluation priority. Statement a uses the verb "evaluate"; all the others use "find" or "find out." Essentially,

in this context, the two verbs mean the same thing. Evaluation is the process of "finding out." This is why it's so important for the school administrator. He needs to find out what is happening in his school. He needs to know the problems and obtain insights for dealing with them.

If, for instance, you had the statement, "our students need to learn word attack skills," you would have a statement of a priority but not a statement of an evaluation priority. A statement such as this one assumes that you have already conducted an evaluation: you have "found out" a portion of what needs to be done in your school. The problem, in many school situations, is that while decisions are made to take certain actions, the assumption cannot be made with any validity that they are being taken because of what has been "found out" in the school situation. Educators often adopt open classrooms, programmed instruction, overhead projectors, flexible scheduling, and other items because of a hunch that they're going to do some good and not because of what they have found out about their school or its clients.

Notice also that the above statements of evaluation priority are at various levels of abstraction. Statement a is obviously the most general and abstract. It stresses an evaluation priority, but one which must be further specified before it can really give much shape or direction to an evaluation. If your initial efforts in accumulating data for evaluation priorities were sufficiently thorough, you should be able to specify your evaluation priorities

well beyond this level of abstraction. If your efforts weren't thorough enough, you'll have to go back and obtain the data which will enable you to further specify.

Now look at Statement b. Statement b is pretty explicit, but it raises some other questions: "What consideration led us to the conclusion that we need these particular scores?" "After we determine these scores, what difference will that knowledge make in the way that we conduct the reading program?" In other words, what is the problem to which your knowledge of these scores will be addressing itself? It could be that you are comparing these scores with the scores of the previous year to determine whether an experimental program has brought the predicted gains and to use this information in deciding about the continuation of the program. There might be many other valid reasons for seeking this information. But the administrator should determine first of all that such reasons in fact exist. A set of reading scores by themselves can be pretty meaningless. The ultimate question is: "What difference will this knowledge make in the educational program?"

Statement f, for instance, suggests one of the legitimate reasons for obtaining reading scores. That is, such scores can be used as an alarm system for further evaluation. There can be many reasons why the reading scores in a school drop. Regular standardized reading tests can serve as a monitoring device to alert the administrator to the need for conducting a more thorough investigation.

Statement d, like Statement b, assumes that you have already answered a previous question. In this case, it assumes that you know why you want to individualize. Is it because your philosophical position is that it is always good to give students individual attention? If so, there is nothing wrong with this; but you should be aware that you are making your decision on such a basis, and not chiefly on empirical evidence. If, on the other hand, you have made your decision on the basis of empirical evidence that certain reading abilities are enhanced through individualized instruction, you probably should look closely at the supporting research. It may help answer the question about how you should individualize instruction. You can't assume that all individualization is the same; the research on which you are basing the decision probably gives some details about how a particular style of individualization was achieved.

Statements c and e are both likely to be very productive statements of evaluation priorities. Both make assumptions (i.e., that "junior high school students should be able to handle their subject matter texts" and that "students should be interested in reading on their own"). Probably most of the people in our schools would believe that both these criteria apply to most students. Notice, however, the exploratory nature of these statements. Neither one makes narrowing assumptions about the nature of the solutions, only that the solutions be directed to the problem suggested by the statement. At the same time, both statements give

considerably more direction than Statement a.

Now open your Case Study Manual to page 12 and read the article by Daniel A. Salmon. If you were going to evaluate the school described in this article, how would you go about it? What guidelines for evaluation are suggested in the article? What would you do to amplify and implement these guidelines? What modifications would you make in these guidelines? What additions would you make to these guidelines for evaluation?

From the information given in the article, select what might appear to be four major priority areas for evaluation. (An "area" might be something of a broad nature like a reading program.) List these broad evaluation areas on a separate sheet of paper. (Use the sample worksheet on page 48 to guide you.) Then, under each major area, list at least three more specific statements of evaluation priority. (Don't worry too much if your areas seem to overlap one another. It's almost inevitable that they will to some degree. Their main usefulness is in helping you broaden the range for your specific statements of evaluation priority.)

Now that you have selected these evaluation priorities, write or tape a brief explanation of the processes you would use (in actual practice, not just on the basis of the article) to make and validate these selections. Submit your explanation to your partner, if you have been working with one, or review your own work, using the following questions as criteria: