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ABSTRACT

Since educational criticism aims to reeducate teachers' perception in order to improve or illuminate educational practices, the audience's role is particularly important. In many ways, the intended audience determines the evidence presented. The evaluator must write the criticism in language which is meaningful to the audience (for example researchers, teachers, or lay persons). Because the gap between the concerns and the language of teachers and researchers is so wide, the educational critic who writes for teachers must rethink his or her communication with the audience. Educational criticism differs from artistic criticism because the critic is not an aloof critic of a completed work; the sustained contact with teachers enhances collegiality rather than distance; and the critic aims to instigate change. Criticism grounded in an individual teacher's concerns would detect nuances in progress and would reeducate the teacher's perceptions over the course of the visits. For a report on a teacher's skill deficiencies, the "connoisseur/critic" would consider the teacher's lived experience, the patterns of his or her practices, and the demands for action. (GDC)

"Different Evidence for Different Audiences?": An Exploratory Analysis (1)

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"With language comes understanding, and surely it is easier to criticize people if you do not understand them" (William Foote Whyte) (2).

Educational criticism (3) aims to reeducate the perceptions in order that educational practice be improved or illuminated. In this paper, I shall argue that the critic's practical brief makes the audience's role particularly salient in this mode of research and evaluation. Specifically, the intended audience in many ways determines what counts as evidence. I want to explore what the provision of "different evidence for different audiences" might mean for the kind of feedback critics can provide, and for the role of the critic.

I

Educational criticism's aspiration to reeducate the perceptions naturally leads to the question, "Whose perceptions?" It seems reasonable that, given peoples' varying degrees of educational perceptiveness, each individual or group would benefit from reeducation to a different degree or in different ways. The educational critic, to some extent, must decide whose perceptions to reeducate and how to reeducate them. When writing for a lay audience, for example, the critic is likely to adopt a different language from a criticism written for a group of qualitative inquirers. In other words, the criticism is shaped to make public what the connoisseur has discerned; but the critic can only make his or her criticism "public" if it is in a form or language that makes sense to the

intended public (or audience). The concerns and language of educational practitioners and of educational researchers diverge radically. In these circumstances, the evidence that makes "sense" to an audience of researchers may not make "sense" to an audience of teachers. And, what counts as evidence in one case, may not in another case. I shall return to this point later.

Beyond what makes sense to an audience, of course, there are other important influences on the evidence the critic gathers and reports. These influences include the critic's frame of reference in data gathering and data analysis, and the critic's ethical obligations to informants and others. Yet, when all is said and done, there remains a multitude of apparently valid or at least plausible interpretations of the evidence garnered in a qualitative study. The data do not speak for themselves. As Robert Donmoyer observes, "meaning is not drawn from the data (despite qualitative researchers' frequent talk of emergent findings), but rather imposed on it" (4). He concludes, "members of the research community cannot avoid questions of purpose" (5). And, in educational criticism, we need to ask, "whose purposes?"

Before proceeding with my line of argument, permit me a caveat. I want to draw a firm distinction between the provision of different evidence for different audiences and the writing of multiple reports. The latter entails providing one audience (say, a teacher) with one type of information and a more frank report to another audience (say, an administrator who wishes to evaluate the teacher). In other words, the substance of the evidence is altered on the basis of each interested party's need and right to know (6). In part, this decision is made, according to Lee Cronbach and his associates, so that "the facts" are presented "in a palatable manner" (7). Although I do not question that "facts" should be presented in a "palatable manner," and concede that all disclosure is necessarily a selection from some universe, (8) I do question if the practice of multiple

reports is a proper ethical stance. Multiple reports undoubtedly have considerable utility, but as Nel Noddings writes, "it would seem downright unethical to give teachers innocuous reports of their performance and then pull out all the stops in a 'vivid rendering' for research colleagues" (9). Thus, the view advocated in this paper should not be confused with more familiar arguments for the provision of multiple reports.

Although the kind of "different evidence for different audiences" that I am advocating would have utility, that is not my primary reason for suggesting it. Rather, I believe that the gap between the concerns and language of researchers on the one hand, and teachers on the other hand, is so wide that little communication occurs between the two groups (10). It is akin, with only modest exaggeration, to what anthropologists describe as cross-cultural communication.

Teachers are preoccupied with practical concerns of what will "work" in the classroom (11). Although researchers often appeal for teachers to be reflective about their practice, it is researchers, not teachers, who have the time, reward structure, and energy for reflection. David Flinders' study of teachers' curriculum management reveals that even dedicated, experienced teachers have little time, incentive, or energy to reflect on their actions (12). The language overheard in the teachers' lounge at lunchtime, and the concerns that that language expresses, bears marginal relationship to most of what is published in educational research journals.

In these circumstances, the educational critic who writes for teachers needs to rethink his communication with audience. Criticism must be cast in terms of the teachers' world views--and this often entails significantly different concerns from the interests of academe (13). As Philip Jackson observes,

educational researchers "speak of putting theory into practice. But that is not what we do at all. We put theory, or whatever you want to call the ideas we transmit, into practitioners [his emphases]..." (14).

Thus far, I have laid out some factors that shape what counts as evidence in educational criticism and suggested that the "language" of criticism must approximate the "language" of the intended audience. Otherwise, reeducation of the perceptions, the aim of educational criticism, is unlikely to result (15). I shall now consider a hypothetical illustration of the consequences of the view I have advanced. This particular example is hypothetical, but it is grounded in actual problems in curriculum practice: it involves a critic studying an elementary school teacher who has responsibility for teaching all the subjects in the curriculum. The teacher lacks subject-matter expertise in one subject (16).

II

Consider the following situation: an educational critic is studying the operational curriculum in Ms. Ladd's sixth-grade classroom. Over the course of several weeks, the critic observes that the teacher manages the class well and has the opportunity to witness that the operational curriculum in reading, language arts and mathematics is substantive. During the third week of the critic's visits, he observes a social studies lesson for the first time. Ms. Ladd has already mentioned to the critic that she has scant background in geography but, nonetheless, believes she teaches the subject satisfactorily. As the social studies lesson proceeds, the teacher reviews the concept of cardinal directions. Repeatedly over the course of this social studies lesson, the teacher tells the children that "north is at the top of the map" and refers to north as "up." The critic knows that the social studies literature argues these

characterizations of north are incorrect: "'up" means [illegible] the center of the earth." The correct form is: "north is . in the direction of the North Pole" (17).

After observing several more geography lessons, it becomes apparent that Ms. Ladd misunderstands many important geographic concepts and skills. The geography curriculum is the poor relation in Ms. Ladd's classroom. Moreover, this state of affairs goes unnoticed (18). Neither the principal nor the parents express concern about the geography curriculum. Unlike mathematics and reading, the substance of a geography curriculum seldom evokes much interest beyond the classroom door. How can criticism best be rendered? What evidence is appropriate?

III

The traditional metaphor underlying educational connoisseurship and educational criticism comes from criticism of film, the visual arts, music and so forth. This metaphor suggests a critic aloof from events. Film critics, for example, view the completed film; seldom do they visit, or have any interest in visiting, the set during shooting. Although Elliot Eisner proposes that educational criticism can be construed more broadly--say, teachers criticizing other teachers--in fact, few, if any, such criticisms have been done (19). The usual practice of educational criticism is an outsider, usually a researcher, studying classrooms. This suggests several limitations of the film critic metaphor. First, the educational critic is not an aloof observer of a completed artistic work. Rather, he is witnessing a continually unfolding series of events. Second, the critic's sustained contact with teachers more likely nurtures collegiality than distance. Third, educational criticism, unlike the usual aspiration of film criticism, . not only aims to reeducate the perceptions but also to instigate desirable changes in the object of criticism.

Given these limitations of the traditional conception of educational criticism, it is time we considered what type of evidence will best help teachers. "Vivid rendering" adds an important vantage point to the perspectives available to educational researchers, but it is doubtful that it communicates effectively with teachers. Despite Jackson's generation-old call to try and understand the world of teaching as teachers see it (20), we have made relatively little progress in this regard--even in qualitative approaches such as educational criticism. The "language" of outsiders has frequently done more to condemn teachers than to reeducate them.

Educational criticism has seldom been written with the teacher as primary audience. Can criticism be cast in terms of the "lived" curriculum that teachers experience (21)? What would criticism grounded in the teacher's world view be like? Does it entail abandoning connoisseurship/criticism for some model of collaborative research?

Criticism grounded in the teacher's concerns would not necessarily result in the familiar written (or videotaped) report. Instead, it might employ the skills of the connoisseur/critic--particularly the abilities to detect nuance and subtlety--in process. Reeducation of the teacher's perceptions would be incremental over the course of the critic's visits. The critic's ability to discern patterns of classroom life would be joined with the teacher's "embeddedness...in the here-and-now" (22). In Noddings' apt phrase, the data would be "mutually constructed" (23). Connoisseurship/criticism skills of the highest order would be required in such a continuing dialogue with the teacher.

In my view, such an extension of the notions of connoisseurship and criticism would retain the vital element of an outside perspective. It would still offer a mirror for practitioners. While moving closer to models of collaborative research, connoisseurship would clearly still be required if the

dialogue between critic and teacher is to be as rich as possible. Moreover, connoisseur/critics may well derive "descriptive terms that may provide a language for insiders and outsiders alike" (24).

In Ms. Ladd's case, the evidence probably would be different from a written report for a learned journal. (I would rush to add that it should not be different in the sense of multiple reports.) The former would be rooted in the teacher's lived experience, the patterns of her practice, the demands for action. For example, what differences does she see between her curriculum practice in geography and in other subjects? What types of changes would be required to bring geography into line with other subjects? These questions are more in the manner of an invitation to think these things through jointly than the formal rendering of a judgment. Certainly the evidence provided to the teacher should also provide food for reflection--but reflection that begins with her questions and concerns, not the concerns of academe (25).

IV

Two final observations seem warranted. Unfortunately, time requires that I simply raise them as issues. First, this broadened view of the conduct of educational criticism implies somewhat unconventional role for educational theory. That is, the role of theory, in this scheme of things, is not to define educational problems--but to make sense of the problems once the connoisseur locates them.

Second, we need to recognize that critic and teacher may not always see eye-to-eye. For many reasons, practitioners may simply not welcome what the connoisseur discerns: collegiality is no guarantee of agreement. The critic's well-meaning attempt to see the world through the native's eyes still falls short of a native view. Inevitably outsiders bring their own values to a setting, and

even attempts to render "what is in the teachers' mind" (26) surely cannot always succeed. As Antoinette Oberg and Lonnis McElroy note, their collegial work with teachers has depended on some shared assumptions between critic and teacher (27).

In conclusion, I am not suggesting that we abandon traditional conceptions of educational criticism. We researchers need as many perspectives on educational problems as we can conceive of illuminative lens to provide those perspectives. But I am suggesting that we seriously entertain the use of educational criticism for purposes that have seldom been practically addressed to date. In particular, I believe that the kind of evidence that communicates to teachers must take as its starting point the concerns of those teachers. Then we can truly say that the connoisseur is making his insights public.

Notes

1. This paper was presented as part of a symposium, The Influence of Audience in Arts-Based Qualitative Inquiry, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC, April 1987. I gratefully acknowledge David Flinders' critique of an earlier draft.
   For reasons of convenience, throughout this paper I use the masculine form for connoisseurs and critics and the feminine form for teachers.

2. William Foote Whyte, Appendix A to Street Corner Society, (3rd ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 296.

3. Elliot W. Eisner, The Educational Imagination (2nd ed.) (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Stephen J. Thornton, "Differences that Make A Difference: The Artistic Versus the Scientific Approach to Qualitative Research," Education and Urban Society, in press.

4. Robert Donmoyer, "The Rescue from Relativism: Two Failed Attempts and an Alternative Strategy," Educational Researcher 14, 10 (December 1985): p. 17.

5. Ibid, p. 19.

6. Lee J. Cronbach and Associates, Toward Reform of Program Evaluation (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980).

7. Ibid, p. 201.

8. Elliot W. Eisner, "Ethical Tensions in Qualitative Researach" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1986).

9. Nel Noddings, "Fidelity in Teaching, Teacher Education, and Research for Teaching," Harvard Educational Review 56 (November 1986): p. 508.

10. Elliot W. Eisner, "Can Educational Research Inform Educational Practice?" Phi Delta Kappan 65 (March 1984): 447-452.

11. Gail McCutcheon, "Elementary School Teachers' Planning for Social Studies and Other Subjects," Theory and Research in Social Education 9,1 (Spring 1981): 45-66.

12. David Flinders, "Teaching Demands and Adaptive Curriculum Management" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 1985).

13. Judith E. Lanier, "Tensions in Teaching Teachers the Skills of Pedagogy," in Staff Development: Eighty-second Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, ed. Gary A. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Gail McCutcheon, "Curriculum Theory/Curriculum Practice: A Gap or the Grand Canyon?" in Current Thought on Curriculum (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1985), p. 46.

14. Philip W. Jackson, The Practice of Teaching (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), p. 50.

15. Similar concerns are expressed in regard to teachers and curriculum evaluation in Catherine Beattie, "The Case For Teacher Directed Curriculum Evaluation," Journal of Curriculum Theorizing 6,4 (Spring 1986): 56-73.

16. There is some evidence that indeed the operational elementary social studies curriculum does lack in substantive geography content. See Meg Rogers and Bruce Uhrmacher, "Creating the Everyday Citizen: Research into the Elementary School Curriculum" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, New York, 1986).

17. John Jarolimek, Social Studies in Elementary Education (7th ed.) (New York: MacMillan, 1986): pp. 279-280.

18. For examples of how certain curriculum assumptions and practices often escape anyone's notice see Stephen J. Thornton, "Curriculum Consonance in United States History Classrooms" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1985).

19. Eisner, The Educational Imagination, op. cit., p. 248.

20. Philip W. Jackson, Life in Classrooms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

21. Beattie, op. cit., p. 60.

22. Jackson, Life in Classrooms, op. cit., p. 147.

23. Noddings, op. cit., p. 509.

24. Jackson, Life in Classrooms, op. cit., p. 176.

25. William R. Torbert, "Why Educational Research has been so Uneducational" in Human Inquiry, ed. Peter Reason and John Rowan (New York: Wiley, 1981).

26. Antoinette Oberg and Lonnis McElroy, "Educational Criticism for Classroom Teachers," p. 1, paper in this symposium.

27. Ibid, p. 3.