

# INTRODUCTION CLASSIC PIECE

## Let's Eliminate the Confusion: What Is Evaluation?

Leander L. Boykin

During recent years there has been an increasing tendency among some professional groups to use "evaluation," "testing," and "measurement" as synonymous terms. This rather loose use of the term "evaluation" and a misunderstanding of its meaning has caused many teachers to question the function of evaluation in the teaching-learning process. Because it has been confused with measurement and standardized tests, many people have tended to think of evaluation as an end point rather than as a means of appraising the growth of the total personality of the child or diagnosing the successes and difficulties which students encounter in that development. This confusion, in the opinion of the author, has severely retarded the improvement of educational practices. It is also his opinion that much of the confusion that has resulted from the misconception of the term would be clarified if the following characteristics were understood. For evaluation has a much broader meaning than measurement and standardization, and consequently should play a more active and important role in the educational process.

### WHAT EVALUATION IS NOT

---

#### **Evaluation is not just a testing program.**

In the modern school increasing emphasis on the personal and social development of the child, as well as on his academic achievement, has called for the corresponding development of a variety of techniques for appraising all phases of child growth and development, of pupil achievement, of behavior and of the teaching-learning process.

It should not be implied, however, that tests have no place in a program of evaluation. Tests are but one of the many different techniques that may contribute to the total evaluation program.

#### **Evaluation is not synonymous with measurement.**

The dictionary defines the verb "evaluate" as meaning, "to ascertain the value or amount of; to appraise carefully." The verb "measurement" means the "act or process of ascertaining the extent, dimensions, quantity, etc., of something especially by comparison with a standard."

To one who accepts the above definitions of "evaluation" and of "measurement" the distinction is clear. Measurement means the counting of, a numerical expression for, something;

---

*Source:* Leander L. Boykin, "Let's Eliminate the Confusion: What Is Evaluation?" in *Educational Administration and Supervision*, 43(2), 115-121. Copyright © 1957.

but implicit in its use is the assumption that through measurement we have more appropriate and more dependable information on this something. Although educational measurements do not in and of themselves constitute evaluation, the reason for measuring is to get data for evaluation. Thus desirable measurement is measurement which contributes to intelligent evaluation.

Monroe has distinguished between measurement and evaluation by indicating that in measurement the emphasis is upon single aspects of subject-matter achievement or specific skills and abilities, whereas in evaluation the emphasis is upon broad personality changes and major objectives of the educational program.

**Evaluation is not an end product nor a culminating activity.**

The primary purpose of evaluation is to answer questions about the school program, such as: What progress are we making toward the objectives of the educational program? Are the methods we are using effective? Is student behavior actually being changed or is the response mostly verbal?

Are the objectives toward which we are working achievable? Are they worthwhile? Each of these questions is concerned with an *ongoing* educational program, not with a finished one. Continuous evaluation, then, is essential.

If education could be thought of as a cumulative process, with terminal points at which certain purposes could be considered completed, then an intermittent testing procedure might be justified, provided it fulfilled other requirements. But if we consider education as directed growth, or a continuous modification of behavior, then only a continuous appraisal can be adequate. Not only is a good evaluation program concerned with how well accepted goals are being realized, but with what new procedures and techniques might be used in bringing about greater growth toward the objectives, and also with how those goals, themselves, may be altered and revised in the light of the evidence secured. Evaluation, therefore, is not something to be engaged in at the close of the school term as a culminating activity; nor should it be viewed as an end activity to be done by some external agency, such as a consultant or visiting committee on a specific calendar date.

**Evaluation is not just an administrative technique.**

Only a shortsighted evaluation program would have as its main goal the providing of a basis for giving grades, or for the rating of teachers, or for the comparison of one school system with another. These may be by-products to the more fundamental purpose of contributing toward the continued progress of the total school program, but they should not form the basis of or be regarded as reasons for the initiation of a program of evaluation. *The ultimate purpose of evaluation is to improve the educational program of the school and to make it more efficient.* In the events evaluated may be an entire institutional program, a part of the program, the planning which resulted in the program, the consequences of the program, or any matter related to the program. And in keeping with democratic procedures in education, all individuals involved and affected should be active participants, not just administrative and supervisory personnel.

## WHAT EVALUATION IS AND SHOULD BE

---

If, as has been indicated, evaluation is not just a testing program, not synonymous with measurement, not an end product nor a culminating activity, not just an administrative device, what then are the guiding principles, characteristics and functions of an effective evaluation program? Briefly summarized, they are as follows:

**A clear concept of the aims of society, of education and of the school, is basic to evaluation.**

Evaluation of the work of a school is made in terms of the philosophy of the school and objectives which the school is expected to attain. Evaluation validates the hypotheses upon which the school operates. It is descriptive as well as quantitative.

**A program of evaluation must be comprehensive.**

It should not be limited to a few isolated goals, or objectives, but should include all the major objectives of instruction. Evaluation is concerned with all aspects of pupil behavior and with all the objectives which the teacher, the school and society hope to achieve.

**Evaluation is concerned with the study of the status of, or changes in, pupil behavior.**

It is more concerned with growth than with where pupils stand in relation to their peers or to national norms. It is concerned primarily with the growth of pupils in learning to satisfy needs in a socially accepted manner, rather than with subject-matter facts, concepts, and information per se. This may be derived from papers, observation, conferences, class work, library, and social situations.

**The methods for summarizing and interpreting the evidence obtained from a variety of appraisals are a fundamental part of the evaluation program.**

New techniques must be developed, and old techniques must be revised and modified to meet new needs. No longer do tests of intelligence and subject matter achievement alone meet the needs for appraisal of the aims of a comprehensive educational program designed to meet the varying needs, abilities, interests, and purposes of children and youth. Such newer techniques as anecdotal records, observational methods, questionnaires, inventories, interviews, checklists, rating scales, personal reports, projective methods, sociometric methods, case studies, and cumulative records are required to assess such objectives as knowledge and understandings, skills, interests, aptitudes, attitudes, personal-social adjustment, critical thinking, and health and physical development. In addition, techniques are needed to evaluate such correlative factors as the social and economic backgrounds of pupils and the educational climate in which classroom and school activities are conducted.

**Evaluation is a continuous process, an integral part of all learning.**

It is the starting point in instructional planning. It broadens the teacher's awareness of the child in a total environmental situation. Evaluation promotes individualized classroom instruction. As pupil behavior and its meanings are studied, evaluation focuses the teacher's attention upon the developmental changes in pupils. It familiarizes the teacher with the tools and techniques used in studying and analyzing the nature and causes of behavioral changes. It makes

provision for gauging the growth of pupils without primary emphasis upon academic achievement alone.

**Evaluation involves an approach that leads to improvement.**

Adequate evaluation leads to improvement of the learning situation, to the growth of the teacher, to better administration and supervision of curriculum practices and guidance, educational and co-curricular activities. An essential purpose of evaluation is to make a periodic check on the effectiveness of the school and thus to indicate points at which improvements in the program are necessary. Evaluation as a continuous process demands constant curriculum improvement which is in step with changing times, thus lessening the frequently cited lag between social change and the school program.

An effective evaluation program provides information basic to effective guidance of all pupils in the school; it is adjusted to the needs and abilities of the individual pupil.

**Evaluation is a group endeavor.**

It is a cooperative process involving pupils, parents, teachers, principals and supervisors. Service, custodial, and lunchroom personnel also play important roles in the evaluation process. From its inception, evaluation makes use of group techniques and approaches—group discussion, group leadership, group planning, group organization, group decisions, socio-drama, role playing, and group guidance. Evaluation sensitizes teachers both to the subtleties and to the importance of interaction. The evaluation process increases skill in interaction. It provides a high level of on-the-job education. It strengthens democracy because it is dependent upon the use of democratic procedures for its successful fulfillment.

**Evaluation provides a sound basis for public relations.**

It improves public relations because its process involves parents and other members of the community. Cooperatively evolved evaluation programs based upon commonly accepted values enjoy the support of the community to the extent that its members have shared in the valuing, planning, and executing which is entailed. A sound evaluation program provides a certain psychological security to the staff, to the students, and to the parents of a given community.

**Self-analysis and appraisal are essential parts of the evaluation program.**

In fact, the trend toward self-evaluation is one of the significant features of recent developments in evaluation. Such a procedure includes: (a) cooperative establishment of goals; (b) cooperation in determining present status with respect to these goals; (c) cooperation in the activities required to secure the desired growth; and (d) cooperation in securing evidence as to progress in the fulfillment of goals to be realized.

In more recent years, the following trends in evaluation have become evident: (a) The modern teacher and the supervisor are concerned with important functional learning outcomes, many of them less tangible and less easily measured than the subject-matter concepts, skills, and abilities of previous decades. (b) An increasing emphasis on the measurement of understanding and interpretation rather than upon isolated informational skills and abilities is particularly observable in present-day tests of general educational development. (c) The increased use of informal, or teacher-made test exercises for instructional purposes to supplement formal or

standardized tests is also characteristic of recent evaluation programs. (d) The development of factor analysis of mental abilities may also be cited as an important new approach in measurement and evaluation. (e) The development of techniques for measuring the role of the individual, as well as of small groups in studies of group relationships. (f) Increasing attention has been given to the development and refinement of unstructured, or projective, tests of personality.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute