

# *Edu-Care*

## *Straight Talk*

WITHIN the context of education, evaluations have been interpreted to mean nothing more than examination results. Consequently, academic evaluation has become the sole determinant of a person's worth.

Evaluations, so understood, have become more important than the process of education. The task of the education system has practically been redefined from teaching to examining. The real reason for a person to join a course or even a school is no longer education, but certification. No longer do people study a subject for intrinsic reasons, but only for its extrinsic worth or market value of the certification. Instead of submitting to an evaluation to ascertain the achievement of the process of education, people today submit to a process of education only to become eligible for the evaluation and subsequent certification.

However preposterous this idea may sound its truth cannot be denied. Consider for instance that parents care more for results than actual learning; that is why memorizing without understanding is acceptable – and so is cheating. The idea is “get good results regardless of the means adopted for the same”. Teachers spend more time giving class tests, surprise tests, weekly tests, unit tests and then quarterly exams, half-yearly exams, and sometimes pre-finals, before the final exams. In addition they spend time setting questions papers for each of these, correcting and grading them, entering them into school records before writing down individual reports. Where then is the time to teach, instruct, explain, facilitate and support learning, let alone get to know the child and guide the child according to his needs, interest? This madness has reached such heights that the quality of a school is determined by the average percentage scored by its students rather than on the basis of student-teacher ratio per class, the quality of student-teacher interactions or the quality of teaching! In reaction to this, and more appropriately one might say, others are urging people to “say NO to degrees” and calling for an end to this certification mania. But we wondered if there is another way – to neither reject the worth of evaluation nor let it usurp the place of education. To use a cliché, we must not throw out the baby with the bath

water! Instead, we need to look at the place and process of both internal and external evaluation and give each its due. In this issue of Edu-Care we look at both types of assessment and attempt to put evaluation in its correct place. In addition to our own “ruminations” about the issue, we include a guest article that provides a more academic insight into the process and need for a certain kind of evaluation.

*GK/UR*

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*Issues of the Day***Coach, Umpire, Teacher or Examiner?***Gurveen Kaur*

AT a recent parent-teacher meeting at my daughter's school I stood in line waiting to meet the Physics teacher. This was a teacher who, all the students said, did or could not explain well and whom despite the complaints from all the students and some parents, the principal was shielding.

As I waited this teacher complained about one child after another and said that they were not making enough effort to learn and their poor results were a reflection of that. The only child who did not get a negative report was one who had scored 98% and whose father was a Physics lecturer. Each parent in turn soundly scolded their child even when the child admitted that she had studied but scored badly because she had not quite understood the basic concepts in two chapters. Most just stood silent, not even bothering to explain anything – perhaps thinking it would serve no purpose.

I looked at the faces of these children, most were resigned, some sullen and a few close to tears. Yet the teachers and the parents went on and on. Not one child looked indignant, surprised or shocked at what I saw as unfairness.

Awaiting my turn I wondered, “who could these children turn to for help or support?” “What were the students learning from such an assessment?” and “What would be the

effect of such an evaluation on the student's attitude to learning?”

What is it about evaluations and examinations that they make us react negatively or defensively, but almost never rationally, constructively or positively? This seems to be the case regardless of the manner in which evaluations are done - even when they are not offensive or insensitive. On the other hand there is the tendency to dismiss the worth of such evaluation completely. It is time that we re-examine the role of evaluations.

**The root of it all**

The problem seems to stem from the fact that evaluations that are intended as just an academic measure of achievement are treated as final, comprehensive judgments determining the worth of the person or the person's chances of success. This is neither a fair reading of the academic evaluation nor what was intended. This is especially unfortunate when the best evaluations are flawed and inconclusive. Flawed because most evaluations are based upon tests or exams, and we all know how it is possible to score well in exams without really understanding and most tests, as they are designed today, miss more than they reveal. Inconclusive because one cannot predict the future development or the lack of it of the child.

It is this growing emphasis on examinations and evaluations that puts the parent and teacher into opposing camps - the teacher sees the parent as the coach, while the parents resent this as they had entrusted the teacher with the role of being the tutor! The partners no longer see them selves as co-trainers but as adversaries.

Parents want to pay schools to 'fix' their children so that they will achieve their

(the parents') wish list. Schools want to admit only 'learned' children and/or 'bright' children of educated parents so that their work is simplified or minimised.

Everyone wants instant solutions that can be bought off the shelf so that no effort is required for helping children work towards increasing levels of maturity and competence. No one seems to be interested in taking on the responsibility to analyse the age-appropriate achievement level and help the child patiently over a period of time to reach that acceptable level.

### **The effect on the child**

Such an approach clearly works against the child, for two reasons.

First, parents are supposed to ensure personal and social growth such that the teacher can concentrate upon the intellectual growth of the child. In so far as any such clear division is possible, this is how the task division was traditionally understood. We all know that in reality that no such clearly demarcated division of labour is possible, that there is a continuity

between the different aspects and the child cannot be neatly compartmentalized into personal, social and intellectual categories. That one needs to state this comes from my years of experience as a teacher where one is constantly confronted by both

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parents and teachers working to improve the academic scores while both not only neglect the personal and social development of the child but further fail

to appreciate and understand the relation between the two!

Second, if the teacher sees herself as the examiner then she spends more time on testing than actually on teaching the child. It is convenient to cut down on teaching time and to see herself primarily as the evaluator instead of the instructor. And usually it is the less competent teacher that identifies more with the role of the examiner rather than the instructor. S/he prefers to spend more time setting class tests, weekly tests, tests unit, quarterly tests and then quarterly exams, half-yearly exams and final examinations than in teaching, explaining, guiding, helping, supporting, correcting and strengthening the child. This leads to a situation where the child has two examiners but no tutor. Parents and teachers must realise that their primary task is to be the student's tutor and not the examiner.

### **Rethinking responsibility**

The basic task or responsibility of parents and teachers towards the child

is to accept each and every child unconditionally and non-judgmentally and to help prepare the child to live a meaningful and responsible life independently. The task of the school and the parent is to prepare the child to face the tests that the child may face in life. And, surely it makes sense to examine only after sufficient preparation, but today everyone wants to judge the child without really taking the time to prepare him/her for anything. While some people would argue that the parents who send their children to coaching centers are actually 'preparing' the students – that is not the kind of preparation one is talking about. Coaching centres may help the child score marks but do not always ground one in the basics of the subject and generally do little to make the person a competent, independent learner.

In the past when adults suggested any improvement, they supported the child by setting smaller targets to achieve that helped move one towards the bigger, final goal. That is, they realised the need for and provided the necessary scaffolding at proper times. Now it is common to hear parents complain/say "I've told her to do it but she just doesn't listen". Parents and teachers with their attention on examinations results have shifted the focus from capacity building to the (momentary) performance of the child. While expectations from the child have increased, the support has not just decreased but has almost vanished.

In the past when teachers and parents insisted upon a firm foundation, they did not mind if that

took a little more time. Now parents want to rush children through more information regardless of the child's ability to understand what they are taught. Earlier if a child went with some doubt to a teacher or parent, the first thing the parent or teacher would do would be to trace back to where the problem began and work forward from there. Now most parents, including many of the 'educated' parents, equate learning with memorizing, so now 'don't know' equals 'have not memorised' and that's how they teach the child. If anyone wants to go back to build a strong foundation parents get impatient for they want the super-structure and are not really bothered whether or not it stands on a firm foundation. Earlier apart from the teaching at school, most children studied on their own. Now one has parents constantly nagging the child to study and some parents need to sit down throughout with the child to get any work done.

Some teachers and parents do realise that things are not as they ought to be but feel helpless. This is one reason they sometimes 'help' to fudge the real results and achieve a 'better' or an inflated result by unfair means. Parents buy question papers, bribe to manipulate mark sheets or get admissions or land a job. Teachers help cheat during examinations by either turning a blind eye or even dictating the correct answers or giving question papers before the exam. This is the result of the dual role that teachers must play of being both, the coach and the umpire, but most find it difficult to balance the two roles. This dual role is so confusing that s/he

responds neither as an examiner nor a good teacher. But I think that there is another deeper, unconscious reason: that they cannot but instinctively respond as nurturers rather than critics. And it is this that still gives us some hope!

### **So where does evaluation fit in?**

This is not to say that there is no place at all for assessments or evaluations. Parents and teachers need to occasionally take stock or conduct on-going audit but there is a fundamental difference between a periodic, specific review of the situation and a final summative judgment about the student. On-going assessments reveal the person's progress or lack of it, or are an indication of insufficient progress but don't make judgments about the person. These help the parent and/or teacher take stock of what has been achieved and help plan better for future teaching. Not all these assessments have to be conducted formally or artificially as we do with exams.

A more reliable, wholesome assessment would not be based only on tests or exams but take into account the child's preparedness for and participation in the class, the quality of the daily class work and homework, projects or longer written assignments. The assessment even during a test or exam could go beyond multiple-choice questions or complete-the-sentence type of answers. Longer discursive

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essays or analytical, creative answers could be included. Where the lack of language proficiency might impede or handicap some children, alternative practical projects could be set. Open textbook questions would challenge the teacher and the student to go beyond rote learned information-based questions and answers. The desire for objective assessments must not be the excuse for “dumbing down” the process of assessment or trivialising it. Especially in a scenario where the evaluations based upon these tests

assume an importance out of proportion to their worth and reliability.

Teachers and parents in their role as the coach and support don't use evaluations as a stick to beat or

scare their children but a tool that can sharpen their own teaching strategy, help them give better guidance, as well as to make the child an independent and competent learner.

### **Re-examining evaluations**

Evaluations, if they are to be formative and confidence building, must be based upon the child's starting point and must track progress from that point. Evaluations within the school should not be comparative or from some absolute standard. Questions like "Are you satisfied with what you have done or do you think there was the scope or possibility of doing something more?" lead the child to neither fear nor resent the evaluation

as something external to the process of learning. Whereas questions like “how come you fared so badly when others in your class did so well?” do nothing but scare and insult the child when s/he least needs it. Evaluations within a school should not be comparative or from some absolute standard. Admonishing or berating a child that s/he has failed to score less than 90% or has done worse than others in the class does not help improve performance or self-confidence.

The teacher needs to make clear what it is that is being evaluated: is it the learning that is being evaluated – the information and concepts, skill, understanding or is it the learning capacity of the learner? Initially evaluations that focus on the learning readiness and competence of the learner are more appropriate whereas later a balance between growing learner capability and independence and what is learnt in terms of the skills, content and understanding are both in order.

If the basic task is to support the child towards a meaningful, responsible and independent life then evaluations must also make sense to the child. This may not be possible before a certain age but the report must make sense to the child and as early as possible the child must be part of the assessment. The child must be helped to understand the role and place of evaluation in a process of learning. Children need to learn when, in a learning process, there is need for stocktaking or reviewing one's learning and planning one's further learning. Children need to learn to

critically and honestly conduct periodic self-appraisals. Not just for academics but in all areas of growth and development.

All students must be taught that external evaluations play a secondary role of confirmation of one's assessment – and not a primary role. The role of the external evaluation is to validate, not replace the primary assessment, which is the self-assessment. With enough self-confidence children can be helped to confront external evaluations and realise the need for re-examination whenever there is a lot of variation between the two results to check whether the self-assessment was inflated or the external assessment is incorrect. If our central task was to help a person become self-realising, self-disciplined, self-determined or free, then evaluation must be such that it supports and moves in the direction of such growth.

As someone has quite aptly said, "Evaluations and examinations are the tail that wag the dog that is the education system."

Certainly, evaluations and examinations have assumed an importance that is out of proportion to their role in the education system. But if a tail wagging the dog is unnatural, so is a dog without a tail! Our emotional response to evaluations has made us lose sight of their proper place in the teaching-learning process. Evaluations should be treated as a tool that should help in the process of education but not take the place of the process of education.

*First Person***Examining the meaning—and role—of assessment***Usha Raman*

A RECENT television debate focused on the need for examinations at the tenth class level, and whether such methods of assessment had anything to do with real learning. While the consensus was that there is definitely “something wrong” with our education system, doing away with examinations might not be the best way to fix the problem. A young girl vehemently opposed the proposal to do away with tenth class public exams, saying that this exam had “played a crucial role in her development”, while another student felt that examinations focused too much on rote learning, and did not really get at one’s real talents. Overall, people seemed to be hesitant to speak out too strongly against what they viewed as a necessary evil.

The debate reflects our confusion with this whole system of evaluation that goes by the name of examinations. We don’t like it, but we feel there is no real alternative, so we see ourselves as being forced to live with it. Let me share with you some other incidents that may tell their own story about our ambivalent attitudes to formal testing at the school level.

The day before a school examination, nearly eighty percent of a class stayed home from school, ostensibly to study for the next day’s paper. The children, all 13 and 14 year olds, had decided to “bunk” school to prepare for the exam. This mass absenteeism did not go unnoticed, and the next day, the principal decided to

announce that the exam was cancelled. Many of the children who had stayed home to prepare were aghast; their parents were even more outraged. “This isn’t fair to the children who prepared so hard,” said one parent. I, for one, felt that since the only useful objective of an examination—to get children to read their lessons seriously—had been accomplished, the exam itself was unnecessary. But other parents felt their children had lost an opportunity to “prove themselves”.

During another discussion, a parent was expressing her concern about the methods employed by a particular teacher. This teacher had decided to put aside the textbooks for a while and instead focus on giving her students a wide-ranging exposure to ideas and concepts and in the process build some basic research and documentation skills. The parent was anxious that the syllabus would not be adequately covered, and that the children would not be able to do well in the exam.

A parent who had relocated to a new city was looking at some schools for her children. Among the criteria she used to evaluate the schools was the rate of success as measured by highest scores in the board examination. One of the schools she approached was apparently miffed by the question. “This is not an assembly line, madam!” was the response. She did not understand why the school

found her question about exam scores so objectionable: “After all, I want my child to be in a place that can motivate her to score well,” she said.

Scoring well, then, seems to be the thing. I don’t deny that there is a certain warm feeling that comes from

looking at a good test score that one has achieved. But the danger lies in equating that good score with one’s overall

understanding of the subject or one’s learning. My daughter is always peeved that I do not react with more enthusiasm when she brings home a good grade. “Aren’t you happy that I did so well?” she asks. And I have to explain, patiently, to a 14-year-old, that a high test score indicates only that she was able to answer the questions put to her; it does not indicate mastery of a subject, and sometimes does not even indicate understanding. And as I watch my children go through one exam after another my dissatisfaction with this means of measuring knowledge gain grows. Isn’t it enough that they have learned, that they have understood, that they have (perhaps) experienced the pleasure of a good book and the excitement of a well conceived theory?

But then I am faced with another issue that seems to require the carrot-and-stick approach that examinations symbolize for me. My postgraduate students at the university seem to have no real interest in the topics we discuss in class. They do not read the papers assigned for discussion each day, and manage the classroom interactions

with minimal engagement. I try different ways to get them involved in the readings, to come to class with questions in their minds. Nothing seems to work. “Aha!” I think. “What they need is a surprise test!” The moment I announce a test and say that

the marks will be included in their final grade, there is a visible shift in attitude. They begin to come to class with notes made, with questions as well as

some answers. The promise of a test was needed to make them realize the promise of learning.

One might argue that the university students have been through years of conditioning, of thinking that learning is of use only when it is going to be assessed in some way. But this is only one more symptom of this deep-rooted exam sickness. The fault lies not entirely in the examinations themselves, but in the assumption that examinations are a true measure—or only measure--of learning. Even when we recognize that there is an element of serendipity in doing well in an examination, we tend to forget that when we rush to make a judgment of a person’s intellectual ability based on examination results.

To this end, I am often tempted to give up on examinations and tests, or at least in their conventional forms, and allow my students to think for themselves whether or not they have learned enough to go to the next stage from a particular class. But the system does not permit me to do this. I must go through the charade of equating a

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limited answer to a limited question with understanding, or with inferring that a certain number of correct answers on a multiple choice list indicates grasp of a chapter.

But what is the alternative? In the absence of such structures to “measure” learning, how do we know that learning has occurred? How can we demonstrate to the person responsible for the next level that one is “ready”? And is it even necessary for us to know that someone has learned something? Of course it is, particularly when the learning is relevant to a particular skill or knowledge base needed for a given task. When one exits a system of education, what is important is the process one has gone through, and the cumulative learning that has taken place—not just the ability to answer a set of questions. This learning is best assessed in an ongoing manner, by those in close and continuous contact with the learner, and communicated in a report that describes the learning in more than simple quantitative terms. The assessment is also a necessary diagnostic for the teacher/facilitator to determine whether she has succeeded in helping the child make the connections and understand how to acquire a certain set of skills. The next

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step is to provide the learner with enough opportunities to apply that skill in a variety of practical or imagined contexts. At the entry point to the next level, or when seeking entry to a place

where the skill/knowledge is needed, the learner (who is now a candidate) is assessed with reference to the skills/knowledge required; this

assessment is specific to the job requirements and makes no judgment of other aspects of the learner.

To move to such an approach would take a radical shift in perceptions of success and failure, academic excellence and practical application of such excellence. Excellence then becomes something that is not comparative, necessarily, but intrinsic to oneself and specific to a situation, thus freeing us of the need to demonstrate in some absolute manner our mastery over a subject or a content area. Performance is then related to the degree to which one is able to apply oneself to a given task, and is judged in context. This then will bring us back to the true purpose of education—to make us “able” to be, and to work, and to gain productively happiness and satisfaction in this world.

*Reflections***Evaluation, Assessment or Accountability?***Shyama Sundari*

I WOULD like to start with the assumption that the words in the title are more or less interchangeable. All carry the implication of an external agency, which is operating with the involvement of an external factor. We talk about being accountable to something or someone. Though there are words like self-assessment and self-evaluation, which indicate something different; we perceive them merely as a subset of the actual (read, external) evaluation or assessment. There are various things we feel accountable to, namely, religion, society, legal systems, etc. The degrees of accountability to each of these may vary and also differ from person to person. The significant role in this structure is played by the **person/institution** that holds the brief for accountability. To check whether one is discharging the work in the prescribed manner according to the given standards is the responsibility of the agency that has the accountability. We are also asserting that if we set up systems that are comprehensive, we can build accountability that is person independent.

**Who sets the standards of performance?**

Now comes the crucial issue of who decides or based on what parameters do we decide the issue of why a certain agency and no other should be responsible for evaluation. The fact

that evaluation and the rest of it also subsume the tacit inclusion of responsibility is clear. But the issue why we decide, for example, that exams are a critical way to suggest the progress of students or that material success indicates personal accomplishment, still remains debatable.

The argument is laid out only to suggest the possibility of existence of different factors to measure success. In a society that venerates austerity for example, possessing few personal assets may act as a consideration in evaluating the progress of an individual. There may be communities that value physical work, learning by experience rather than book learning, where the means of evaluation cannot be only exams and marks. Even in this situation there is a likelihood of gradation but where there is emphasis on process, assessment cannot be something that enters at the end of the whole process. It is more integrally tied to the whole sequence of learning. This opens up a totally fresh approach to the question of evaluation.

There can be one or many systems of accountability, but we can function within these only when we accept responsibility. For instance what we need to do as members of a family, as citizens in a country or as individuals in society are responsibilities that carry a 'must' with it. It is however not easy to hold

### **Confusion over Testing**

A group of three boys who were attending the IIT coaching were recognized as "having potential". The first three ranks in class tests were shared between them during the period of the coaching. Naturally one of them was a little ahead than the others and everyone believed that he is going to get the best rank. After the results came to the great surprise of the teachers and the class the best secured a lower rank than the other two. He did get into IIT which is different matter altogether. The irony was there was never a competition among the three and they remained good friends. But it came as shock to the boy as he may have unconsciously absorbed the general belief that he was better than the others. His family who took his success for granted was so upset that many of their friends thought the child may have failed. Unfortunately this did not make the parents reflect upon the methods of evaluation and the hollowness of the existing methods. Nor did the rest of the class or the coaching centre understand that the game of scoring the highest is quite a matter of chance.

someone accountable to these duties. There are some elements of this whole structure for which we are more easily accountable than others. The overarching societal and legal sanctions constitute the stick that makes us fulfill many of our responsibilities. Of course there are unquantifiable elements that make it

possible for us to slip through this kind of accounting system. In the legal framework it may be possible to order a husband to fulfill his duties both as a parent and a husband. But beyond checking blatant violations like not providing for the family, this cannot ensure that he brings up the children with love and affection, or that he shows concern for his wife. These can only happen by an internal accounting system for which the individual alone is responsible. We are well aware of the external auditing that happens periodically for all monetary transactions of individuals/institutions. But we generally do not see the necessity for a process of internal auditing to evaluate our actions and correct our conduct. Mechanisms like social audit are a step in this direction.

### **Taking the yardstick inward**

It is this process of internal accounting that is neglected both at home and in society. Our entire focus is on external evaluation. That it is only a partial way of assessing the progress of any work is instinctively rejected. We have invented several layers of accountability at different levels so that one keeps a check on the other. After a while when this structure proves insufficient, we get busy with the process of adding yet another layer and creating additional levels to fill the gaps. We hardly even recognize the complete absence of the individual owning responsibility through the force of internal motivation and not due to a sword hanging over one's head or an invisible stick being wielded. We hear

the constant complaint of the lack of leadership in our society. We also grumble about adults with reasonable education and employment, enjoying certain levels of comfort operating with a lack of personal commitment. This attitude is nothing but a reflection of the fact that we are ignoring our own share of responsibility in guiding the course of events. Our ancient Vedas describe the concept of 'Rta' (harmony), a higher order of responsibility that asserts how even the minute trembling of a single leaf interrupts the order of things in the environment. This may appear to be only an explanation of the delicate balance within which humankind and the environment are located. But it is an indication of the heightened sensibility existing in the society that recognized and respected it. The responsibility to act with a sense of accountability arises in an environment where such a sense of balance is valued. Without exaggeration, we have moved so far away from such a concept of harmony that today we are ready to forsake it totally.

These days, we often read media reports about students taking their life at the age of sixteen, feeling like failures simply because they could not clear their exams. There should be something more than mere personal anguish at these happenings. They are a slap in the face of our society which has elevated external evaluations to such an extent that an individual is forced to make them a yardstick for measuring the character and quality of one's own self. Many religious texts

and even books of Sociology/Anthropology indicate that the first love a human being has is towards her own self. How is it that we are able to concede this most intimate part of our self to the outside, to accept to having it weighed by external means to decide whether we are good enough?

The yardsticks for external evaluation are visible and can be standardized to a large extent. Internal evaluation is more process based and not amenable to standardization. But if we have to evolve a more holistic method of assessment in schools internal evaluation has to merge with the external. Simply adding the marks in each subject is not adequate to decide whether the student has passed or failed. Expressed in concrete terms it may sound trivial but in fact this is the basis on which we are judging a child. We have placed the whole system of evaluation beyond any debate and discussion. The system is exalted to the level of a final arbiter and it is not surprising that children decide that their whole life is wasted if they fail before this judge. Is it enough if we realize the folly of extending the scope of external evaluation to such an extent? How do we rectify the mistake?

#### **Building security, not fear**

The answer lies in examining the value of internal examination and devising ways in which it can become part of our education system.. Naturally the question that arises at this point is whether there is no value at all in the existing system. The present system has assumed

### Why do we do what we do?

Navata is in the twelfth class and is also taking IIT coaching. She hardly has time to play, visit friends or even spend time with her family. Strangely she was not pushed into this situation. She had the space to assess various choices and decide for herself where she wanted to go. She had secured a state rank in the tenth and is generally hard working and steady. Her parents recognized that she could do well in any field with those qualities. In spite of their encouragement she chose the way that most of her peer group was moving towards, the path of coaching and highly competitive exams. At the end of a year in the tight schedule she keeps wondering where the fun in learning has gone. How the matter of a simple hour for herself has become a luxury. She is in one of the better institutes, which may hold classes on Sundays also, but allow some free time during the week. But to her dismay she is not able to spend an hour of her leisure without thinking of her exams. She feels as if she can only breathe freely after the final exams are given.

She claims sagely that she understands why the first-year students in IITs are so disruptive, chaotic and totally turned away from anything that resembles class work.

monolithic proportions in our country and has grown so formidable that it is beyond the scope of any interrogation.

#### **A need to re-assess the situation**

We have raised certain issues and expressed some doubts about accepting the prevalent system as completely valid. Another attempt to answer this question can be through exploring the validity and scope of internal evaluation, that is, its place in the system of education. Internal evaluation has a larger agenda than merely appraising the progress of a student from one level to the other in mere academic terms. It tries to look at the sum total of what it means for the child to look inside and see where she is going, what it means if she is able to play the violin or excel at basketball, add/subtract, read in three

languages, etc. It tells her what it means to her as an individual and what it means in terms of her own aspirations.

Making our children turn inward and work towards self-direction is an important aspect of internal evaluation. Once the child is aware of the significance parents, teachers and society attach to this process, she will participate in it. Today many children are willingly running the race for better scores as they see the value family and society attach to it. It is our turn to reverse the trend and show the children a more secure way of assessing themselves, a direction which does not end with the child passing out of school. It can then become a beacon that guides them throughout their lives in everything that they do.

Other Words

*This writer offers a somewhat different view of the virtues of recognizing – and affirming--merit:*

“The just allocation of admiration is a virtue that requires judgment and integrity: judgment to distinguish genuine talent from mere showiness, and integrity in refusing to bestow praise on those who do not fully deserve it. Prizes are only valuable if they are restricted to the very few. Not winning a prize is not something to be seen as shameful—it should be the norm, something that happens to the overwhelming majority of people.

We need social structures that allow for very fine-grained distinctions to be made at the top of the ability range in any given domain—whether learning, sport or industry. There is no point in having an exam system in which more than five per cent of the candidates can attain the top grade, let alone one in which 30 per cent do. Society needs ways of picking out and rewarding the rare talent that is truly exceptional. The rest of us should cherish those who possess such talent, for they are one of our most valuable resources. They are the scientists who will come up with the life saving medicines of the future, the artists who will inspire us with new works of beauty, the sportsmen and women who will amaze us with their strength and skill. If we want society to progress rather than stagnate, we must learn to be more generous, and rediscover the lost art of pure admiration.”

*Dylan Evans, “Mozart redeems our mediocrity” in The Hindu, 22 July 2005, p 11; reprinted from The Guardian Newspapers Limited.*

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*We reproduce below a story that we carried in an earlier issue of Edu-Care, many years ago, which we felt relates quite poignantly to our discussion on evaluation. Responses are welcome!*

I always tell the story of the animal school, a fabulous story that educators have had around for years. We laugh about it but we never do anything about it. A rabbit, bird, fish, squirrel, duck, and so on, all decided to start a school. Everybody sat down to write a curriculum. The rabbit insisted that running had to be in the curriculum. The bird insisted that flying be in the curriculum. The fish insisted that swimming be in the curriculum. The squirrel insisted perpendicular tree climbing be in the curriculum. All the other animals wanted their specialty to be in the curriculum, too, so they put everything in and then made the glorious mistake of insisting that all the animals take all of the courses. The rabbit was magnificent in running; nobody could run like the rabbit. But they insisted that it was good intellectual and emotional discipline to teach the rabbit flying. So they insisted that the rabbit learn to fly and they put him on this branch and said, “Fly,

rabbit.” And the poor old thing jumped off, broke a leg and fractured his skull. He became brain damaged and then he couldn’t run very well either. So instead of an A in running he got a C in running. And he got a D in flying because he was trying. And the curriculum committee was happy. The same way with the bird—he could fly like a freak all over the place, do loops and loops, and he was making an A. But they insisted that this bird burrow holes in the ground like a gopher. Of course he broke his wings and his beak and everything else and then he couldn’t fly. But they were perfectly happy to give him a C in flying, and so on. And you know who the Valedictorian of that graduating class was? A mentally challenged eel, because he could do almost everything fairly well. The owl dropped out and now votes “no” on all tax elections that have to do with school.

*Leo Buscaglia in Living, Loving and Learning. Slack Inc: 1982.*

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“Having educational standards -- as opposed to not having them -- makes sense, of course, and most of the public seem to be enthusiastically behind the drive to create meaningful standards and curriculum that is aligned with those standards. But an unofficial "coalition" of frustrated business leaders, misguided politicians, short-sighted citizens, and ideologues is pushing us headlong toward the dangerous practice of making decisions based on single scores on tests that those taking them have not had the opportunity to prepare for.

... Testing is not evil, of course. A primary purpose of school is academic learning, and we must know whether, and how much, students are learning. Well-made tests are an excellent way to measure learning and diagnose weaknesses. Excellent teachers create good tests, grade them carefully, and get them back to their students in a matter of days. Parents searching for excellence would be wise to ask the better students to describe the kinds of tests they take and the lag time between taking the test and getting it back.”

- *John Merrow, in Choosing Excellence: "Good Enough" Schools Are Not Good Enough, Scarecrow Press, 2001*

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*Thinking it Through*

**The Role of Evaluation within Pedagogy**

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*If evaluation is a necessary part of education, how can it be built into the system so that it remains what it is supposed to be—a method of feedback to the learner and facilitator that allows them to understand how to proceed further? **Geeta Dorairajan** looks at the real meaning of evaluation in the learning cycle, and, using arguments made by scholars over the years, discusses how we can bring back the centrality of such an approach to assessment in schools.*

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**Three Kinds of Evaluation**

As human beings all of us evaluate ourselves and others in many ways, for it is an integral part of our lives. Every day, when we get dressed we ask ourselves, “How do I look?” “Am I okay?” As human beings we also evaluate others, with a “mm, speaks well”, “nice dress”, or even a “not sure if I would do that if I were in that position”.

The evaluation of the other person is in one sense judgmental, but the evaluation of ourselves by ourselves can be called monitoring. Aware that as human beings we share living and functioning space with others, we monitor ourselves, our words and deeds, from what we understand as the ‘other’ point of view. This is what provides the basis for an awareness of public and private spaces and faces, and the acceptability of one rather than the other. It implies that we accept that others also evaluate us.

There is one other kind of evaluation that happens in everyday life. It is the evaluation that enables learning to happen. It is an *evaluation of the other, from the perspective of the other* and not the self. As human beings all of us teach those who are younger or less experienced/capable than ourselves, and this teaching is accompanied by an informal evaluation of what has been achieved by the learner, so that decisions can be taken about what else needs to be done.

All of us are learners, teachers, doers, and in that role, also evaluators who check if the desired ‘learning’ or change in behaviour has taken place. A parent teaches a child to tie his or her shoelaces, to plait hair, tie ribbons, to make tea/coffee, to answer the door bell, to eat without spilling; an adult teaches another adult to cook, sew, even ride a bicycle sometimes, or to drive a car. This list is endless. The “education that took place long before there were formal institutions called schools” would never have been possible without such evaluation (Gardner, 1999: 22). Such ‘evaluation’ can also be described as

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'monitoring' for its purpose is not to grade or classify someone, or to find that person wanting. Its primary purpose is to enable learning to happen and to take that learning further. This evaluation is therefore not judgemental. It is not "value phobia" loaded (Scriven, 1986: 62).

*The primary purpose of evaluation is to enable learning to happen and to take that learning further.*

Rather, it is an excellent example of absolute criterion-referenced measurement, in direct contrast to norm-referenced measurement (Cronbach, 1970).

This evaluation that enables learning to happen is an integral part of human interaction, particularly when the interaction is between two more versus less capable peers, or better still, between children and adults, that is, between those who are already a part of a society and those who are being initiated into it. The evaluation is made from a position where the evaluator has perceived the point that the learner or 'other' could reach, has made an assessment of what could be done to enable that movement and growth, and will next attempt to make it happen.

One important and unique feature of this evaluation is that the person who is evaluating puts aside an awareness of self, tunes in to the consciousness and state of learning that the other is in, and then makes possible, through a constant evaluation, teaching and monitoring, more learning to happen. Another feature of this evaluation is that it is not something which is carried out under 'explicit rules and procedures,'

or where deliberate 'samples of behaviour' have to be elicited so that reliable judgements can be made (Bachman, 1990:19-20). It is

ongoing and is an integral part of the learning and teaching loop. It is the way in which a parent or caregiver teaches his/her

young to stand, walk, eat, speak, dress, socialise, and slowly get initiated into becoming a member of a society. It carries with it, therefore, features of care, love, tolerance, and nurturance that make it unlike any other evaluation that happens in society. Such evaluation is never frightening, never intimidating, and not something that human beings run away from. Since it is never done in a deliberate manner, and the learner who is being evaluated very often may not be aware of being 'evaluated,' it is an evaluation that happens under typical and not maximum performance conditions (Cronbach, 1970).

### **Evaluation within Education**

The monitoring which is from the perspective of the one who is learning and meant to enable further or better learning, has not permeated the arena of evaluation in a formal or disciplined manner but that does not mean that it does not exist. It definitely does, for without it no teaching or learning can really happen. As described by Bloom (1971), it exists in the look of an eye, a nod, an observation of a gesture or a body movement, the note taken of

body language, etc., by the teacher in the classroom. These observations go a long way; it is this evaluation that enables any teacher to fine-tune his or her teaching to suit the needs of that particular group of students. Without this kind of monitoring, the modification of a lesson plan to make it genuinely learner centred would not be possible. However, since such evaluation is unaccountable and cannot be quantified, it is rarely recognised as evaluation, and does not find a formal place in schooling. It has however been explored by educationists and psychologists who have been interested in exploring the interaction between learning and development, primarily by L. S. Vygotsky and J. S. Bruner.

#### A Vygotskian Perspective on Pedagogic Evaluation

Learning and development are interrelated for Vygotsky from a child's very first day of life and this learning happens with assistance and aid from adults who are around in the environment. The major standpoint taken by Vygotsky was that first of all, learning should be matched in some manner with the child's developmental level. To explain this 'matching' he makes a distinction between problems that can be solved by the child without any assistance, and those which are solved with

assistance from others. The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of

***The kind of monitoring that helps learning go further exists in the look of an eye, a nod, an observation of a gesture, the note taken of body language...this is what helps the teacher fine tune her teaching to suit the needs of a particular group of students.***

potential development as determined through problem solving either under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers is the zone of proximal development. Thus, the actual developmental level

characterises mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterises mental development prospectively (Vygotsky, 1978: 86-7). Vygotsky posited this notion of the zone of proximal development to help him understand the internal course of development in children, the role played by imitation, and the kind of learning and teaching that will best benefit the child. The "notion of a zone of proximal development enables [him] to propound a new formula, namely that the only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development" (1978: 89).

The actual zone of proximal development is not something that can be predetermined for it varies from child to child; between two eight year old children, one child may be able to solve problems up to a twelve year old's level, while the second may be able to do so up to a nine year old's level. Obviously, then, these two children are not mentally the

same. Thus, any caregiver or parent who is teaching or assisting these two children must tune in to the consciousness of the two children, identify their respective 'mental ages' and modify input, guidance and assistance accordingly. This 'tuning in' cannot happen without monitoring of some kind. Although Vygotsky does not state it explicitly, it is implied in his conceptualisation of the zone of proximal development and a parent's ability to tune in and modify the nature of assistance provided. This is an example of the evaluation that happens in society, which enables learning; it is an evaluation of the other (in this case the child) by someone who is more capable. But the evaluation is not done from the state of development that has been reached by the adult or more capable peer. On the contrary, it is done from the perspective of the one who is being evaluated, for its main purpose is to further learning. Without it, 'learning that is in advance of development' cannot happen. This idea was picked up by Bruner, developed further and also applied to language learning.

#### A Brunerian View of Pedagogic Evaluation

Bruner examines the underlying assumptions behind the Vygotskian hypothesis that good learning is that which is in advance of development and argues that if this is taken literally, there is a contradiction in the proposal. At one level, the zone of proximal development is to do with achieving consciousness and control. But these two come only after a

function has been well and spontaneously mastered. But if it has been mastered, it has already been learnt, and therefore does not have to be taught at all. He therefore argues that there is some assistance provided by a more abled peer or tutor to ensure that such learning happens. More importantly, the adult or aiding peer must tune in to the level of the child and enable learning. He points out that if a child is enabled to advance by being under the tutelage of an adult or a more competent peer, then the tutor or the aiding peer "serves the learner as a vicarious form of consciousness until such a time as the learner is able to master his own action through his own consciousness and control" (Bruner, 1985: 24). Once a child has mastered that conceptual system or function, (s)he can use it as a tool. Up to that point, the tutor in effect "performs the critical function of 'scaffolding' the learning task to make it possible for the child ... to internalise external knowledge and convert it into a tool for conscious control" (Bruner, 1985: 25). He then applies this idea of scaffolding to language acquisition and posits that along with a Language Acquisition Device there is a Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) (Bruner, 1985: 29, 1986: 77)

The argument about an implied evaluation that was made with reference to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is equally applicable here, and is much more obvious. The hint of a possible evaluation has in fact been made by Bruner himself. If a tutor or more abled peer has to provide the

scaffold for a task, then that 'tutor' obviously cannot do so without tuning in, at an individualised level, to the child's stage of development and the ability to do something independently. Based on this 'feedback,' the adult makes decisions about the quality and quantity of assistance and guidance that is required. A mother who is teaching her child to build blocks or to make a pyramid, may not be conscious of 'evaluating' her child to enable the building to happen, but without such evaluation, it will not be the child who is building the block/pyramid!

This again is a perfect example of evaluation that enables learning, of an evaluation of an 'other,' from the perspective of the other and not of the self. The mother or caregiver or more abled peer has mastered many more functions, and has achieved a great deal of consciousness and control. This 'extra knowledge' or ability is not the target that the mother or caregiver wants the child to reach or aim for. That would become a frustrating case of being told to aim for the stars to enable one to reach the treetops, with the implication that the stars are never reachable! In this context, the next branch, or hand or foothold that is accessible, and perceived as essential for upward movement, is the target that the child must aim to reach.

### **Features of Pedagogic Evaluation**

1. It is judgemental, but the judgement is an 'okay, not okay, needs help, needs modulation,' etc. it is a monitoring rather than an evaluation.

2. It is an evaluation that has the characteristic of perceptivity attached to it. This 'perceptivity' is an extension

and explication of the Brunerian depiction of a caregiver being able to tune in and become the child's consciousness, to scaffold, so that learning can take place (Bruner, 1985).

3. It is similar to the assessment carried out by the nurse or health care worker who takes a patient's temperature, pulse, respiration and blood pressure or the pathologist who carries out a series of investigations, or the doctor who does a physical examination. All of them are monitoring someone else's vital life signs; this monitoring is done to look for growth, either good or bad, or the rate of healing or decay as the case may be. In this context, change is what is looked for; stability is what is not desired.

When these different images are put together, the picture that emerges is that there is an evaluation that is an essential part of all learning and teaching, whether within or outside formal education; this evaluation is akin to monitoring and its primary function is to enable learning. Its aim is to capture change and growth and it is individually calibrated and individualised. It is an intrinsic part of the teaching learning loop and is essential in all educational testing contexts. It is an evaluation of the 'other,' the child or the learner as the case may be, depending on whether the 'evaluator' is the parent or caregiver, or the teacher in the classroom, from the perspective of the other, that is, the child or the learner. I would like to describe this evaluation as a 'convivial' one (Illich, 1973). It is an evaluation that is done with care, respect and tolerance for the one who is being evaluated. Its main purpose is to

enable learning and is similar to the evaluation carried out by parents and caregivers to aid their children to learn and make progress. This convivial evaluation is an alternative approach to evaluation, one that will attempt to capture *small gains* (Tharu, 1981). It is

an evaluation that is not 'norm referenced,' does not aim to elicit language under maximum performance conditions, and is primarily fine-tuned to capture growth in the learner.

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### Sharing Room

I found the recent issue on reading very thought-provoking. I was particularly struck by the point that confusion arises because *chaduvu* means both to study and to read and the further distinction between reading for an end - whether to pass an exam or to do one's job - and reading for pleasure. It seems to me that there are two key questions to ask about reading for pleasure:

Does reading stimulate us to live life more fully and to think more clearly than we would do otherwise? If so, what kinds of reading do this?

My son Mikey (now aged 23) would probably answer no to the first question as he read much less than I did after the age of 13 and this has bothered me over the years. When he went on journeys I pressed Good Books into his hands

- which he sometimes read and sometimes didn't. I often wonder if he'd have read more if it hadn't been so insistent that he should! Yet he's grown into an intelligent and socially responsible man. He is very interested in film and discerning about what he watches - his imaginative world is nourished by artistry on the screen rather than in the printed word. He reads serious newspapers and magazines on world affairs and forms sensible judgments without reading many thick volumes inside hard covers. He refers to the Internet when he wants to find something out rather than to books. Does it matter that what he reads isn't on paper? Maybe not. What matters is that he has found other media that help him to think clearly and responsibly. Some of these involve the skill of reading, but not necessarily reading books. With all the work that has been done on multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner and others over the past few years, maybe we need to accept that some people learn effectively through reading and some don't.

Speaking for myself, not my son, I'd answer yes to the first question. Reading for pleasure has enriched my life more than I can say, but in answer to the second question, I'd have to say that what matters is not THAT I read, but WHAT I read. If I'm honest about what I was reading at 14, much of it was rubbish that helped me escape from the pains of adolescence but in no way illuminated my understanding of life or helped me to think more clearly. Escapism is a great way of coping with hardship, but a Georgette Heyer novel is in no way superior to a television soap or a Bollywood film because the escapism is on the printed page.

I suggest that most really rewarding reading is hard. If you have to work at making sense of it and responding to it, it's changing you and gives you the reward of a slightly new vision of life. No mind can remain fit without exercise. But as we get older, we just can't cope with as much of it. My appetite for Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard certainly decreased after I hit 40! Still, despite creeping old age, I find the great advantage of reading over other kinds of mental stimulation (such as film, discussion and music) is that it isn't dependent on a given time frame. You can go back again and again, re-read what you find difficult and put your considered response into writing so that others can also take their time to read and reflect on what you've said.

- *Eleanor Watts, educationist and writer*

*And another viewpoint about reading:*

"...I still have vivid memories of what I read in my English textbooks. It was there that I read George Orwell's account of shooting an elephant in Burma, Dom Moraes on a trip to the Thar, Kushwant Singh's depiction of life in the village of Mano Majra, Somerset Maugham describing the solitude on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.... [T]he English textbooks I read and reread...gave me a sense of language and an idea of how to express my own sense of the world I inhabited. This is what literature can do, even without your knowing it. Shouldn't there be a wider debate, then, on what our students read in their books?"

*Amitava Kumar, The Hindu Literary Review, October 9, 2005*

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Centre For Learning is a voluntary, not-for-profit organization that strives to understand, in theoretical and practical terms, what education means as distinct from schooling.

Our attempt is to share our learning and understanding with other interested individuals and organizations, both from the privileged and disadvantaged sections of society so that we may together begin to responsibly and compassionately address the issues that we face in the world today.

Our hope is to discover how we may together evolve a lifestyle and a way of looking at things that is socially just, that genuinely respects the cultural and biological diversity of all living things on this planet, and that brings out the best in ourselves as individuals and as a collective.

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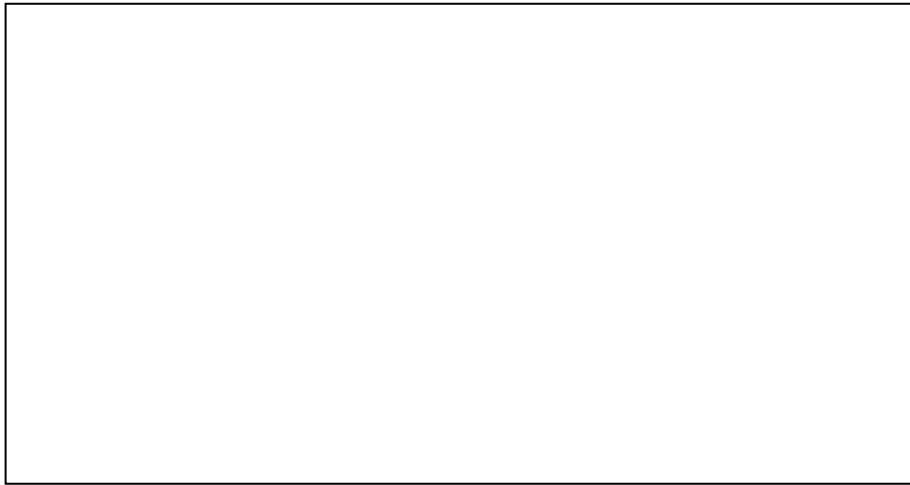
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