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THE GOALS AND ROLES OF CURRICULUM EVALUATION IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Evaluation in religious education, while having a single goal of answering questions of worth or value, can play many roles It can help establish goals and order priorities, clarify objectives, test new materials and test the effectiveness of the finished product Within each of these roles it can perform additional subroles Before evaluation can play any of these roles what is needed is a recognition by Church leaders of the need for a new grand design in Christian education, one that is cognizant of the religious education needs of all the faithful, that sets a challenge, that forces a commitment and that results in programme development modelled after the highly successful secular curriculum projects of the past decade

The process of evaluation in both religious and secular curriculum development projects has as its goal the answering of questions relating to adequacy, worth, value, strengths, limitations and applicability Given this essentially judgmental goal, evaluation may play many roles in curriculum development For example, a partial list of roles might include an assessment of needs, the refining or operationalizing of instructional objectives, the on-going improvement of materials, the training of teachers and building of tests However, regardless of the precise role, the general goal in each case should be to answer judgmental questions concerning value, adequacy or worth (15) The purpose of this paper is to discuss the roles which evaluation and evaluators can play in providing information which can form the basis of judgments of worth—prior to, during, and at the completion of a curriculum development project in religious education

GOALS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Before considering the various roles which evaluation can play in a curriculum project in religious education, let us first consider the question of goals in such education Perhaps the most crucial problem facing religious education today is that of formulating goals and priorities for

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the next decade In fact, the problem of reformulation of goals and priorities is endemic to the entire Church It is particularly crucial, however, in the field of education What does the Christian community expect from its programme of religious education during the next decade? What does it mean to the Christian during the seventies? How can the Church in its teaching mission help prepare its children, adolescents and adults to live full lives in a larger pluralistic, secular, technological and materialistic community?

What is a goal? A goal, as contrasted with an objective, which is a much narrower statement of intent, is

> something presently out of reach, it is something to strive for, to move toward, or to become It is an aim or purpose so stated that it excites the imagination and gives people something they want to work for, something they don't yet know how to do, something they can be proud of when they achieve it (11, p 38)

The Church in the United States at one time had a visionary goal or grand design* in education when, as a defensive measure to protect the faith of its young from proselytization by essentially Protestant public schools, it mandated 'every Catholic child in a Catholic school' A poor and immigrant Church united behind this goal and, while it was never fully realized, the development of the largest nonpublic school system in the world was the result

The crisis that racks the same school system today stems in part from the fact that the threat that spawned the Church's original visionary goal no longer exists (although secular proselytization today may pose as great a threat), in part from the reformulation of goals within religious orders, in part from an identity crisis on the part of some religious teaching exclusively secular subjects, and in part from a demand by the Christian community for a re-ordering of priorities that include a more equitable distribution of fiscal and human resources within the Church Some argue the real crisis is economic If the Church had a visionary goal, one that recognized the unique dimensions of Christian education in our pluralistic society perhaps the more affluent Church of the 1970s

*A term used by Granger (8) to describe the overall goal of a large organization Granger's article is an excellent discussion of the importance of clear goal statements in the business community

would be sparked to an effort similar in scope, but necessarily different in outcome to that of the earlier Church

In our effort to save this same school system we might do well to step back and not attempt to answer Mary Ryan's question, 'Are Catholic schools the answer?' but, given the need to reach all our children and adults ask instead 'Are Catholic schools the question?'

Education like most of our institutions, stands on the threshold of major changes New models that break out not only of the self-contained classroom but of the school itself are here Witness, as just one example, the potential opened up by the apparent success of Sesame Street In this context the Church is at a historical crossroads, it presently has a unique opportunity to formulate a new visionary goal, a new 'grand design' regarding religious education for the coming decade If the Church is successful, such a statement will become a commitment which will give rise to subgoals and then to programmes to meet the religious education needs of all its people

In many ways the situation facing religious educators today is analogous to that faced by science and mathematics educators during the 1950's These secular educators were forced by a national crisis in the United States to reformulate both their longer-term goals as well as the shorter term objectives which necessarily flowed from these goals It could no longer be left to the textbook publishers to set goals or instructional objectives or to local initiative to develop the curriculum material Curriculum development projects in mathematics and science became national efforts to develop the best programmes possible by drawing on university scholars, developmental psychologists, media experts and skilled teachers Leaders in government recognized the need for more and better scientists and engineers, they set a goal and provided the funds and then educators translated this mandate into new and exciting curricula

Similarly the Church could consider sponsoring an effort modelled after the Cambridge Conference on School Mathematics (2) which engaged in exploratory thinking about mathematics goals, expositing sometimes mutually incompatible ideas with a view to a long-range future At such a conference the relative merits and compatibility of cognitive verbal conceptual goals in religious education *vis-a-vis* expressive affective cathartic, spiritual and sacramental goals could be explored

Once the Church begins to develop curricula to implement its goals in

religious education it would do well to explore the model provided by the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) BSCS decided to prepare three parallel sets of biology course materials This was based on the recognition that there was a lack of agreement among biologists on the values of various goals and that all three approaches made sense This same diversity, given some of the polarizations within the Christian community, will probably also be necessary in developmental programmes in religious education BSCS further recognised that all three programmes were experimental, thereby giving greater freedom to both the curriculum builder and evaluator

On this latter point, the Church as a funding source must be willing to gamble, it must recognize 'that the most productive experiments are explorations of the unknown (9, p 7)' Unfortunately, this empirical orientation to curriculum building, and the valuing of diversity of approach in religious education, is not always easy for the Catholic decision-maker to accept, much less support, because of his formation in theology and philosophy (12)

ROLES OF EVALUATION IN SETTING GOALS AND PRIORITIES

What role can evaluation play in the formation of goals and in the setting of priorities? Statements of goals or priorities are expressions of opinions, attitudes and values These expressions derive from judgments, varying in degree of subjectivity, made by people on various issues (17) Evaluators can provide decision-makers with data on how various sections of the community value different educational goals, or programmes

Underlying this role of evaluation is the recognition that the opinions and attitudes of people are facts a special complex and varying order of facts but inescapably they are facts They describe a structure of values and attitudes which are every bit as real as the condition of building, financial income, or test performance

Methodologies for gathering information on the valuing of goals and priorities are reviewed by Stake (17) and need not be considered here The aim of all these techniques is to enable the evaluator 'to give a clearer and more valid representation of community needs and generalized values (17, p 196)'

For example, Donovan and Madaus (4) found that in the Archdiocese of Boston, religious education programmes for children and adolescents

received one of the highest priority ratings relative to a list of eleven other possible Church activities by both Catholics and non-Catholics and the highest rating relative to nine specifically educational apostolates which included the building of schools Further when presented with options for the future, religious education programmes were valued higher than school programmes *per se* In Boston there was interesting heterogeneity concerning priorities among groups of people For example, adult religious education was almost ignored by the laity while it received top priority from the clergy and religious The collection of attitudinal data by evaluators is not meant to imply rule by majority or for that matter consensus In Boston, for example, whether the laity recognizes it or not, programmes of religious education for adults may be crucial In other words, data do not automatically lead to decisions Such data 'enter into decision processes as inputs, not as outputs (17, p 201)' The point is, people's views on the goals of religious education can help decision-makers test assumptions they have made and provide them with knowledge on the type and source of resistance they are likely to meet

Another role that evaluators can play in formulating priorities is in gathering data which allows comparisons between the outcomes of present school programmes as against a list of outcomes judged in advance to be desirable For example, Scriven argues that the present goals of the school should be to educate for survival, to produce in students 'the capacities to *produce*, to *evaluate rationally*, to *relate to*, and to *effectuate* socially and intellectually revolutionary *suggestions, candidates, threats* and *actions* (16, p 3)' Given this visionary statement, Scriven can then ask evaluators to provide data on the degree to which schools at present equip students with a reasonable knowledge of arguments

> for and against abortion, censorship, incest, taboos, graduated income tax, dependent exemptions, contraception, the Fifth Amendment, local control of schools, 'liberal' education, police review boards, pacificism, charity, states' rights, a United Nations police force, euthanasia, nationalization of foreign-owned industry, jury trial, excise taxes, war, automation, unionism, de facto school segregation, sumptuary laws (especially those affecting use of drugs like alcohol and nicotine), 'equal time' on TV, 'mental illness', violent revolution, monasticism, prostitution,

> guaranteed income, progress in history, the death penalty, segregated private clubs, premarital chastity, egocentric hedonism, suicide, subsidized art, environment contamination and conservation, and compulsory schooling/voting/arbitration/blood tests/military service (16, pp 9-10)

Scriven's admittedly large but still partial list is a model that religious educators could emulate not necessarily in its specifics but in its scope and intent One might well ask how a Christian should approach the arguments for and against each of these issues Further, think of the issues relating to a person's spiritual, prayer and sacramental life that could be raised

Of course, many people would be horrified by Scriven's goal for education not to mention specific items in his list Witness the controversy over sex education or the tension between parents and teachers in inner city schools, the former wishing the school to stress discipline and language arts skills while the latter, especially in some of the 'free schools', wishing to stress expressive and affective outcomes It is in these types of controversial areas that evaluation can play a role in assessing opinion and attitudes prior to the beginning of a curriculum development project, not as votes but as input to be weighed and valued by decision makers

THE ROLES OF EVALUATION IN DEFINING OBJECTIVES

Once goal statements have been formulated and priorities set they must be translated into educational programmes and activities One approach to curriculum development typified in the writings of Popham (14), Sullivan (18), Mager (13) and Gagne (6) would argue that the first concern of the staff is to develop a detailed set of operationally stated behavioural objectives before work on the development of materials and experiences can begin Ralph Tyler, for example, feels that by defining objectives precisely at the outset 'the curriculum-maker has the most useful set of criteria for selecting content, for suggesting learning activities, for deciding on the kinds of teaching procedures to follow, in fact to carry on all the further steps in curriculum planning (19, p 40)' This *pre factum* approach to specifying objectives would, it seems, best lend itself to a religious education programme that primarily stressed cognitive skills, if for no other reason than that cognitive objectives seem

easier to state and we know much more about pedagogic techniques required to achieve them

Another approach to curriculum development, described by Eisner (5), Grobman (9) and Atkin (1), eschews detailed behavioural objectives In fact, it is argued (5) that the attempt to define objectives in this way is detrimental to the development of curricula Instead, the development of materials should begin immediately and objectives can be inferred at a later stage from student experiences with these materials Eisner, for example, argues for what he calls 'expressive objectives' which describe or identify

> a situation in which children are to work a problem with which they are to cope a task in which they are to help, but it does not specify what form that encounter, situation, problem, or task they are to learn An expressive objective provides both the teacher and the student with an invitation to explore, differ, or focus on issues that are of peculiar interest or impact to the inquirer An expressive objective is evocative rather than prescriptive (5, pp 15-16)

This approach to curriculum development would be best suited, it seems, to a religious education course that was primarily expressive, or affective in nature one geared to developing a Christian life style Here the techniques a programme might use to develop objectives are not nearly as clear, and certainly not necessarily identical with the verbal-conceptual methods of lectures, conversations, demonstrations, discussions and the printed word

The first approach is technological in orientation it is based on an engineering or systems mentality and has great logical appeal The second recognizes the fact that scholars and teachers who work on curriculum projects do not think like engineers This is probably particularly true of theologians liturgists, pastors and teachers who might cooperate on a religious education project Philip Jackson contrasts the two schools of thought as follows

> Indeed, it is difficult to think of two viewpoints further apart than those symbolized by the Golden Rule on the one hand and the slide rule on the other The one calls to mind adjectives such as romantic, warm, tender, naive, while the other evokes the concepts of realism, coldness, toughness efficiency (10, p 16)

While a strong case can be made for stating objectives at the outset of a project, Grobman (9) points out the existence of 'BSCS course materials, produced in record time, are evidence that it is possible to do a respectable job without an advance list of detailed objectives Today, some years later, the BSCS does have some written objectives, but these are largely *emergent objectives*, developed as a concommitant to other work (9) '

Regardless of whether educational objectives are pre-defined behaviourally and/or inferred *post hoc*, they must eventually be delineated if for no other reason than for evaluation Evaluators can play several important roles in the process of delineation If the project decides to attempt to predefine some or all of its objectives, the evaluator could offer a workshop for the staff on stating clear unambiguous behavioural objectives

If the staff decides to prescind from explicitly predefined behavioural objectives the evaluator could help to clarify implicit objectives

> he can ask such questions as 'Is what you mean?' 'Is the kind of child you would like to turn out?' 'Do you want students to be able to do ?' 'Is the kind of teaching you are talking about?' He can do some descriptive writing and some test writing and check these for reactions It is far easier for the historian to look at a test question and say, 'This is exactly what I am driving at' or, 'That is not relevant', than it is for him to phrase a specific detailed objective (9 p 20)

Here the evaluator recognizes it as 'partly his responsibility to uncover and formulate a testable set of criteria for the course (15, p 45) '

Perhaps one of the most important roles evaluation can play in the area of objectives is in helping the project staff determine the value of each objective The clarity of expression of a behavioural objective says nothing about either its feasibility or desirability In other words, behavioural objectives themselves, like goals, need to be judged according to criteria or worth

Tyler (19) recommends that objectives be screened through the philosophy of the school, subject matter experts, student needs, societal needs and the psychology of learning The National Assessment of Educational Progress project used panels to screen its objectives First it clarified each objective by a prototype exercise Lay panels representing

various groups and geographic regions were then asked to rate each exercise Did they think this was an important outcome that schools should stress? Did they think that persons in their area would object to such an exercise? Would they object to their own children answering such an item?

A national curriculum development project in religious education would do well to incorporate the National Assessment's use of panels in screening objectives Such a procedure would demonstrate the variance that undoubtedly exists between the priority structures of different groups (parents, clergy, theologians, teachers, students, psychologists, young and old, etc) on the value of diverse objectives in religious education It could help the staff design alternative materials for different groups Here again such data become inputs, to be weighted in various ways, when deciding on the worth or feasibility of various objectives in religious education

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN IMPROVING MATERIALS

The evaluator can play an important role once the development of curriculum materials and educational experiences are under way Here the evaluator works closely with the staff in field testing new materials so that the revisions can be made while the course is still fluid Scriven (15) gives the label of 'formative' to this ongoing evaluative process Grobman (9, pp 48-62) suggests techniques for reviewing early forms of materials These techniques allow the staff to determine the suitability of these materials along such dimensions as student and teacher interest and comprehension, suitability for different types of teachers and students, classroom management cost time sequencing, etc

The formative evaluator can easily become a threat to the curriculum developer if he lacks tact or constantly plays devil's advocate Consequently the evaluator's staff role in monitoring materials during the try-out phase should be closer to that of diagnostician and colleague than to that of judge or critic

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME

Once materials are in final form, 'summative' evaluations are needed (15) Here the evaluator can play many roles, all of which, however, are geared to gathering data to answer questions such as how good is

the course? how effective is it? should it be adopted? how does it compare to other courses or approaches?

A summative evaluation can be made of the new materials *per se* an evaluation of their suitability, readability, content coverage, adaptability, time demands costs, etc Such a summative evaluation is called 'intrinsic' as contrasted to 'pay-off' evaluation which attempts to gauge the effects of the materials on learners (15) Thus one might on the one hand ask theologians to rate how well materials follow the logical structure of a particular aspect of theology On the other hand, one might ask the more difficult question, 'to what degree have learners mastered this logical structure?' Both types of information are needed Possibly the logical and elegant structure of the scholar may not be isomorphic to the pedagogic structure necessary for the uninitiated

Another useful distinction when talking about summative evaluation is that between descriptive and comparative studies Some descriptive arguments over the relative merits of these two types of summative evaluation are debated in the seminal works of Cronbach (3) and Scriven (15)' and need not be considered here However, new programmes in religious education will require both types

A descriptive evaluation attempts to describe the new course on as many criteria as is feasible It is not enough to evaluate a new course in religious education on how well it has achieved its stated objectives One must also describe the opportunity costs or trade-offs, the unexpected, unintended outcomes that also have accrued To arrive at a multidimensional description of course outcomes one can employ tests that are not content valid for the new course It was important, for example to learn that students in modern mathematics courses did not perform very well on traditional tests of computation The question of whether increased gains in understanding of concepts and positive attitudes towards mathematics were worth this trade-off was a value judgment that had to be faced

In gathering multidimensional data, Cronbach (3) urges the use of item data To this end he suggests sampling items across students Instead of each student sitting for the same 50 item test, it is possible to obtain data on upwards of 700 items in the same period of time by giving different subsets of the pool to different samples of pupils

Descriptive evaluations of new courses in religious education, in addition to being multidimensional, must also attempt to describe what types of students benefitted the most or the least from interaction with

the materials The question of interaction between types of instructional programmes and different student characteristics is a promising new area of instructional research Further, descriptive evaluations ideally should be longitudinal It might take several years, for example, to find that students who had a new physics curriculum in school were not as apt to elect to continue their studies in physics at college Atkin points out that this type of result may be desirable 'That is, the new course may reflect the nature of the subject more accurately than other courses, when certain children find out what astronomy, for example, is really all about, they decide on the basis of the better evidence they now have that this subject is not for them (1)' Of course, this result may not be desirable This again is a value judgment that must eventually be made

Programmes in religious education must also evaluate long-term effects As a contemporary example, consider the innovative programmes of some Newman Clubs that attract and involve many students but leave them unprepared to re-enter more traditional suburban parishes upon graduation Data are badly needed on the long-term effects on different types of students of this phenomenon before value judgements are passed

If the assumption that the Church must develop alternative materials and educational models in religious education is correct, then it becomes imperative that the comparative costs and educational effectiveness of these approaches be studied For example, our data, though unfortunately based on samples of opportunity, show that after controlling for religiosity in the home, students in Catholic schools do not differ from students in public schools who had attended religion classes outside of school hours in their religious practices, or in their attitudes toward the Church or toward current social issues Students with eight years of Catholic elementary schooling scored significantly higher on a measure of knowledge of the faith than did their counterparts with eight years of attendance at out-of-school classes organized by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine However, one year of Catholic high school comes very close to closing this knowledge gap If these findings are replicated then they will raise some interesting questions relating to cost effectiveness As new approaches to religious education are experimented with in new educational environments, comparative studies of relative costs and educational effectiveness will become crucial

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