

Testing and Evaluation

by Léo Gaumont

Evaluation is defined as a systematic determination of a subject's merit, worth and significance, using criteria governed by a set of standards. There are a great many things included in this definition, not the least of which is the fact that the criteria is governed by a set of standards. This begs a clarification of what is meant by “a standard” which is best described as a required or agreed upon level of quality or attainment.

When considering the fact that there are over seven billion people on earth and further considering the fact every person who has ever walked the earth has had unique attributes, including infinite combinations of physical variations with cultural, linguistic and religious overtones, and it becomes rather impossible to come up with or to agree upon what would constitute a “standard” human being. Combining this observation with an understanding that different people learn differently at different rates and to differing levels of proficiency and the idea of having a standard in education moves from the ridiculous to the absurd, unless of course, we put a group of students in a classroom. Here a teacher who is disconnected from the family has to report to the parents just how well their student is doing within the arbitrary expectations of yet another agency who, knowing absolutely nothing about their child, has determined what will be learned to an “agreed upon level” that is for all practical purposes, impossible to measure.

Since the existence of an objective standard that can be universally applied to all students is an absolute impossibility, curriculum, determined by an agency that is oblivious to the individual child’s needs, must be used as a standard. Note that it is the curriculum that is the standard and that to try to fit any child to it does not standardize the child but forces the individual to conform to the standard of the curriculum. Therefore, any testing done in association with the said curriculum is more a measure of how well the curriculum or program has done with the child than how the child has done with the curriculum. Bearing in mind that most often, the curriculum is not in harmony with where the child is at any particular moment, higher grades usually indicate a higher degree of memorization of material soon to be forgotten. Testing, therefore, is more a measure of test writing skills than actual knowledge. Any good test writer is likely to be able to beat the test by studying its patterns. And then there is the ridiculous assumption that 50% is an acceptable level of achievement!

There are some skill testing tests which can give an indication of levels of proficiency, but simply giving a student the opportunity to prove proficient by engaging in a particular task will suffice to determine whether or not a student will succeed at that task. Content or curricular testing may prove the child is intelligent and willing to please their teacher, but it is hardly a test of proficiency.

Now that testing towards a non-existent standard has been shown to be largely an exercise in futility, we can address if and when there is a need for testing, and this will be determined by the environment in which the student is learning. When a child attends school, the school reports to parents how their child is doing in school. Note that the parents do not report what the child did at home to the school, but rather the school reports to the parents. This actually validates the claims to parental authority. Therefore, should the parents decide to change the learning environment from the school to the home, there remains no good reason for the school to report to the parents and there never was a reason for the parents to report to the school.

This now brings us to an important question regarding the need for evaluating home education programs. It is clearly stated that parents have the sole authority for the training and teaching of children and this is

validated by the school system's need to report to the parents. If parents have the authority for the education of their children, it should actually be the Minister who should be reporting to the parents regarding the state of the education system and not the parents reporting to the government respecting things the government has no jurisdiction in. When parents choose to have others help them with their education, there must be reporting on the child's progress, but if parents have determined to do the job themselves, they alone have the authority and responsibility to make sure the child is progressing in their learning. Bearing in mind that it is impossible to stop a child from learning, short of unspeakable intrusions, and the fact that it is impossible for a child to "disappear" from the watchful eye of a parent like what can happen in a school, evaluation of progress is an ongoing process that is far more accurately accomplished by a parent than what is possible by a teacher. This is not to diminish the professional teacher's role or responsibilities, but that role ceases when the parent takes the child home.

A traditional home education is provided by parents who have determined to take the full authority and responsibility for the entire program, scope, sequence and expectations for their children. The very fact that parents have taken this responsibility should be all the evaluation and assessments required. Once parents have determined to take this route, the Minister is completely absolved of responsibility and therefore for any need to be apprised of student achievement. Indeed, all reputable studies have clearly shown that a parent-directed home education consistently results in a better "product" than the school "product" for the simple reason of parental involvement.

Therefore, considering that objective standards cannot exist; that testing is usually a measure of the instruments used rather than the child being tested; that parents have always had, not only the ability to produce children, but the authority and associated responsibility for their training and education; and the fact that home educated students are very successful, productive members of society; any attempt by any agency to usurp parental authority in any way, particularly with respect to evaluation and assessment of a home education program, is in violation of common sense and jurisdictional protocol.

In conclusion, any agency outside of the family that requires any form of evaluation respecting the educational progress of children makes a claim to that authority. Any agency negotiating with government respecting evaluation is negotiating with authority which is not rightfully theirs. Unless parents explicitly allow the compromise of their God-given authority, nothing, including the United Nations, the government, school boards, ICHESs, AHEA, HSLDA, the public, other parents or any other created thing can or should take that authority away. To do so is a violation of the basic rights properly belonging to parents.

Home Educating In Alberta

Alberta has the most unique situation of any jurisdiction when it comes to home education. Not only does the government erroneously make overtures about having home educated students evaluated and assessed, but the provincial home education association along with another made in Alberta anomaly called ICHESs (independent contracted home education specialist) seem to have forgotten that all questions regarding the assessment and evaluation of parent-directed home education is strictly a function of the parents. Home educators in this province will have to be vigilant to protect and defend this authority as even the smallest of compromises will legitimize the false claims to authority made by agencies who have none.

Please note: An excellent statement on this issue is found in point 7 of Schedule A to the By-Laws of AHEA: "The Association holds that student assessment is an integral aspect of the education process, and that therefore parents have the sole right and responsibility to determine the methods and instruments to be used to ensure the educational welfare of the child." This statement should accurately direct any action taken by any agency purporting to represent parental freedom and authority for educating their children.