



Shaping the Future



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Evaluation: Bane or Blessing?

by Neil Sandfort

While a systematic evaluation system probably won't entirely eliminate informal evaluation, it will provide a venue for people to participate in evaluations that make a difference.

Evaluating... everyone does it about almost everything, but most assuredly about Lutheran educators and administrators. If you don't believe that, just eavesdrop some evening in the parking lot after school, in the hallways, around the dinner table, or (perish the thought) in the teachers' lounge. Sometimes Lutheran educators kid themselves into believing that those "informal" evaluations don't amount to anything, but they can be a problem. They're like measuring with a rubber ruler with no standard scale. Who would want to be measured like that? Informal evaluators get to select their own standards, stretch them to cover anything they want, apply them to whomever they choose, and interpret the results as they wish.

evaluate

Doesn't it make sense instead to involve parents, students, and fellow teachers in a systematic evaluation system where the standards are known and applied in a planned, scheduled, and organized way? While a systematic evaluation system probably won't entirely eliminate informal evaluation, it will provide a venue for people to participate in evaluations that make a difference.

It is helpful to differentiate *supervision*, *observation*, and *evaluation*, and to understand how they are interrelated. *Supervision*, usually the responsibility of the administrator, means overseeing the work of others. *Observation*, a part of supervision, means formal or informal on-site visits to see how an individual functions within a specific time/task framework. It includes pre- and post-observation conferences to enhance growth. *Evaluation* is assembling data from various sources such as records of observations, formal feedback from parent, student, and peer surveys, and student outcomes to assess an educator's performance over a period of time. Think of observation as a snapshot and evaluation as a video.

observe

Why is it that some Lutheran educators — including administrators — dread, procrastinate, and try to avoid observation and evaluation? Perhaps it's a result of misunderstanding biblical admonitions, such as "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*" **MATTHEW 7:1** This instruction from Jesus does not refer to evaluation by supervisors. It forbids personal, hurtful, condemning judgment. With that in mind, evaluation is not primarily about finding what an educator is doing wrong. It's just as important to call attention to what he or she is doing well. Here's a little test. Think back to recent parent teacher conferences. Which comments do you remember most clearly at the end of the day, the affirmations or the criticisms? Even if you hear ten positive comments, the one or two negative ones are the ones you'll probably remember. That's why it is essential for evaluations to include positive assessments as well as suggestions for improvement.

affirm

Teachers deserve the formal observations, coaching and encouragement of their administrators to help them grow professionally and in ministry to children.

Time spent by administrators observing teachers is time well spent, but it does require a significant investment of time. Since they can't be in two places at once, teaching administrators find it especially challenging to observe teachers during the school day. Teachers deserve the formal observations, coaching, and encouragement of their administrators to help them grow professionally and in ministry to children. Boards of Christian Education that understand their responsibility to support the growth of their teachers will agree to engage substitute teachers to provide time so their administrator can observe teachers during the school day.

cultivate



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Why would it not be a good idea for teaching principals to delegate evaluation to a board member—or anyone else? How does your evaluation process differ from the evaluation process in a public school? Why do you think the author suggests that evaluation also should include topics "related to Christian life, witness, and ministry?"



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of Shaping the Future:

[**Finding Common Ground in Running and Teaching** by Mark Newman \(Feature\)](#)

[**The Common Core Standards** by Dr. Pamela Zimmermann \(ETnet\)](#)

[**Accepting Failure** by John Chilman \(SECnet\)](#)

Evaluation of Lutheran educators is not the same as evaluation of educators in other schools. Assessment standards relating to commitment to students, excellent teaching, student assessment skills, knowledge of subject matter, classroom management, collaboration, and communication are common for evaluation of all teachers. Standards for Lutheran educators must also reflect the mission of Lutheran schools to make disciples by teaching and their ministry to love, nurture, and care for children in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus, the appearance of Lutheran educators' classrooms, their schedules, classroom routines, management and discipline practices, and content of instruction are unique because the Christian faith is at the heart of everything Lutheran educators do and the core of the identity of Lutheran schools.

Supervisors in Lutheran schools also need to give attention to mission and ministry-related teaching during classroom observations and the evaluations they support.

How does that show up in evaluation? It is reasonable to expect Lutheran educators to demonstrate that they are "able to teach," 1 TIMOTHY 3:2; 2 TIMOTHY 2:24 that they demonstrate growth toward pedagogical excellence, and that their students learn and grow academically, socially, physically, and personally.

integrate faith

Supervisors in Lutheran schools also need to give attention to mission and ministry-related teaching during classroom observations and the evaluations they support: Are Teaching the Faith (a more appropriate title than Religion) lessons taught faithfully, winsomely, and with conviction? Does the teacher apply Law and Gospel appropriately to nurture faith development? Does the teacher intentionally integrate the Christian faith at teachable moments when teaching all subjects? How? How often? More importantly, how naturally and effectively? Faith integration must be part of pre- and post-observation conferences, systematically monitored, and documented during observation, and considered during goal setting and evaluations.

Since Lutheran educators teach not only through the formal lessons, but also through how they conduct their lives as disciples of Jesus and model their Christian faith, it is fitting and proper for their formal evaluations to address the following topics related to Christian life, witness, and ministry in addition to the usual categories of teacher assessment:

demonstrate

- Teaching God's Word in its truth and purity, and Lutheran doctrine faithfully.
- Living as an example of Christian faith, life, and discipleship.
- Functioning in harmony and unity with coworkers and those served in ministry.
- Cultivating an environment of love and order
- Offering an active Christian witness
- Actively participating in the mission and ministry of the school and congregation

The primary object of evaluation is to help teachers become better teachers and to serve children and their families more effectively in shared ministry.

Teacher evaluation in Lutheran schools is not primarily about the systems or formats we use to fulfill governance or administrative responsibilities. The primary object of evaluation is to help teachers become better teachers and to serve children and their families more effectively in shared ministry. To that end, the following counsel from St. Paul seems especially meaningful for those who evaluate: *We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14 ESV

evaluate

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