10. Appraisal: The Teachers' Perspective

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The Discovery Channel on TV has some terrific programming. Not too long ago I watched a scientist explain why it is that the position of a stranded boat will not change even when it is tossed around by giant storms. The theory is that waves move across the water rather than the water itself moving. The wave moves along in a circular motion, propelled by big or small forces depending on what started it in the first place. As long as nothing interrupts the roll of the wave, it will pass and leave everything as it was before.

At the time, I was in the process of collecting my thoughts for this presentation, reflecting on the rising tide of mediocrity, which you will recall was the alarm raised several years ago by the report *A Nation At Risk*. One of the many outcomes of the increased scrutiny provoked by that and other reports has been the reform of our thinking about appraisal. But long before that, teachers had been bobbing along in a dangerous and stormy sea and the only rising tide they knew about was the criticism that was threatening to swamp them. Anyway, teacher organizations tried to applaud the reports as a welcome SOS. And sure enough, very quickly they were surrounded by would-be heroes and rescuers. Unfortunately, most offers of help have presented new dangers and it has been
difficult to distinguish flotsam and jetsam from a life raft. Teachers still aren’t at all sure what appraisal reform will turn out to be.

Now for those of you who wish I hadn’t started out that way, let me sympathize. You believe that appraisals are an important key to positive change. Your strategy for surviving the onslaught of criticism is to elevate standards and prove accountability. You think I should suspend my cynicism and throw myself wholeheartedly into a project to document success. Resistance, you say, fuels the fires in the critics’ eyes—And you’re right.

Resistance makes schools look unresponsive, and makes people believe that educators are lazy. And it’s true that lazy teachers don’t want to change, incompetent teachers can’t change, unions want to protect the weak, and stubborn teachers become bad press. And you’re right in thinking that I’m going to preach a sermon you have probably heard before. I have a negative message to deliver, and if you take me seriously you’re going to experience frustration.

To begin with, here are some additional possibilities that I ask you to consider. There are other reasons educators might resist reforms. For example, good teachers don’t want to continually be changed. Good teachers want to be left alone to do what they do well. Good teachers think they improve their performance best with experience, inspiration, sharing, and freedom to plan and dream.

Good teachers don’t understand why the public doesn’t value what they do and they feel bitter when they think about it. They certainly don’t understand why they should interrupt their teaching to process paperwork that will tell the public how well they were teaching before they were so rudely interrupted.

It is also true that a significant majority of teachers belong to organizations that serve as unions as well as professional associations. Those unions work to insure that all teachers, weak or strong, have due process rights. But members of these unions have never enjoyed any unbridled powers. We do not hire and fire teachers, and we do not grant tenure. The vast majority of our members can’t understand why school districts would not terminate the employment of teachers who are an embarrassment to the profession. Teachers are very unhappy when they are blamed for that failure. And they are frustrated that those perceived failures stand in the way of fair and reasonable funding for education and deprive them of resources to do the job.

These are the conflicts that rage in the everyday world of teachers. No matter how well meaning and reasonable those responsi-
ble, these are conflicts which alternately threaten the teaching profession and the health of public education.

I know that you are often frustrated that teachers won't just "go along" instead of fighting every effort to inspire confidence in our schools. I know that many of you blame unions. I understand how hard it is for school administrators and elected officials to raise money for education, and I know the kind of criticism you take. I will try not to argue, but simply share with you some perceptions of appraisal which have become clear to me over the years that I have served as an advocate for teachers. I do so in the hope that it may help you consider alternative ways to approach changes in evaluation.

I've been around long enough to have swung on the pendulum. I have fought both for and against evaluation plans. Much of what I know about teachers' perceptions of appraisal, I learned over the past 4 years. During that time, Lincoln Public Schools and the Lincoln Education Association have developed their own teacher appraisal instrument and field-tested it in a dozen schools. This experience has given me an unusual opportunity to find out how teachers feel about appraisal.

The Lincoln negotiated agreement establishes a Joint Teacher Appraisal Committee. Although experts generally agree that teachers should help develop their appraisal instrument, teacher input is rarely so formally guaranteed. Prior to this agreement, the District suffered from confrontations on the topic of evaluation, with teachers insisting that they wanted contractual controls and the District insisting that evaluation was not a proper subject for collective bargaining. In negotiations, during the year of the change, it was agreed that a committee, with equal numbers of representatives from the administration and from the teachers' organization, would have the responsibility to develop a new appraisal system. Also provided were contractual guarantees of fair play and the right to grieve in cases of dispute.

The Association did not try to take away the Board's job of setting standards, nor the administrative job of making judgments about quality of work. In return, the administration recognized that the association could help teachers reach an understanding of the District's expectations and help develop an effective process for assessment. The simple but significant gesture of this contractual commitment created a good feeling of partnership.

The Joint Committee studied a number of appraisal systems while creating their own documents. However, they worked hard to develop evaluation criteria really important in Lincoln and the
methods Lincoln educators wanted to use to identify success. They created a 3-year cycle of independent formative and summative processes and agreed to an intensive assistance program in an effort to help the administration eliminate deficiencies. When they were done, both teacher and administrator committee members were pleased.

The system was field tested last year and a new draft will be tested in an expanded number of schools this year. Mrs. Marge Willeke of the ESU Evaluation Team studied the procedure, with assistance from members of the Joint Committee. Her evaluation reached every administrator who participated in the field test, and all of the teachers who were appraised. The Joint Teacher Appraisal Committee also had the opportunity to participate in the testing of national standards being developed by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation chaired by Daniel L. Stufflebeam of Western Michigan University. That project is supported by numerous grants and participating organizations, including the Association of School Administrators, the School Personnel Administrators, the American Educational Research Association, the American Evaluation Association, the NEA and AFT, the American Psychological Association, and other equally prestigious groups. Mrs. Willeke's work resulted in an impressively thorough report which told us there is a high degree of satisfaction with the new process and a good match with the proposed national standards.

Our study of the 1st year of the Lincoln pilot was intended to focus on our committee's efforts to design an appraisal document. We did not ask whether participants thought they ought to be evaluated, and few of them dredged up basic arguments for and against appraisals in general. However, within the union the process brought about many discussions of the basics of appraisal, particularly with regard to its public relations value. Clearly, the public is clamoring for "accountable" schools and teachers with credible stamps of approval. Many educators believe that aggressive appraisal can build greater public confidence and lead to better funding. Others believe that the public has an obligation to increase funding without all this nonsense about evaluation. Whether or not the public has failed to give adequate support, there's no denying that most of the legislation passed in the name of school reform ties new money to measurements alleged to increase accountability and control quality.

Will the efforts have long-term payoffs for teachers and schools? Teachers don't think so. They simply don't believe that evaluation
lives up to its promise, and they don't believe the small gains they do make are worth all the extra work.

I believe one teacher in our field test explained that point of view well. This anonymous teacher wrote “I realize that appraisal is necessary, but I doubt if the principals know how to effectively use the appraisal instrument as a tool. There are other ways to grow professionally besides IDM (Instructional Decision Making), and I refuse to be intimidated by some appraisal process—especially when I know nothing will come of it. Why don't you people at the Public Schools Administration Building take a stand on issues that are more meaningful to teachers, like the weak attendance policy or the outrageously poor staff development program. Do something about the quality of our schools in other areas besides the teachers. Make the appraisal process meaningful as well as relevant to teachers, and maybe more teachers would take it seriously.”

Although obviously ventilating a lot of frustration, this teacher has raised an important question, silently asked by many—does teacher evaluation help teachers? Does evaluation get at the most critical problems in our schools? How did teacher evaluation rise to such importance in political circles?

There's public relations value in the growing research base which ties teacher behaviors to predictable outcomes in students, and public relations value in making teaching look more scientific and controllable. It has even seemed like a good idea to use impressive sounding jargon. The public wants to believe that someone can identify good teachers, tell what a good teacher does, and know why it works. It's comforting to the public to think that a model teacher can be hired, and cannot slip into incompetence if administrators are vigilant. It's easy to sell the public on strenuous in-service training programs to shape up teachers. It's easy to be a critic.

There are, however, nasty side effects. From the belief that a model of good teaching exists, the public can take the short step to the harmful conclusion that anyone can teach if they possess a passable knowledge of a subject and are able to emulate the behaviors in the model. They can erroneously conclude that any deviation from the model must be faulty. They can ignore jargon as pretentious. They can demand inservice after teachers have run out of energy to listen. And they can believe that principals can become overnight experts on teaching—something more believable in shopping malls and barber shops than in America’s classrooms.
Good public-relations campaigns are simple and self-perpetuating. Evaluation hype requires too much stirring and damage control because the frustrations are stirred every year in the teaching ranks. Even if their own appraisal is positive, most teachers have some bad feelings about the process. They surely don’t go around humming the catchy tune.

The ivory-tower world of the researcher runs into other conflicts with the world of real teachers. Even in training institutions, teachers are taught to strive endlessly for ideal learning conditions. The real world, then, can’t help but fall short. Having learned how to reach for the ideal, teachers resist compromise with the practical. They do not learn to quietly accommodate tight budgets, paperwork that leads nowhere in particular, and principals who are only human. In fact, nobody ever tells prospective teachers that they will have “bosses” to contend with. When I was a teacher, I knew my mission and my special calling—to work with the most unlovable teenagers in my school—and I agonized over ways to get through to them. Evaluation never helped me. In fact, I remember nothing of significance which evaluation raised to my attention.

I do particularly remember two of them. I remember an observation conducted by an administrator who had never been a classroom teacher and clearly did not understand what was happening in my class. I also remember an evaluation in the early 1970s when my principal gave me a low mark on an evaluation because I wear wire-rimmed glasses. There are two points to this personal digression. First, it’s a mistake for administrators to try to fake knowledge of teaching expertise. Second, righteous indignation prevents one from hearing properly.

Not only would relationships of educators improve, but the image we project to the public might be more positive if we stopped training prospective teachers as though they would one day walk out and hang up a shingle in private practice. We should tell them that they will need to be good employees, and they might not be so publicly appalled when someone drops by to conduct an appraisal. Teachers will continue to resist “management” as long as they are trained for a solo professional mission and then treated like students who must be disciplined and taught. What are the odds? Can a principal ever help idealistic teachers become more effective when he has to assign cafeteria duty, require triplicate paperwork, put too many kids in a classroom, and ask the staff to compromise with misguided parents? The administrator can’t provide the resources that teachers need. When the principal can’t produce, the
principal can't criticize. Teachers think that if they are lucky, the principal will take care of problem students, get them sufficient supplies, and leave teachers alone. They don't need constant coaching to be a good teacher. Having passed the hurdles of college graduation, initial employment, and finally the achievement of "tenure," most teachers expect to fly solo for the remainder of their careers. They have reason to believe that they are good and they most certainly don't expect the administration to pop up on its clay feet one day and suddenly decide that their performance doesn't stack up.

Another interesting problem in organizational psychology is that reformers have begun to believe their own hype. School districts have come to believe that they deserve and can get all super teachers. We talk a lot about our high standards, but the truth is that we can't find enough teachers of that high quality in the first place and we have to "settle" in at least a few cases.

As a result, most systems are usually afraid to specifically articulate their standards, preferring to encourage teachers to psyche themselves up to set their own high standards and to live by their own work ethic. Appraisal is just an annual opportunity to whip them up a little more. The only trouble is that when there's a teacher who really should be fired, the ambiguity testifies dramatically to the absence of any real standards.

Those of you who are practicing administrators no doubt take exception to those remarks. You have probably worked hard to set a tone for your system and you're probably proud of the tough image your schools project. But no matter how proud we are of our own local schools, you still need to be realistic about the fact that most teachers accept teaching assignments based more on location and general demographics rather than on any particular knowledge of the instructional philosophy of the system. I am gratified that a lot of teachers want to work in the Lincoln system, but very few sign on because they think our administrators will come into their classrooms to work with them, or because we have such a strong commitment to Madeline Hunter's Instructional Decision-Making. Nor do new teachers particularly care that principals have learned some new vocabulary and will script tape when they observe. That information will be irrelevant in the new teacher's career unless the principal turns out to be surprisingly helpful or gets in the way.

I can be realistic, too. Teachers know that someone out there has the right to hire, fire, and/or promote them. But most teachers believe those decisions have little to do with appraisal and the
ability to teach. Teachers aren’t stupid. They see bad teachers untouched by appraisals, bad teachers given tenure, poor teachers promoted, good veteran teachers attacked out of the blue, and they see good student teachers not hired. The end result of all those object lessons from real life is that teachers resist public relations schemes associated with appraisal because they know them to be politically motivated. That is, teachers believe something important will be sacrificed to whatever part of the public has a bone to pick. Few teachers believe that the target will automatically be someone they consider incompetent.

Even the latest trends are scary. Before our very eyes, principals are being transformed from business managers to instructional leaders. Some new young turks are being hired to prove that good coaches can work with teachers to create new excitement about teaching. No one, however, has been able to razzle-dazzle teachers about some of the veterans who can’t or won’t team up with their teachers to help. Teachers know they won’t change and that mass administrative firings would send altogether the wrong message to the public. Teachers try to keep a straight face when they hear that their principal will attend a couple of in-service classes and become instructional leaders.

If we finally do undergo a transition to principals who are instructional leaders, it will mean that teachers have decided to help administrators who show promise. The transition will fail if anyone expects teachers to turn a blind eye to a principal who has a credibility gap in his or her credentials. Teachers feel an almost sacred obligation to reveal the shortcomings of an unrealistic or unhelpful administrator. They think that silence just prolongs the agony. On the other hand, teachers will follow a leader with nothing but good people skills and the ability to rally the team. They will also respect and appreciate someone with expertise in teaching theory and practice. They will probably even try to help an administrator who has limited administrative or management skill. But teachers will never pretend that an administrator is good, or let anyone think they can’t tell the difference. That would be as intolerable as a policeman taking a bribe.

You can always tell when teachers have been pushed to the point they feel compelled to “blow the whistle.” They begin to talk about teachers having the right to evaluate principals.

The worst news I have for you today is that so far, teachers have not bought into the recent changes in teacher evaluation. Teachers sense danger and they have circled their wagons. The clearest danger is that researchers and testing experts are searching for ways
to reduce teaching to paper so that we can convince the public that we can control and improve the way teachers perform. But teachers know that nothing unique and exceptional ever grew from a dry formula. Creativity and flair can't be standardized. Painting by number has never produced any masterpieces. Resistance to "recipes" for improvement is growing every day and there is massive resistance to standardized methods of teaching, both from individuals and organizations. Listen to some of the comments from Lincoln teachers during our field test, keeping in mind that we have tried to diffuse any concerns about "standardization," particularly with regard to our IDM in-service program.

"I need feedback as a teacher, not as a clone of methods which are forced on us. I cannot function as a mechanized teacher, except on evaluation days, and still maintain a relationship with students based on personality."

"The labels he puts to my teaching are often not what I am really doing."

"I feel that I begin worrying too much about IDM model rather than teaching a concept inductively—using the inquiry method—as is my natural style and methodology."

And finally, "While IDM provides a format for evaluation, it also standardizes teaching. In my own school that I attended, I feel that some of my best teachers would not have done well based on IDM. I think individuality makes for more interesting teachers."

In addition to these complaints, standardization will have other unwanted side effects, a few we have already seen. Not long ago the fad was to criticize "textbook-tied teachers." Using teacher-made materials was meant to be more professional than buying commercially developed products. That theory inspired lots of school districts and teachers to abandon professionally produced resources in favor of what those of us who write newsletters call "fast and dirty" materials—volumes of amateur, poorly produced worksheets. Similarly, we have slowly eroded academic freedom in the process of making sure all students study the same skills with the same book on the same page at the same time with the same degree of success.

Behind each of these plans are well-meaning reformers who think that the changes will actually be better or will at least affect public perceptions of education and will work to the ultimate advantage of our schools.
A few years ago when I was working as a lobbyist for the Mem­phis, Tennessee Education Association, I had the experience of having the governor of Tennessee look me in the eye and tell me that the only way to get money for education was to have a Master Teacher plan. I had fought hard and that made me angry, but he was right. He did raise money for schools that way. But the expense was tremendous: a blizzard of paperwork, elevation of racial tensions, basic skills belabored at the expense of many who should have been able to excel, money used to produce a paper nightmare instead of money put into salary for teachers, and much, much more. When Master Teacher was first implemented in the Ten­nessee schools, there were 3,000 separate skills supposed to be taught and tested in the first grade. And there was a separate test for each one.

When teachers fought the plan, they were accused of fearing evaluation and accountability. But the truth is simply that teach­ers knew the price tag of the political campaign. Teachers have heard governors tell them that such plans will pay off. They’ve heard the same from Madeline Hunter zealots, merit-pay fans, “concerned” taxpayers groups and the two Secretaries of Educa­tion of the United States. And not one of them has made it easier for teachers to do what the public has hired them to do.

The growing frustrations among teachers have many origins. One which is rarely discussed is the basic character of people who enter the profession. There can be no questions about teaching being a highly demanding and modestly paid profession. In the cold light of day, one would have to surmise that those who would undertake such a career are dedicated, hard working, thick skinned, and altruistic. Almost all of them give us much more than we deserve.

Consider now what happens when we get “picky” about such people, or want to make them punch a time clock, or want to add unnecessary paper work. The resentment is strong.

Compounding the problem, most middle-aged to older teachers believe they are teachers for life. When the bitterness and anger well up, such people see nowhere to go. They are not competitive, and are generally uncomfortable with the private sector. Younger generations of teachers may have more bravado, and talk often and manipulatively about getting out of teaching. The truth is that a few will, but most will not. Whether our work force suffers from limited or exaggerated options, we have some unhappy people in our classrooms. Managers need to figure out a way to stop rubbing salt into the wounds and begin building pride and self-esteem.
Appraisals, particularly when school boards or administrators deliberately insist on always finding room for improvement, contribute to the depression and stress. Teachers brace themselves for the recitation: I observed you building a positive-feeling tone by reinforcing the student’s ideas, but I did not see. . . .

Now you tell me, wouldn’t that just warm the cockles of your heart and make you glad you went into teaching?

A new trend in appraisal which might help solve that problem is the separation of formative and summative processes. It’s far too early to expect results from the formative field test in Lincoln Public Schools because we concentrated heavily on the summative process this first year. But, I can share with you some of the interesting deliberations within the Joint Committee. The teachers in Lincoln firmly believed that formative appraisal should be voluntary. We argued that most teachers like to enhance their skills and credentials, and that teachers generally grasp every opportunity to share ideas that work. We were able to point, for example, to all of the teachers who attend far more than the required in-service sessions.

On the other hand, the District was uncomfortable saying that teachers weren’t required to have any growth plan at all. We compromised by agreeing that teachers would have a plan at least one out of the two formative phase years. That’s a start, but the teachers on the committee would like to have a plan that would allow a teacher to attempt their own challenging growth plans with the “no-risk” option of retaining possession of all the results. We believe teachers would soon discover that they really had some time for dreaming and growing. We trust that most would stay true to form and find meaningful ways to keep their teaching in top form. We think they would find exciting ways to share successes, and we are pretty sure that some of them would discover possibilities that the administration hasn’t dreamed about.

Debate on some of these points will come in 1990, and we already anticipate that the administration will argue that some teachers will opt for no change and begin to moss over. The administration thinks that it will be better to be able to assure the public that everyone is required to practice. Teachers prefer to show the public that teachers are working voluntarily to upgrade the education we deliver. Once again, public relations considerations control both sides of the argument.

Notwithstanding the decisions that we still face, teachers are natural learners who like formative activities. They like the idea of helping each other. Although individuals like to work together for
improvement, it is an idea that unions are approaching cautiously. They have several strong concerns. First, teachers learn group processes from working with students. Few of them have the opportunity to relate regularly with other adults in the work force. Although I am very fond of teachers, I have to tell you that they can be unrelentingly critical of each other. Unless trained and assisted, a teacher with quasi-supervisory authority over another can leave an impressive trail of destruction.

Nothing will scuttle peer assistance programs and/or formative evaluations any faster than confusing teachers with administrators. The two greatest dangers are using teachers to testify against teachers in employment decisions and thinking that teachers can do some of the appraisal work for the principal.

The dangers should be crystal clear: exposing shortcomings and vulnerabilities requires absolute trust. Peer coaching and "informing" cannot coexist.

For years, principals have experienced the tricky interpersonal problems associated with performance evaluation and they have learned the realities of human nature with widely differing degrees of success. How any experienced manager could imagine that time could be saved by delegating some of those management responsibilities to untrained workers is beyond me. Nevertheless, as principals try to spend more time on becoming instructional leaders, they more frequently want to drag department chairpersons, team leaders, lead teachers, and so on into the evaluation process. We could profit from thinking about why, as parents, we discourage tattlers in order to nurture positive strong relationships between our children. Above all else, we need for our teachers to work well together.

Administrators may very well need more help to do the new job that has been defined for them, but there are other ways to solve the problem. They either need additional administrators or they need to stop doing other kinds of work, or they need to trust other schools to deliver the new training. We could save our administrators a lot of work if we trusted our own certification requirements for continuing education, and trusted our local colleges and universities to keep our teachers up to speed. It's an irony that our colleges and universities are searching for students and funding while school districts are taking over expensive teacher training and research functions. Formative evaluations sound good, but our time and money might be better spent getting the results a different way.

As for summative evaluations, the results of Lincoln's field test
Teachers generally agreed that the criteria are essential to good teaching. That good start, however, led to some interesting "no win" disagreements. After the experience, participants encouraged the Committee to do everything from throw the whole thing away to expand the form because it needed to include every conceivable contribution any teacher might ever make. That kind of diverse input should tell us there’s no way to win, and appraisal won’t really help our public-relations campaign. If teachers believe in their hearts that appraisal is a farce, they will scuttle the plan in their churches, the grocery stores, their neighborhoods, and everywhere they feel safe to speak their minds.

Let’s consider whether teachers believe that appraisals are a farce. Routine appraisals aren’t very telling because they generally just provide an opportunity for the administrator to say something nice about the teacher’s work. Once in a while a principal will deliver an unpopular message and ruffle feathers for a while, but usually everything will get back to normal by the start of the next year. But how about when push comes to shove? Do appraisals deal with incompetents? Possibly. Observations provide opportunity, at least. If the administrator has a good grasp of communications, he or she ought to be able to tell whether the teacher and students are connecting. When they are not, the administrator should be insightful enough to understand the reasons and offer help. If efforts to help don’t pay off, the teacher should be fired. Have they been? Not in the public’s mind, at least.

Well, there are some reasons. The most important in current reform movement thinking is that tenure stands in the way. The public believes that teachers can’t be fired. A lot of administrators think that teachers can’t be fired. Some facts might help us ascertain the truth of the matter. According to the Nebraska State Education Association, the division of teacher rights opened 321 job security case files last year. Nebraska has about 18,000 teachers, so that makes the percent of teachers in trouble about 1.7%. Sometimes, teachers anticipated trouble and solved the problem, sometimes they overexaggerated an incident which was quickly forgotten. Of those 321 cases, however, 197 teachers were really given notice of dismissal or contract amendment. Of those, 138 were reinstated without a hearing, and 34 were re-signed.

There were Board hearings in 25 of the cases. In 20 of those, the Board upheld the administration, and it reversed the administration in only 5 instances. Clearly, the politicians aren’t thwarting their administrators. Moreover, there have only been an average of 9 litigations concerning teacher terminations in each of the past 3
years, and those were generally instances where there were gross procedural errors, such as failure to give timely notice. The myth that a teacher can't be fired is certainly bigger than the reality.

So why would there be incompetents in the classroom? And why would evaluation have such a bad name? For one thing, our evaluations often don't present persuasive documentation, so they invite disagreement. For another, administrators have too long taken the easy way out and "counselling" teachers out of the profession. I say they have taken the easy way, because when a problem teacher goes away, nobody has to say for certain what was wrong. No one has to prove a case. No one has to risk looking bad. Some administrators pride themselves on the kind way they handle the teacher to save them public disgrace.

On the other hand, life is a private nightmare for the person who decides to leave because of such counseling. I can tell you why someone would voluntarily resign under such circumstances. It's because they become convinced that they aren't good. Or, they become afraid not to. They become increasingly unhappy on the job, and frustrated with what they consider unreasonable obstacles. Or, they believe that their co-workers think they are awful. Whatever the particular reason, you can be sure that the devastating effects of such administrative "counselling" ruin lives far more often than termination actions. Take it from the person who talks them into hospitals or out of suicidal thoughts or just helps them through the endless late night hours on the phone chasing the personal feelings of uselessness. It's kinder to let an employee be angry because they were fired.

Without all of the manipulation and effort to reveal to a teacher that he or she has a terrible professional flaw, school boards can and do take quick, unwavering action to dismiss incompetent teachers. Few straight-forward, well-documented cases make it to a hearing. Almost all of the hotly contested, hard-fought termination cases arise from administrative overkill that reeks of unfairness. Don't all those cases where the teachers were reinstated prove that it's hard to fire teachers? That all depends on whether we believe that remediation cured them. It is certainly possible for teachers to be able to change troublesome behavior when it is spelled out for them with sensitivity and a sincere desire to help. In that respect, appraisal processes can clearly work when the administrator is able to state the deficiencies and solutions.

Are there other reasons teachers would think appraisals are a farce? Well, the process of formative appraisal that we would all like to think takes place, generally boils down to the teacher hav-
ing to think up some good sounding "job targets" or goals, or what have you. Sometime during the year, the principal will come into contact with the teacher, and make a judgment about how they are doing, in general. If the teacher doesn't do anything to cause trouble during that year, life goes on uneventfully.

Many of you are probably out there thinking to yourselves, "That's certainly the way it used to be, and it sounds lousy. Good thing we've moved into the new era of principals as instructional leaders and we make them set job targets, too."

Don't kid yourselves. Look at the way job targets for educators have been improved. On the theory that student improvement can be measured, most job targets these days set goals for effecting student outcomes. How could anyone argue with the fact that good teachers get good results from students? I won't argue this involved question here, but I will tell you that virtually every teacher I have represented in termination has produced valid evidence of student achievement on standardized tests. The link between cause and effect does not stand up under challenge, and may create a new nightmare school districts don't need.

Of course it helps a school to have a leader who sets high expectations. Some new principals attack their employees with an enthusiastic, energetic involvement in instruction. And it works just fine with teachers who are ready for a new burst of inspiration and with relatively new teachers who are still fresh and rested. I predict, however, that these efforts are doomed to failure, too. Why? Simply because most of the new breed of administrators do not focus on how to make the teacher's work easier. Far too often, they want to change the cosmetics: make everyone look energetic, have everyone smiling, keep teachers on task at fast-forward speed. Or worse, they want all teachers to teach just like they do.

Most of us, even educators, never face the truth that we ask elementary teachers to teach 16 or 17 subjects to 29 individual students in 6 1/2 hours every day. They revise curriculum, or at least implement new curriculum in about a fifth of the subjects every year. In addition, we demand that they learn about Madeline Hunter, begin using computers, coordinate their work by meeting with a team of people, help plan for special education students, stay healthy so they don't use much sick leave, attend open houses and PTA meetings, stop smoking at work (if they ever had time to anyway), walk the kids to and from the cafeteria, conference with parents, and stop arguing about having to stay for required meetings. A principal who wants something additional better not expect them to rejoice. We're lucky that we have as few insurrections
as we do. Every new, bright idea that we heap on our classrooms diverts energy from teaching.

Still, in spite of those who muddle around with things, our schools are effective. That's a good start to what I have to tell you about how teachers believe appraisals can help them.

First, administrators can use the current trends in appraisal to help teachers become more effective. As the administrator spends less time on office work and more time out in the classrooms, he or she should be able to discover ways to simplify the work load of teachers and provide needed resources. In the course of revising curriculum, we need to clean it up: take away irrelevant and less important material; find ways to reduce clerical demands and stop unnecessary paper work; listen to teachers' ideas about how to solve problems; eliminate unnecessary meetings; give teachers options about materials and supplies; and not create new problems by pitting teachers against each other and dumping administrative duties on them.

Administrators should be able to find ways to encourage creativity and improvement in teaching. They should be able to reward professional development if they have time to find out what the teachers are really working on instead of running around trying to get everyone to look busy with the latest fad. Administrators should be much better able to appreciate what's good about their staffs and be able to defend them from critics and promote them to the general public.

Given everything that we know about what works in the classroom, and what we know to be the truth about education law, administrators must be able to get rid of teachers who can't perform. If administrators ever want to build credibility and inspire loyalty in teachers, they are going to have to produce—by solving the most dramatic problems. Appraisal will no longer be a farce if administrators get rid of bad teachers before they start "fixing" good ones.

I have discussed appraisals as teachers see them: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good is encouraging. Schools can improve if we are smart about it. Teachers like to grow and feel fulfilled. Teachers will live up to extremely high expectations when they are allowed to dream up ways to flourish. Once some teachers move forward, others will follow, when they are encouraged to do so in a natural, nonthreatening way. Schools can use what psychologists know about developing self-actualized veteran workers to build a highly motivated teaching force.

The bad seems too easy. In our efforts to combat the critics and
build good public relations, we can get the definition of success so warped that schools can never succeed. We can all (public, educators, and legislators) be diverted by the irrelevant, and teachers can spend so much energy and time on "reforming" that they have nothing left to give their students. Good teachers can be thrown "off stride" by uninformed advice or directives and stop connecting with student learners. And they can become so suspicious, afraid, or just tired of the boss that good communication with management becomes impossible.

Finally, there are some ugly possibilities lurking below the surface. Our systems can revert to unhappy, paternalistic days where "bosses" didn't have to earn respect. Bigotry can be allowed to feed on "demerit" pay and selection processes for staffing elitist schools. Academic freedom may be lost as teachers are forced to "teach to tests" and standardize all results and achievements. Finally, teachers may continue to live in fear that as the political atmosphere shifts with various public expectations of the schools they may at any time get snarled in the termination trap.

Those of us in positions to understand the high cost of progress have an obligation to cut out the false starts. We can just stop imposing faddish new programs and making irrational demands on teachers. If we want public education to succeed, we have a responsibility to protect schools from unworkable quick fixes by standing up to be counted. Good administrators need more common sense than instructional leadership.

Education can look around at other social problems in order to better understand our dilemmas. As with teaching, a number of professions are experiencing an explosion of potential. Consider what we know about medicine these days. There are new cures and new medicines every day. Local hospitals must all have state of the art equipment and high-quality specialists available for every procedure. And medical costs are astronomical. Just like in education, what we can afford to provide can't possibly live up to what we could provide in theory.

If we let the public demand the ideal, they will have to find a way to pay—by giving up some of the service they value as well as by paying out tax dollars. Good general practitioners would probably not have time to serve as good practitioners if we insisted that they had to try to stay abreast of all the new advances in organ transplants.

The same is true of teachers. The advances in what we know about teaching aren't necessarily affordable. Can we afford low class size? Computerized and highly individualized materials?
How about releasing teachers from classroom responsibility every 4 or 5 years for retraining? How about giving teachers release time and paying them to write curriculum that really works? How about giving teachers time to coordinate their work?

Are you thinking that the public won't every pay for such things? Maybe you're right. That's why teachers think appraisals are presumptuous. With all of the relatively inexpensive ways to lighten the burden and make schooling more successful, it's almost sinful to attack teachers first.

When was the last time you heard a teacher say that it would be helpful if the principal would just come into their room and tell them which students aren't on task? Or tell them how much time they spent trying to organize their materials? When did you last hear a teacher say that if the principal would only get all teachers to make out lesson plans in a uniform way it would make teaching a lot easier? Maybe it's time for the rest of us to use appraisal to find out what is happening in our classrooms and to look for effective ways to help. Maybe if we knew enough to really be proud of our teachers, we could eliminate much of our public relations problem. If you haven't looked lately, you can't possibly understand the amazing work of our teachers. If you do know all the miracles being performed, when was the last time you told anyone about it?

Now, that's the kind of appraisal that teachers would find helpful!