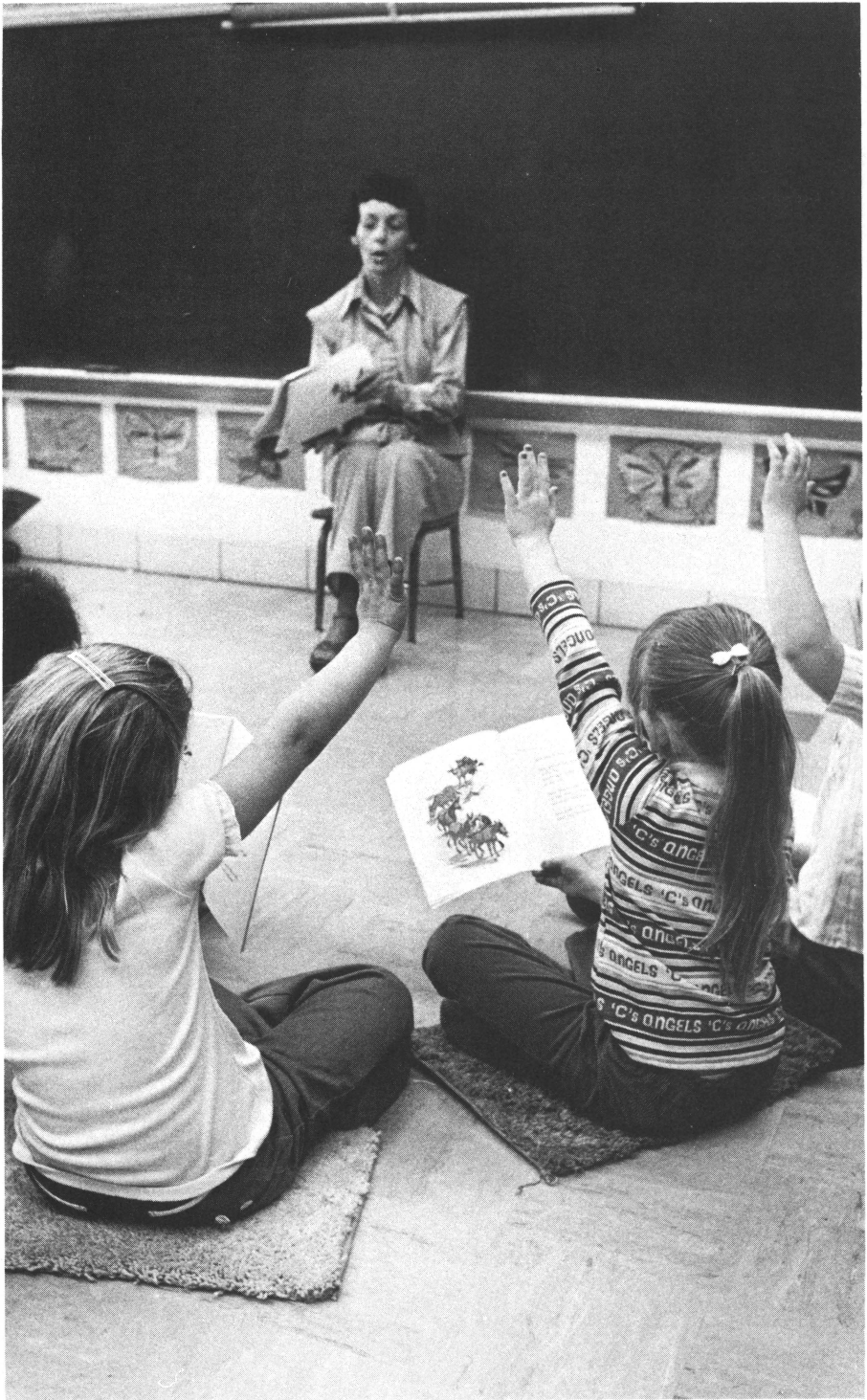


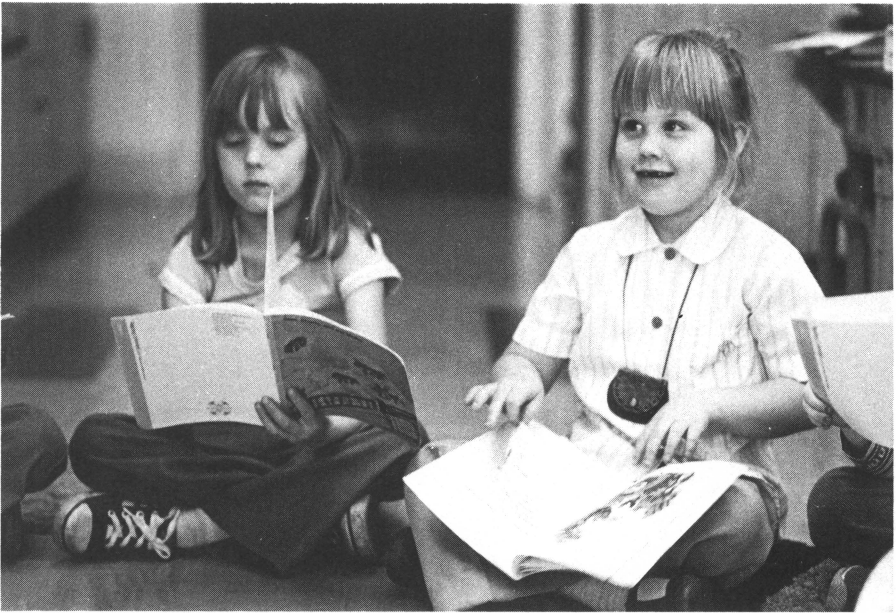
Evaluation of the Reading Program

# Decisions for Improvement



Extension Division—University of Missouri-Columbia  
Program of Continuing Professional Education





For many classroom teachers “curriculum evaluation” brings to mind many negative thoughts and feelings. As one teacher noted when informed about an impending evaluation, “What are they going to tell us we’re doing wrong now?” Perhaps this attitude reflects the increased pressure classroom teachers have experienced in recent years from all segments of society. Accountability in schools is no longer considered a theoretical concept, but is today a fact of life for most teachers. Nowhere is this interest and concern more prevalent than with reading instruction. Parents, as well as the community, are questioning the quality of reading instruction currently being given to their children. “Are children being taught to read as well today as in the past?” If so, “Why do so many young people graduate from school today, unable to read?” In an attempt to answer these questions schools are increasingly turning to various forms of internal evaluation.

## Reading Program Evaluation

There are numerous methods which have been used, either separately or in combination, to evaluate a school’s reading program. They include the use of faculty questionnaires, limited classroom observation, and review of student reading achievement scores on standardized tests. While each of these techniques has varying degrees of merit, they tend to overlook or minimize the one vital ingredient which must be present in any successful reading program and that of course is the personal commitment to excellence on the part of the



individual classroom teacher. Without considering this factor, any attempt at evaluation becomes superficial.

It is the assumption of this monograph that before an effective reading program evaluation can be undertaken in a truly meaningful manner the following conditions must be met:

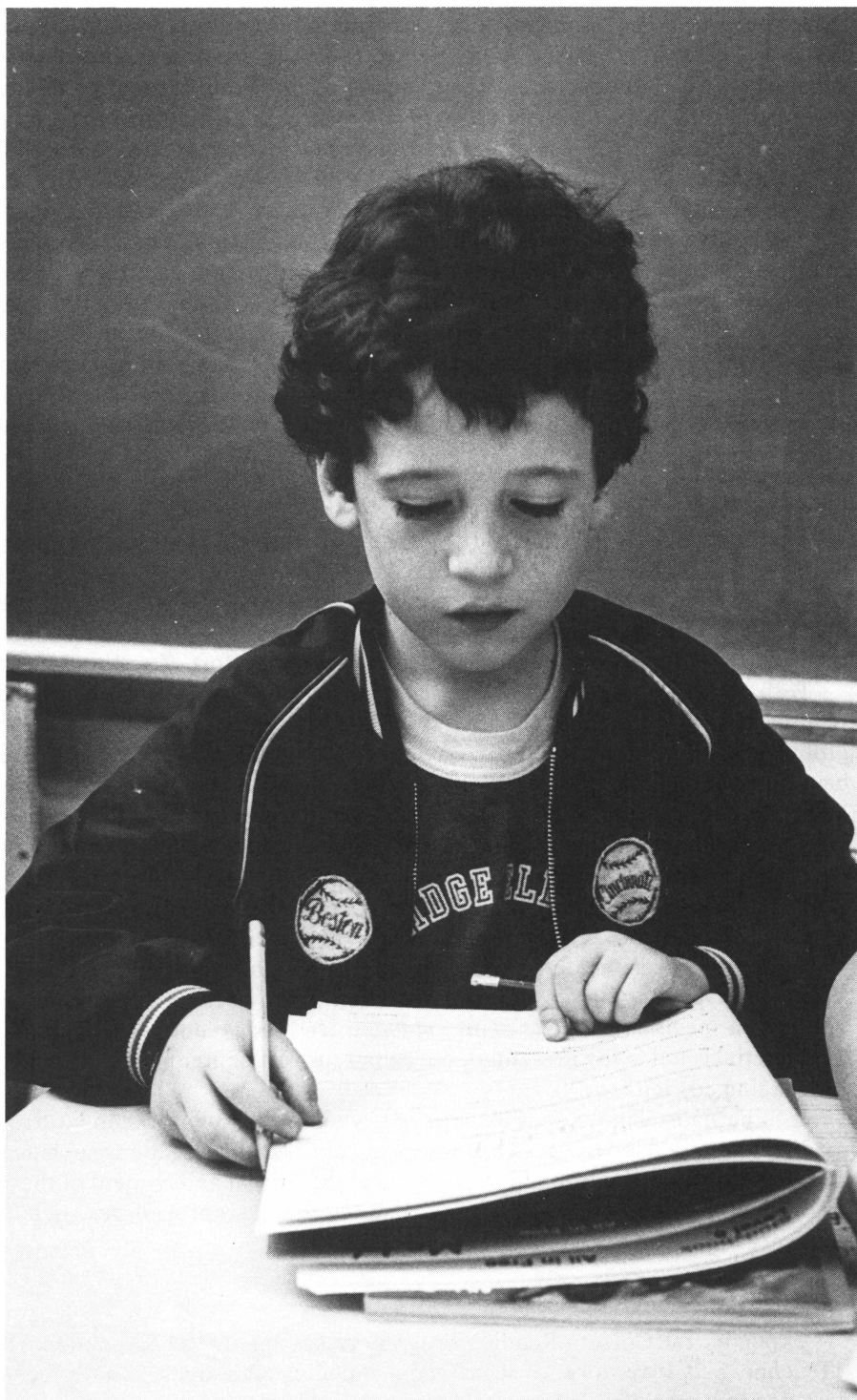
1. Both the teachers and the administrators are in agreement as to the reasons for conducting an evaluation of the current reading program in a school.
2. The value of the individual classroom teacher should be recognized as being the most important aspect of any successful reading program.
3. For a reading evaluation to have any merit it must be primarily a self-evaluation by the teaching staff, both as individuals and as a group.
4. The faculty members must assume the responsibility for the openness and candor needed in the evaluation process.
5. On completion of the reading program evaluation, each classroom teacher must be willing to honestly consider suggested changes.

## Implementation of a Reading Program Evaluation

The following suggestions for developing a reading program evaluation are general and are designed to be easily modified according to local needs.

### **Determination of Existing Conditions for Change**

Before effective changes can be undertaken in a school's reading program



there needs to be made an accurate assessment of the current instructional situation. While this first step in the evaluation process may seem obvious, it is surprising how often teachers who are members of a reading program do not know detailed information about existing conditions beyond what is taking place in their own classrooms. Thus, before any changes are considered information must be gathered on the reading effort in a school as well as the reading program of each teacher.

The collection of information, both formal and informal, on the complete reading program in a school or even a district-wide system can often have important implications for change. The formal sources most commonly used have been the results of standardized reading tests. Informal sources have included individual assessments and teacher perceptions of the current reading program. Frequently, areas of weakness and strength (comprehension, content reading, study skills) become evident when an investigation of this type is undertaken.

### **Formal Information for Change**

For many school districts a review of their reading program has traditionally been to simply examine the results of the standardized reading test scores collected on their students over the last few years. While this procedure has some merit there are also a number of rather significant limitations inherent in such a narrow survey of the total reading effort of a school.

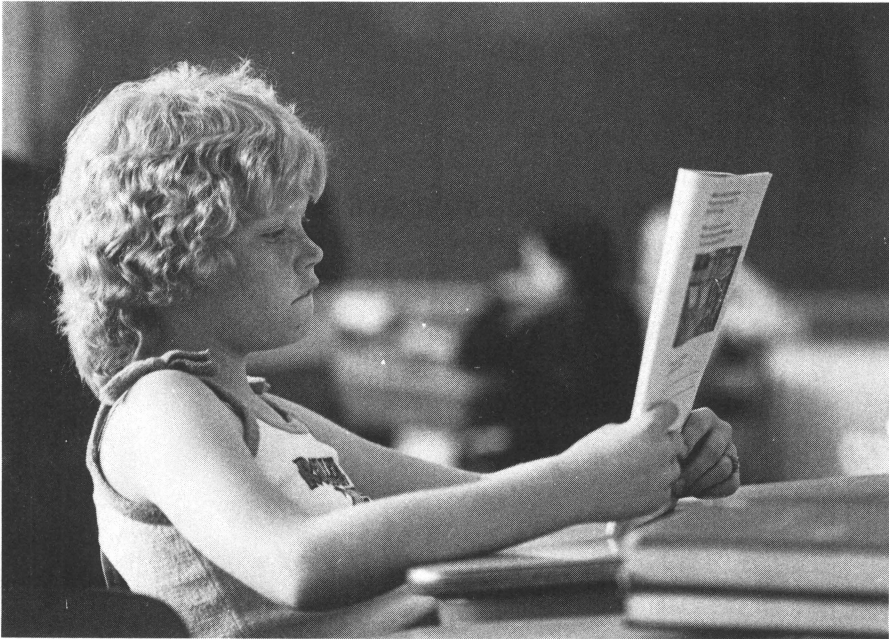
Perhaps the most important reason for using the results of standardized reading tests is to note general trends in the reading performance of large groups of students over an extended period of time. Because these tests are based on national norms, local reading achievement can be compared to this large population. In addition, standardized reading tests can be used to review significant changes within a school district's reading curriculum by comparing current reading proficiency with previous years' results.

While there are advantages in the use of standardized reading tests for the general evaluation of a reading program in these ways, a word of caution is also warranted. Any results obtained, no matter how significant they may seem, should be reviewed with the utmost care. Often, when a school or district does poorly in a specific reading area on a standardized test, it does not mean that the material is not being presented, but rather the test content does not match the reading curriculum.

It is perhaps a more serious situation when the results of standardized reading tests are used to suggest changes in very specific situations such as a classroom or for a single student. Because of the format and content of these instruments (limited number of questions, cultural bias) procedures such as these are unjustified.

### **Informal Information for Change**

Appendix I, "Current Reading Program Assessment," and Appendix II, "Teacher Self-Inventory of Classroom Reading Practices," have been designed to help collect informal information on the current reading program



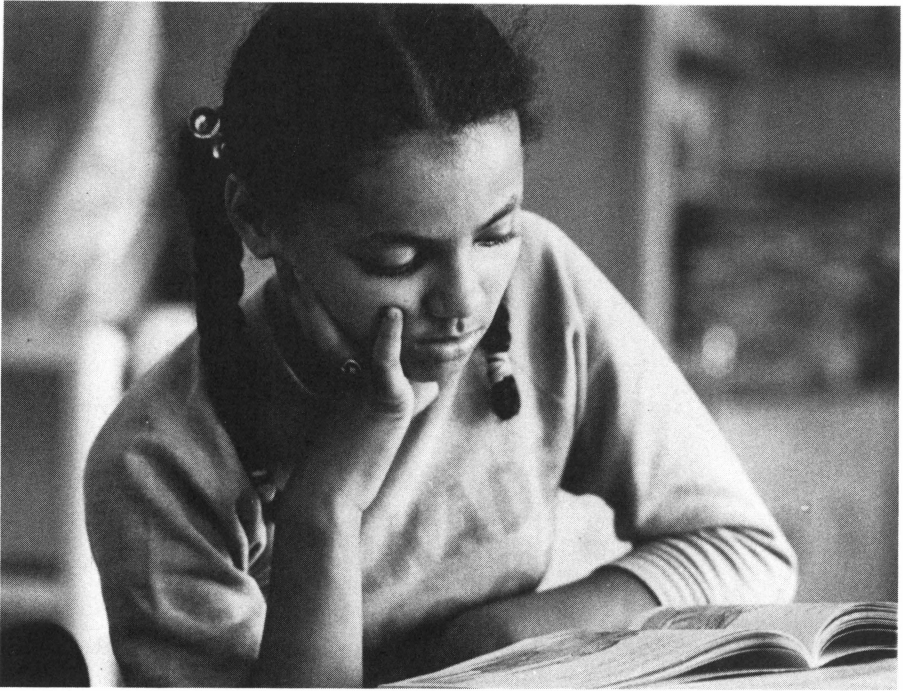
at both the school and the classroom levels. Each of these forms should be completed anonymously, thereby guaranteeing freedom to express honest opinions and suggestions on the current condition of the school's reading program.

These materials are designed for two purposes in mind. Initially, they can be simply a method of collecting informal information on various aspects of the reading program. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, they may be the means for opening discussion between teachers on common concerns and feelings about their respective classroom reading efforts. This discussion can lead to teachers learning from each other. They will have an opportunity to share what has been successfully used in their classrooms and what has been discarded because it was not effective.

### **Motivation for Change**

This monograph is based on the belief that meaningful evaluation for change in a reading program rests largely on the perceptions and attitudes of the individual classroom teacher. It is much more than just identifying problem areas and concerns. Regardless of the amount of information gathered it will be ineffective until teachers are motivated to consider these results in relation to what is currently taking place in their classrooms.

Bringing together the teaching staff and the collected information on the reading program is the most critical aspect of the reading evaluation process and often the most difficult. It requires much more than just simply summarizing and reporting what was found on the survey forms. It is critical at this



stage for teachers to be actively involved if implementation and change actually are to take place.

One of the most useful approaches for encouraging teachers to change is simply to provide each teacher as much opportunity as possible to interact and discuss the results of the reading surveys with other faculty members. It is frequently the case that in these encounters teachers for the first time become aware of common problems being faced by the staff. Rather than feel alone in their concern they now realize others may share the same worry. In addition, not only are problems discussed but often workable solutions are also created. The simple knowledge that they are not alone in having problems with reading instruction is often sufficient motivation for change.

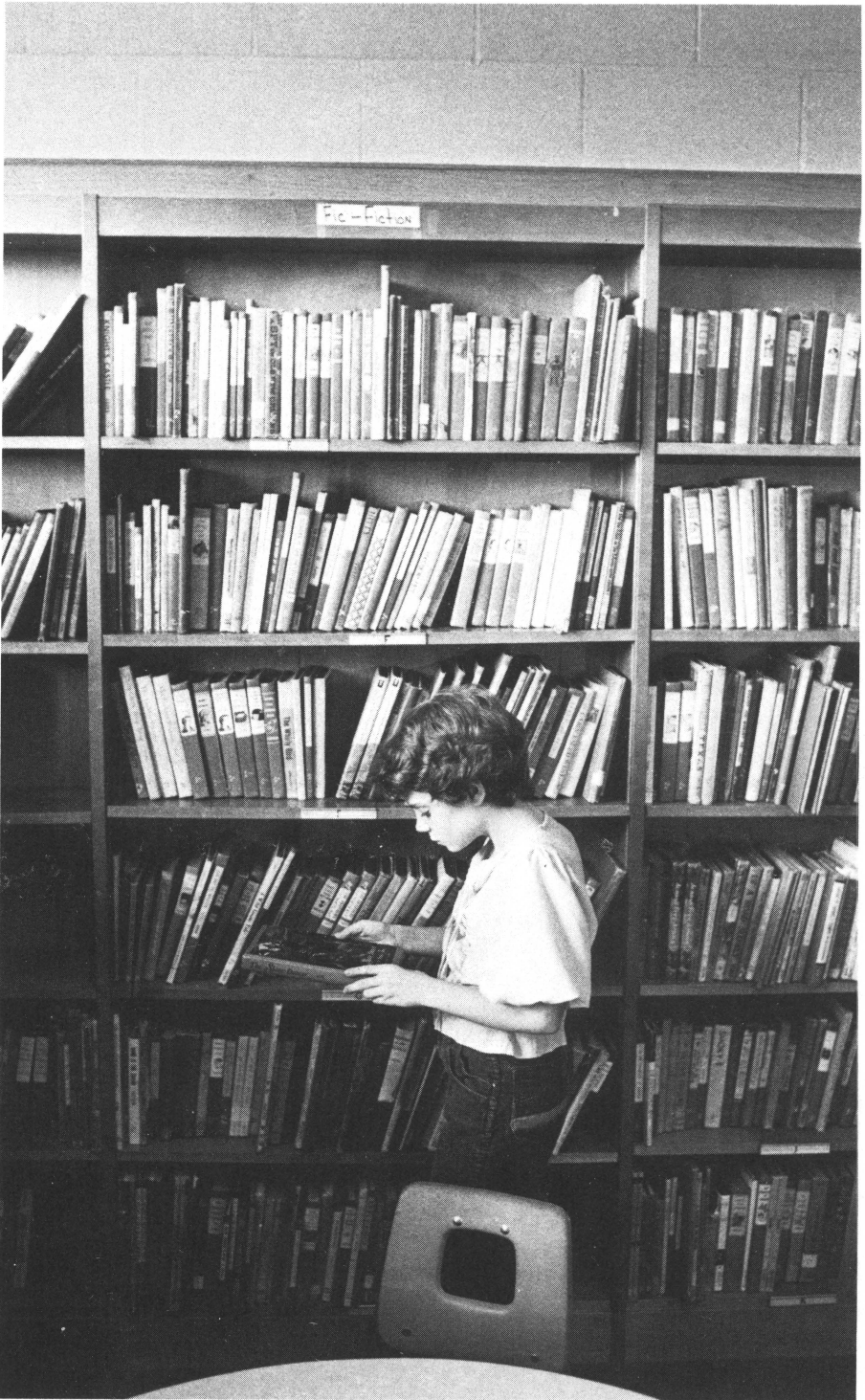
These discussion periods between teachers are so vital a part of the evaluation process they need to be scheduled by the administration in the same manner as are teachers' meetings. The degree to which effective communication takes place during these periods will largely determine the eventual success or failure of the reading program evaluation.

### **Evaluation for Change**

Besides a willingness to change another critical element in any evaluation of a reading program must also be the establishment of some format for documenting the changes undertaken. Without this format it is often difficult to know whether any improvement has actually taken place, especially after a







period of time has passed. The following suggestions might be considered when determining the effectiveness of a reading program evaluation on determining eventual changes in classroom reading instruction.

1. Report the results of the reading program evaluation in a meaningful manner to the teaching faculty.

As suggested previously, Appendices I and II have been designed to be used in the collection of relevant information on both the total reading program as well as each individual teacher's classroom efforts. A first step in the use of these forms would be to summarize their contents, noting frequently mentioned problem areas. This information could then be used as a basis for teacher discussion, leading to meaningful future changes and improvements.

It might also be helpful to have the complete results of the reading program evaluation summarized in a written report which would be available to the teaching faculty. This would enable each teacher a more complete understanding of the total program, with both its success and problem areas identified.

2. Establish target goals for implementing the indicated changes both in terms of stated objectives as well as the time period needed.

Once the basic information on a school's reading program has been collected and thoroughly discussed by the teaching faculty, the atmosphere should be conducive for change where appropriate. Change should not be by decree but rather because each teacher is able to effectively relate to what is being done in the individual classroom as compared to the total reading program.

Appendix III, "Implications of the Reading Program Evaluation," has been designed to help teachers formulate specific ideas on changes in each classroom. It is to be used on a long term basis as a means of self-improvement by the teaching staff.

It may be used in a number of ways as an encouragement to make appropriate changes in the schools reading program at both the system level as well as in the individual classroom setting. Once common problems have been identified as being of concern in the total reading program, teachers can then take appropriate corrective measures in their own classrooms. Thus, problem solving moves from the general to the very specific in terms of the change process. There is the additional benefit of teachers knowing that others are having the same problems and they are not the only ones attempting to make changes in their classroom reading instruction.

3. Assess the impact of suggested changes and the need for further evaluation.

Each teacher, after completing Appendix III, can establish realistic goals within a specified time period for making changes in their individual classroom reading programs. At the conclusion of that time, the teachers can be encouraged to share experiences they have had in attempting to make the suggested changes. This should be an opportunity to share both successes and

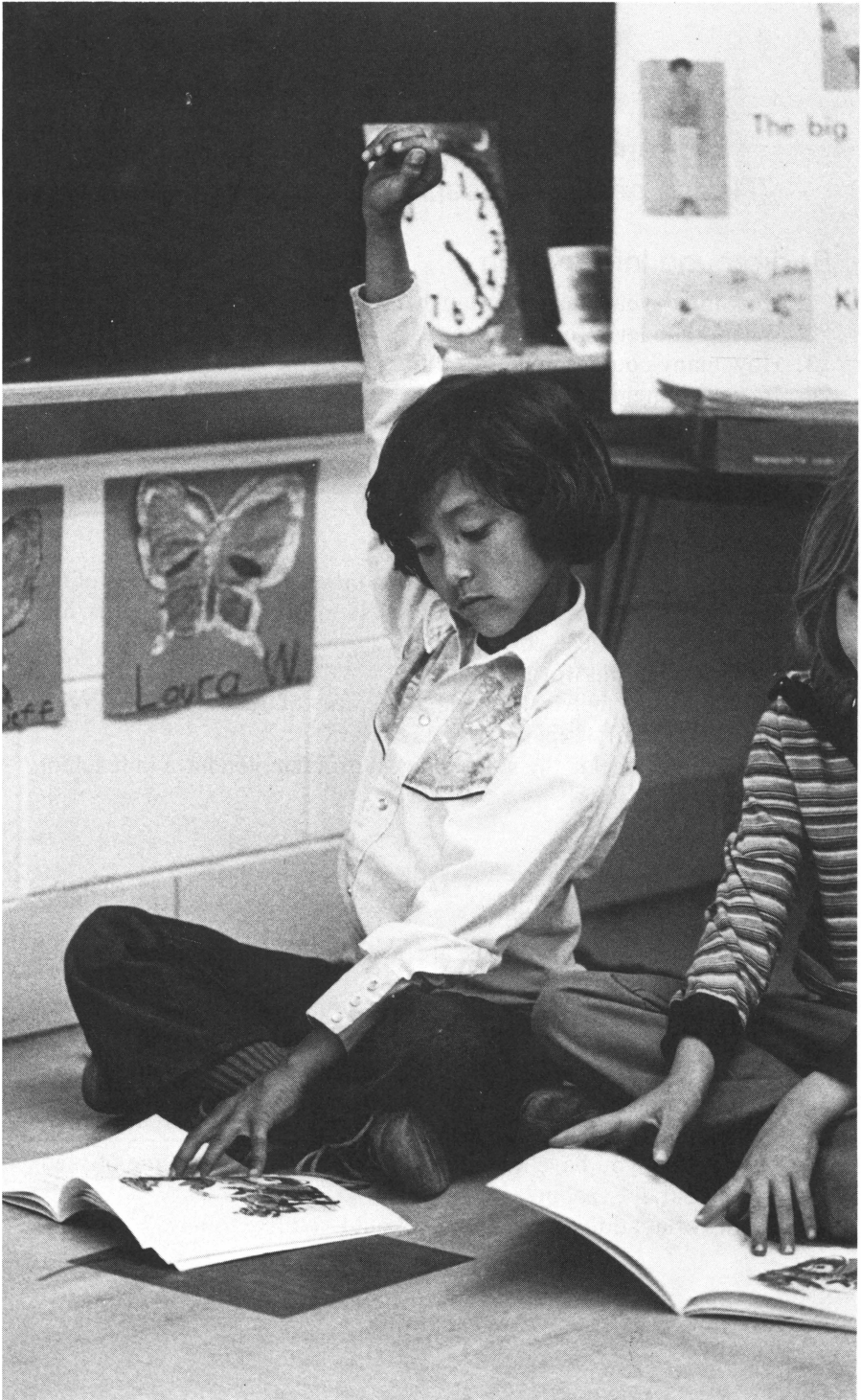


failures in these activities, with the goal of developing new challenges for future classroom reading instruction. In essence then, this one time evaluation has become a continuing process of self-examination and improvement.

## Conclusion

Appendix IV is a summary of the procedures which have been discussed in this monograph and is designed to be used as a checklist for a school district when undertaking a reading program evaluation. This outline might also be used, initially, as an introduction to a faculty on the idea of conducting a reading program evaluation.

As noted throughout this monograph, any reading program evaluation is largely dependent for its eventual outcome upon the knowledge and attitudes each classroom teacher has concerning both the total reading program in a school as well as their own individual efforts. Without a commitment by each member of the teaching staff to not only be willing to participate in the evaluation process but in the final analysis to honestly consider appropriate changes when they are indicated, any reading program evaluation becomes little more than organized "busywork." The authors of this monograph encourage school teachers to consider the benefits of a carefully developed reading evaluation.







## APPENDIX II

### Teacher Self-Inventory of Classroom Reading Practices

The following teacher inventory is intended to encourage you to think about your own classroom efforts in the area of reading instruction. While general in nature, each statement is designed to assist you in thinking about specific aspects of your own classroom reading program. As you consider each statement try to recall how you structure your teaching of reading to meet the stated goal or objective.

The ten statements below are frequently made about teacher practices in effective reading programs. Indicate by drawing a line around the appropriate number the extent to which your classroom reading program shows each characteristic or practice. If it is found almost always in your classroom, circle "1." If it is found most of the time, circle "2." If found sometimes circle "3." If it is found very seldom or never, circle "4." If you are undecided, circle "5." If you think this characteristic or practice is not desirable, then circle "6." As a reminder, the rating scale is presented here.

**1—Almost always**  
**2—Most of the time**  
**3—Sometimes**

**4—Seldom or never**  
**5—Undecided**  
**6—Not desirable**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>I.</b> The ultimate goal of my classroom reading program is to show each child the value of reading in their personal lives as both a source of information and as a valuable recreational pursuit. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>II.</b> In all my reading activities I respect the self-image and individual worth of each child.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>III.</b> I know the objectives and goals of the total reading program in my school and the role my efforts contribute to this effort.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>IV.</b> My classroom reading program reflects an understanding of the fact that reading is closely related to the other language arts—writing, speaking, and listening.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>V.</b> I am aware and respect the differences in each of my students, adjusting reading instruction to meet these individual needs.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>VI.</b> The use of reading materials in my classroom reflects a thorough understanding on my part of their content and the place they have in a total reading program.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>VII.</b> My reading instruction reflects a belief about the reading process as being a personal search for meaning rather than just the mastery of isolated skills.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>VIII.</b> The child experiencing difficulty in learning to read is provided with the appropriate instruction whether it is in the classroom or with a special teacher.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>IX.</b> I am enthusiastic about my reading instruction and am open to suggestions and new ideas related to these classroom activities.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |



# APPENDIX III

## Implications of the Reading Program Evaluation

Based on the review of the information collected about your school's total reading program and discussion with your fellow teachers concerning common problems, complete the following questions.

1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses identified through the evaluation process about the current school reading program?
2. How do these conclusions relate to the efforts in your classroom reading instruction?
3. What implications or changes are you considering in your daily reading instruction based on the results of this evaluation? Specific areas which might be noted include:

	<b>Does Not Need Changing</b>	<b>Needs to be Improved</b>	<b>Expected time needed for Change</b>
Basal reading program	_____	_____	_____
Comprehension	_____	_____	_____
Content Area Reading	_____	_____	_____
Recreational reading	_____	_____	_____
Study Skills	_____	_____	_____
Language arts (writing, speaking, listening)	_____	_____	_____
Individualizing instruction (gifted, average, and remedial readers)	_____	_____	_____
Classroom reading organization	_____	_____	_____
Reading evaluation (formal and informal)	_____	_____	_____
Other (specify)	_____	_____	_____



## APPENDIX IV

### Summary and Checklist of Steps to Consider In A Reading Program Evaluation

#### **I. Establishing the Setting or Atmosphere for Change**

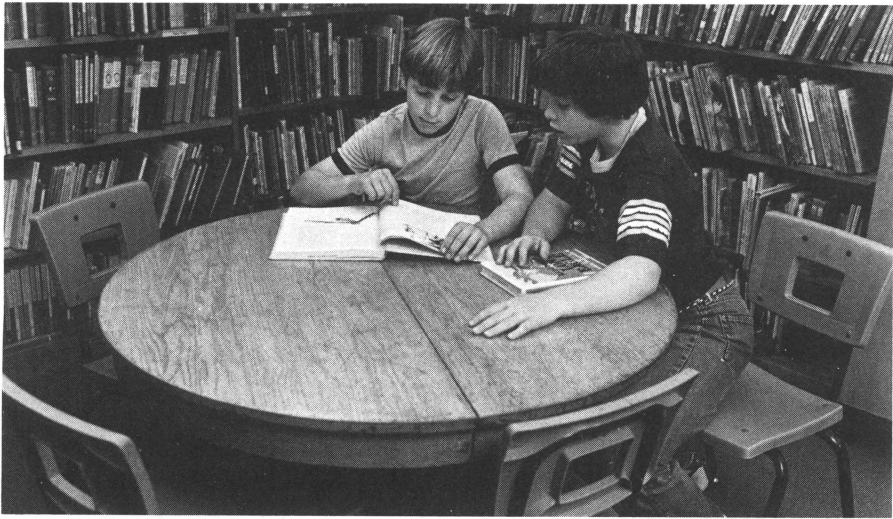
- \_\_\_\_\_ Faculty agreement on the reasons and the need for a reading program evaluation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determination of the procedures which are to be followed in the reading program evaluation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Willingness on the part of each teacher to consider the appropriate changes suggested as a result of the reading program evaluation.

#### **II. Collecting Formal Information**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Results of standardized reading tests
- \_\_\_\_\_ Results of standardized achievement batteries (with particular emphasis on the language arts sections)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Results of other formal sources of relevant information (basic skills tests, national evaluations, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Summarizing the information gathered from the formal sources.

#### **III. Collecting Informal Information**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Determining teacher attitudes and knowledge about current conditions of the reading program (faculty background, cur-



rent use of reading materials, etc.) Use Appendix I to collect this information.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Collecting teacher perceptions of individual classroom efforts in reading education. Use Appendix II to collect this information.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Results of individual assessment procedures (Informal reading tests, subjective reading inventories, teacher constructed tests, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Summarizing the information gathered from the informal sources.

#### **IV. Process of Change**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Informing the teaching staff in a meaningful manner the results of the reading program evaluation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Scheduling the necessary time for the faculty to interact among themselves on the results and proposed changes in the current reading program.

#### **V. Implications of the Reading Program Evaluation (short-term and long-term planning)**

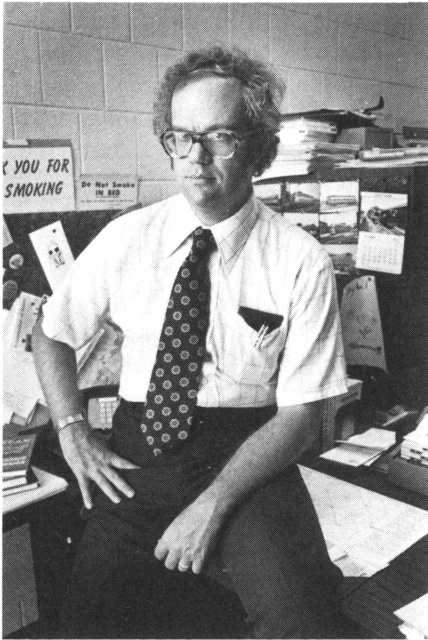
- \_\_\_\_\_ Encouraging the sharing of experiences by the teachers related to the new reading program efforts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Establishing target goals for implementing the indicated changes both in terms of specific objectives as well as the anticipated time which will be needed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Changes related to the total school reading program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Changes related to the individual teacher's classroom reading efforts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine the impact of changes in the reading program when they have been in place for a pre-determined length of time.

Evaluation or appraisal is one of the more difficult areas of any social process—including education. This is so not only because of the many different perspectives from which it is possible to view any phenomenon and thus conclude different realities, but also because of the very complex nature of these kinds of activities. Even so, evaluation has taken place. In complex institutions such as schools and in complex learning tasks such as reading, extreme care must be exercised so as to avoid a response which is too narrow, too broad, too focused or not focused enough. For the wrong response may make a good situation bad or a poor situation worse—a cure worse than the disease.

Professor Robinson and Mrs. Hulett have taken these dimensions into account very well in this monograph. They have assumed, quite correctly, that evaluation is a complex matter and provided a structure to accommodate the complexity, that identification of needed change requires the best judgment of many persons, and that securing needed change requires wide involvement and commitment. Otherwise, the end product is form without substance—words without deeds.

The material in this monograph should provide valuable guidance to those who are seriously interested in evaluation of their reading programs either in a single classroom, a building, or an entire school system.

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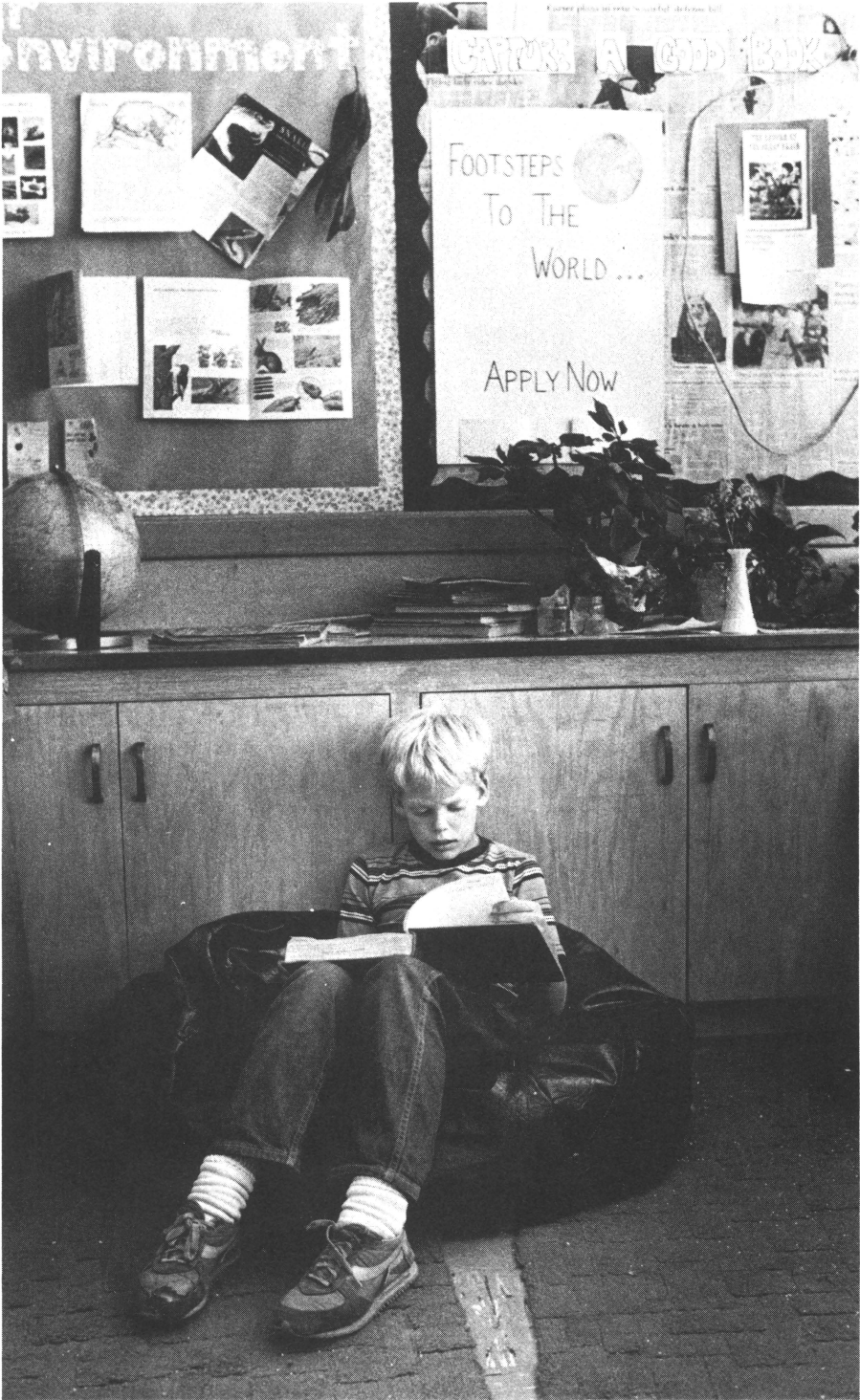
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