An Assessment and Evaluation: Interview with Veronica Lacey

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Recently I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Veronica Lacey about several issues related to testing and evaluation concerns. Although time was limited Dr. Lacey obliged with candid and forthright responses.

Chodzinski: This issue is about testing, in particular it focuses on issues and concerns facing school boards, teachers, students and parents. What do you see as the most pressing/current issue?

Lacey: I believe that there is a need for teachers' to become comfortable with the current information and language of assessment and for them to obtain expertise in assessment and evaluation. Currently there exists an expressed discomfort and this needs to be remedied. I see the role of Faculties of Education as pivotal in this regard.

Chodzinski: As a former director, senior administrator and teacher what are the skills and attitudes beginning teachers in fact all teachers bring to the profession?

Lacey: They must appreciate the notion of being outcome driven. They must be extremely interested in understanding the importance of knowing how to measure the impact of instruction and how to determine the success of students on performance measures and outcomes. They must recognize the individuality of students and be able to competently and professionally intervene to ensure success for all students in their care.

Chodzinski: What do you believe is the Faculty of Education's role in promoting good assessment, evaluation and reporting skills in novice teachers?

Lacey: There is only one word that comes to mind TRAINING. Every faculty should provide students with a course devoted specifically to this issue. Most important is that every faculty professor understands the principles of assessment and evaluation as they apply to school performance assessment. They need to know and teach not only the methodology and mechanics but also the philosophy and understanding related to performance appraisal. Faculties should evaluate beginning teachers for competencies in these areas to ensure guaranteed internal expertise among novice teachers.

Chodzinski: The issue of fairness in testing has received a great deal of attention since the implementation of standardized testing in Ontario. To what degree do you think the concept of fairness is being applied?

Lacey: Let's reposition the word fairness to accuracy. If standardized tests measured frame of reference we might have more confidence in the procedure. What we need to understand is that testing should be about improvement. That is to say the reason for evaluating anything is to determine improvement and how instructors might adjust to ensure success. It's much like a medical doctor who examines a child. It is not only to determine the present condition so to speak it is to determine what action would be appropriate to improve the child's health. What is extremely important is to ascertain all the conditions and then act. This means in teaching that all the variables need to be accounted for before a standardized test can be evaluated as having a worthwhile contribution to the overall success of a child in school.

Chodzinski: Much has been said about teacher testing, i.e., regarding certification. Do you have a personal view about this?

Lacey: Teacher testing is a more complex process than has been handled in Ontario. If we believe students should have the opportunity to be tested and prove success in a variety of ways and through different venues then surely teachers should be afforded the same opportunities. The recognition that learning styles play a great role in affecting school success must be applied in principle to teachers as well.
Testing should not be about how well teachers are doing but how well they are teaching. There needs to be more discussion as to the reliability and validity of the proposed model. I do believe that the profession itself should be responsible for ensuring professional growth and excellence in duty. It is incomprehensible that a teacher should expect to teach for five, ten or twenty years without seriously engaging in content and methodology to enhance practice. After all this is the very hallmark of a profession.

**Chodzinski:** Reporting to parents is a topic of great interest. Many parents, particularly in secondary schools, suggest they do not receive enough information or appropriate information about their child’s progress. What should be done to address these concerns?

**Lacey:** First and foremost, teachers should be prepared to report prospective outcomes of a course, particularly outcomes that affect passing moving on continuous progress. The key is to address concerns related to success. Parents want to know how well their child is doing and what that assessment is based on. Meeting the parent’s need for information is the most powerful marketing tool a teacher can possess. Parents are a key audience. They listen and interpret. By meeting the needs of parents in this regard you are creating avenues for advocacy.

**Other comments**

Education is in another crisis. It is in turmoil and we need to address so many issues. But the one overriding fact is that we need to ensure that teachers communicate to children that it is they whom they care about and present this fact in as honest way as possible to parents and other stakeholders.

There are times in one’s life that we are tempted to take the road less travelled. We are at that crossroad and must step up to the challenge. Those in education and responsible for children’s schooling must step up to the agenda and empower ourselves to meet these challenges. We must believe and prove to the community that we as a profession are committed, caring, creative and flexible in meeting the various challenges confronting us in these times.

I would like to declare one important fact. Teacher’s education has never been better. Faculties of Education are more equipped and better staffed to meet the professional demands of teaching new teachers. Beginning teachers are very fortunate to be attending Faculties today.