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EVALUATING THE HUMANITIES CURRICULUM PROJECT
A RETROSPECTIVE

Barry MacDonald

University of East Anglia

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The Meaning of Ralph Tyler

In the sixties, for those of us who felt it necessary to challenge the received wisdom relating to the mechanics of curriculum development, getting away from Tyler was the name of the game, the trap that had to be dismantled. Tylerism meant social engineering, behavioural objectives with an underpinning of Skinnerian psychology, narrow instrumentalism, pyschometric evaluation, and a lot of other things that made our liberal flesh creep. When Stenhouse attacked the behavioural objectives model of curriculum development, he was seen to be striking a blow against Tylerism; when we suggested as evaluators that there might be virtue in doing other things as well as testing student learning outcomes, we thought we were undermining Tyler as we endorsed Stake's New Testament. (1) When some of us 'innocently' (I mean not intending to be controversial) articulated this view of Tyler in a book on the state of the art of evaluation (2) we were surprised to be gently chided by Stake and furiously upbraided by Cronbach for totally misunderstanding the great man.

It is clear now that what we had was an ahistorical view of Tyler, a post-war redefinition of Tyler stripped of original context and reclothed in the macro-engineering of big social science. Had we known of the Eight-Year-Study we would have found that difficult to relate to the Tyler we thought we knew.

Nigel Norris, one of my colleagues at CARE, has recently written about the close correspondence between Tyler's concept of the 'service study', first published in 1930 in a book co-authored with Waples, (3) and Stenhouse's concept of the 'teacher as researcher' some 40 years later. (4) The service study, systematic investigation by teachers of classroom problems in particular settings, investigations requiring prompt results and necessarily less precise methods, was Tyler's practical solution to the problem of integrating theory and practice, evaluation and development in curriculum planning. Likewise Stenhouse saw research-based teaching as the key to integration, and to getting away from the separation of the roles of developer and evaluator. If educational policy was regarded, as he argued it ought to be, as a specification to be put to the test of teachers' research-based judgment, then both teachers and developers were co-researchers in the enterprise, thus rendering redundant the notion of an evaluator who independently decided whether the processes and products of curricula were worth recommending.

As Norris points outs, both Tyler and Stenhouse thought therefore in terms of inward looking, self-developing professional systems. Both were hostile to external

credentialling that restricted the free operation of teacher judgment, both needed a climate of liberal optimism and political indulgence to sustain such ideas. Both, for a time got it, until the locus of curriculum decision-making shifted decisively out of schools and concepts of evaluation utility became entangled with renewed bids for curriculum control and new strategies of annexation.

I will try to briefly review the development of evaluation in England and Wales over the past 20 years by taking the Humanities Curriculum project as the starting point.

The Late Sixties as a Context of Change

Looking back now from the ruins of genuinely educational discourse, it is tempting to view the sixties as the golden years of curriculum development for the education professions. The economy was thought to be, and appeared, buoyant. The social-class based organisation of secondary schooling had been decimated by the bi-partisan spread of the comprehensive school, and the leaving age was about to be raised to sixteen. Now was the time, with many teachers fearful of the threat to containment posed by cohorts of bigger and older adolescents, to launch the qualitative reform of schooling implicit in the post-war promise of secondary education for all. There was money for development as well as expansion and the teachers had won the latest battle with government over who would take charge of the necessary change.

The Schools Council, an ad hoc organisation in which government both national and local played second fiddle to committees dominated by teacher representatives, was at the helm of development policy. What was seen to be needed was a supermarket of high quality curriculum packages for the discriminating teacher consumer to choose from. Publishing firms competed eagerly for the privilege of contracts to produce the packages, only too willing to do the curriculum designers' bidding in the certainty that profits must ensue. A decade of national curriculum development projects followed, each charged with reviewing a particular area of curriculum, generally defined as a subject, sometimes within specified age limits. Curriculum development teams were composed of seconded teachers, teacher educators, and academics with impeccable pro-teacher sympathies. It was a teacher movement after all - government of the teachers, by the teachers for the teachers.

A sure-fire recipe for conservatism, you might think, and true enough it did not yield much radical thinking. But the climate also favoured the high-risk individual, and the policy of trawling the system to identify gifted individuals to lead the teams, and then leaving them alone to get on with it, was bound to throw up the odd visionary and charismatic figure like Lawrence Stenhouse, and offer them an unprecedented platform. There was a lot of optimism about grassroots responsiveness to

imaginative ideas, and for a period, never to be repeated, the transformation of schooling was largely in the hands of a few individuals, with minimal oversight from their sponsors.

True enough, there were evaluators, usually one attached to each project, accountable to the project director. Evaluation was a new thing and not thought at the time to be very important, basically just a bit of help with finding out how the trial schools were getting on with the new curricula. An attempt by the research community, in the form of the National Foundation for Educational Research, to impose the systematic orthodoxy of the behavioural objectives model on the neophyte evaluators was rejected by the Council. The Foundation, like other centres associated with testing and selection for secondary schools, had already lost its authority following the abolition of the 11+, exposed as class-based rather than meritocratic by the new sociologists of educational opportunity in the late fifties. The evaluators therefore, or at least those who weren't hamstrung by their Project directors, enjoyed for a while a vacuum of academic accountability. Most of them in any case had very shaky research credentials, and preferred to invent their craft rather than adapt one they were less comfortable with.

As I have already indicated this is not to say there was no received view of the task. Hilda Taba (5) was the standard reference work, Tyler (6) the inspiration, Bloom (7) the manual for those seeking guidance. There was much talk about objectives setting and measurement of outcomes, but little appetite for that kind of technical rationality, little sense of how difficult it might become to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new programmes, and little pressure to adopt the precepts of proof. And when Stenhouse (8) launched his public career by persuasively demolishing the most fashionable form of instrumental reasoning, substituting for it the notions of intrinsically worthwhile content and a process model of value, there was a general sigh of relief that professional judgment had been reinstated, at least as an option. Professional judgment left teacher authority intact.

HCP Evaluation, and After

Conditions were good. There was no relevant British tradition, no experts, no pressure, no great hurry. The HCP team were supremely confident and very able, not at all threatened initially or subsequently by the 'independent' evaluation we all agreed was appropriate. Stenhouse had ideas about evaluation, but did not seek to influence evaluation decisions. Basically, and I say this tentatively , I think he hoped that I would play Boswell to his Johnson. It didn't quite work out like that and, as the evaluation began to get some public attention, even threatening at times to rival the Project in terms of the academic interest it aroused, Stenhouse grew more intellectually hostile to the concept of a separate evaluation

role which he saw, probably correctly, as cutting across and undermining the argument for research-based development as a unified enterprise.

So the conditions were good. Much more important to the way the evaluation evolved conceptually and methodologically was the fact that the project was radical in its implications and extremely challenging in its practice. Although its implementation, initially in trial schools and subsequently more widely, was limited to a few teachers in a few classrooms, the values embodied in its experimental pedagogy were so profoundly at odds with the institutionalised habits, skills and assumptions of schooling that its impact went well beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Basically what Stenhouse and his team were testing was the proposition that ordinary pupils (the children of the working class, if you like) were capable of reasoning and understanding at a level thought to be confined, if not always achieved, to the undergraduate seminar, but that the kind of learning they were capable of and the kind of teaching they habitually received, were mutually exclusive activities.

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that within a short time of taking on the role of the evaluator, I had embarked upon the case study of schools in an effort to understand the dynamics of HCP's experimental classrooms. (9) It is also hardly surprising that such close up studies of social action in institutionalised settings with a view to evaluative judgment and reporting should evoke a reappraisal of relationships between investigator and investigated, or that the response to such a reappraisal should lead to the establishment of participant rights on a scale not previously contemplated by the research community. (10)

It is also quite logical that this should lead to an increasing preference for methods of evaluation and vocabularies of reporting more accessible to the judgment and critical faculties of those whose work is represented to others by evaluators.

Even then it is very doubtful whether the tradition of what we now call naturalistic evaluation would have developed in Britain were it not for the fact that within a short time of embarking on these unorthodox activities we made contact first with CIRCE, and then a few others who were reviewing and reconceptualising the more established tradition of American evaluation. Stake's 'countenance' paper became, I think, the baseline for all of us, his notion of evaluators as 'story-tellers' a crucial, liberating concept. And when, in the seventies, HCP suffered a rapid change of climate as the economy began to plunge and managerial accountability to rise, the early work of House (11) and Apple (12) exploring the political dimensions of relationships between evaluation, ideology and technocracy helped us to anticipate the end of the

golden years of professional curriculum control and the emergence of increasingly powerful and coercive forms of central political intervention in the affairs of schools.

None of us living in Thatcher's Britain from which potent opposition and virtually all checks and balances bar, so far, the ballot box have been eliminated or subdued, would now deny that evaluation is a political activity rather than the technico/judicial activity we once fondly assumed. Stenhouse may well have been right, within the egalitarian spirit of the sixties, to have seen evaluation as an unnecessary intrusion into the evolving logic of an education system under the command of principled educational professions in pursuit of excellence for all. In the spirit of the eighties, with an all-powerful government demanding evaluation of everything that is charged to the public purse, the question posed by some of us as the Humanities Project, and with it the era of teacher power, came to a close, has assumed an imperative status. If evaluation is about what happens to people, then what is the impact of what we do on the distribution of power? How can we assist the redistribution of power in times of gross imbalance through the nature of the knowledge we make available or deny, through the language we use, and the channels we choose for the distribution of information? Twenty years on from the trial schools of the Humanities Project and forty years after the Eight Year Study we see the problems of evaluation so much more clearly than we did then. Perhaps we can now concentrate on solving them.

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