CURRICULUM EVALUATION, RESEARCH AND THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

Stephen Arnold

ACU National Canberra Campus (Signadou)

This paper was written in 1989, resulting from a school-based curriculum evaluation project undertaken by the author. It is offered as an historical document for consideration within the context of changes to curriculum policies and priorities over the decade and more which followed. Of particular interest is its placement immediately prior to the release of the first National Curriculum documents in the early 1990s.

This decade *[the 1980s]* has seen tremendous growth in the field of school-based curriculum development, both in Australia and overseas, with a corresponding increase in the level of professional responsibility accorded to teachers in the processes of curriculum development, implementation and, inevitably, evaluation. It is with this last feature that we are concerned here, investigating the development of the role of "teacher as evaluator" in Australian classrooms and some consideration of the ways in which teachers, in accepting the responsibility for such a role, may need to respond to recent pressures and local and national demands. It is the proposal of this paper that, in spite of increasing difficulties at a number of levels, the role of teacher as evaluator must continue to become increasingly important in Australian secondary schools, and research must continue to be devoted, not only to the development of effective models by which such duties may be carried out by willing teachers, but also to investigating the means by which teachers may be encouraged to accept the notion that such a role is an essential part of their responsibility. While the Curriculum Development Centre (through their **Teachers as Evaluators Project**, Hughes, 1979; Davis, 1980) has been devoting considerable efforts towards the former for the past decade, the evidence of experience at school level points to the fact that that their approach to the latter problem may have been less than successful. As noted by Russell (in Skilbeck, 1984; 245) much of the effect of the large-scale evaluation projects of the seventies has been *"…the mystifying of evaluation for the classroom practitioner. For teachers, evaluation appeared to be something that somebody else did."*

BACKGROUND

The field of Curriculum Evaluation is itself of only relatively recent origin. Although raised to prominence as an essential part of the curriculum development process in Tyler's influential objectives-based model (Tyler, 1949), Hughes *et al* (1981) point out that "Curriculum Evaluation" was not to be found as a descriptor for information retrieval before 1967, with only two works published in that decade, compared to twenty-seven in the latter half of the seventies (Fraser, 1986). This decade has seen a huge growth in this field of knowledge, largely due to the increased importance of the movement towards school-based curriculum development. Evaluation has moved away from the previous identification with student assessment and the psychometric testing tradition to become a rich and diverse field characterised by a proliferation of models espousing a range of methodologies and value stances. In fact, the current state of the field has been criticised as being confused as to its nature and purposes (Parsons, 1976; Worthen, 1978; and Nevo in House, 1986). Parlett and Hamilton (1972) note that *"…as a developing field of study, evaluation proceeds in the absence of coherent or agreed frames of reference."* (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972; 2) This, of course, makes it extremely difficult for the non-specialist to attempt to make sense of, let alone use in the classroom, much current knowledge concerning Curriculum Evaluation. As a result, evaluation was a field largely left to "the professionals" during the first decade of its rise to prominence, until a variety of factors turned the focus onto small-scale projects at the local and classroom level. As outlined by Russell (in Skilbeck, 1984), these included:

- An emphasis upon school-based decision making with regard to curriculum development;
- Changes to the Inspectorial system in countries such as the UK and, later, Australia;
- Major national curriculum development projects giving way to local ones which were more relevant and more likely to be successful in their implementation;
- Accountability issues becoming increasingly important;

- Academic studies in the field of curriculum evaluation, both in published materials and tertiary courses at all levels, increasing in number and availability.

In combination, these features have led to an increasing awareness of the potential for the role of the classroom teacher as assuming central importance in the curriculum evaluation process. As to *why* these changes have occurred since the mid-seventies, Davis (1980) supports Pusey's claim that the

> *"…cultural pluralism of Western society has, in a sense, run its course and dissolved most of our formerly compelling philosophical or ideological images of the public order."* (Davis, 1980; 3)

Davis notes that there is no longer general agreement as to the nature and purposes of schooling in our society, and this has led to, and to some extent been caused by, a rejection of centralised authority, and a demand for greater community involvement in school affairs. Whatever the reasons, school-based curriculum development was a most potent force for development of the field of Curriculum Evaluation worldwide throughout most of this decade.

Recent events at the state and national levels here in Australia may appear to sound the death-knell for such a decentralised philosophy. In comparison with states such as Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, New South Wales has always been more centrally dominant in its control of education; school-based initiatives have been embraced at best cautiously. The change of government in this state in 1988 has seen moves back to a far more rigid system of control – in essence, a rejection of much of the philosophy of the school-based curriculum development movement in the face of pressure from groups advocating "back-to-basics" philosophies and critical of what they perceive as declining standards, and also because of growing pressures for accountability in a distinctly tight economic climate. There are indications that such a move is not confined to this state alone, but that it may be more of a nationwide trend.

At the Federal level, this same climate has increasingly seen economic worth set as the criterion for judging educational value in decisions and policies concerning the directions for education in the 1990s. Surprisingly, while such pressures may well bode ill for the future of school-based curriculum development, they may have the effect of strengthening the grounds for school-based curriculum evaluation.

THE PURPOSES OF SCHOOL-BASED EVALUATION

Scriven (1967) distinguished between the *goals* and the *roles* of Curriculum Evaluation. If we accept here the major goal of evaluation as being that suggested by Stufflebeam *et al* (1971), *"…delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives"* (in Hughes *et al*, 1981; 9) then what we recognise as problematic for the teacher as evaluator is the role which the evaluation is to play, or the *purpose* to which it will be put. While March (1986) points to a diversity of different purposes to which evaluation can be put in the school setting, Russell (in Skilbeck, 1984) singles out three: Vocational or educational placement, accountability and course improvement. Of these, it is the last two which are most relevant in this context to the classroom teacher as evaluator. Hughes *et al* in an overview of the approaches of the various State Education Departments in Australia towards this question note that:

> *"Policy statements identify two major purposes of evaluation: to improve curriculum offerings and to provide information for accountability."*
> (Hughes *et al*, 1981; 12)

While recognising that evaluation may serve a diversity of secondary purposes (such as those outlined by Scriven (1967; 40-41) which include teacher development, data-gathering for funding purposes, or even as a tool for gaining or wielding political power within an institution) it is helpful here to consider these two as being the *primary* roles which evaluation is likely to play for the classroom teacher.

Traditionally, the role of course improvement has been the dominant one for Curriculum Evaluation (Tyler, 1949; Cronbach, 1967). It remains central in the more recent climate of school-based curriculum development, but now shares centre stage with its accountability function. In fact, as noted above, recent pressures are likely to see the latter take precedence as economic constraints become increasingly the measure by which educational worth is judged. Partly as a result of the increasing community involvement associated with the school-based development movement, schools are increasingly accountable, not just to Government, but to a wider range of audiences which include parents, potential employers and the students themselves. Schools have lost any remaining vestige of that "glorious autonomy" which may have

been enjoyed in the past, and evaluation is unquestionably the tool by which schools must answer to all those with a stake in the educational process and product.

The other feature which proves useful to specify at this stage is the *level* of the evaluation within the school setting. The teacher as evaluator is most likely to be involved at one of two broad levels, which to a large extent will influence the nature of the evaluation and the means by which it may best be accomplished. These levels are essentially:

- The **individual** or **departmental** level, not distinguished here because both will be primarily concerned with the *course improvement* function of evaluation. The teacher, alone or with colleagues, is interested to assess the worth of a particular teaching programme, whether innovative or traditional, and to make decisions regarding ways in which it may be improved. Naturally, such a role is not without some accountability component, but the primary goal of the evaluation is to provide data for decision-making by which the learning experiences associated with the programme may be made more effective. A smaller scale version of this perspective may involve the evaluation of specific teaching materials or even methods.

- The **whole-school** level, in which teachers are involved in assessing the effectiveness of the total curriculum offered by a school. While such an evaluation may furnish information, which may be useful for course improvement, it is unlikely to be specific enough in this regard to consider this as its major purpose. Rather, such an evaluation is almost invariably undertaken for reasons of *accountability*, either formally (as in the case of a non-Government school preparing for Inspection for the purposes of registration or certification) or informally (at the request of such audiences as the school Executive, the school Board or the school parent organisation, among others). Depending on the means by which such an evaluation is conducted, it can provide an invaluable overview of that which Parlett and Hamilton (1972) referred to as the *learning milieu* of the school. Such an overview could be most useful to teachers subsequently engaged in the smaller scale programme evaluations described above, a possibility which is discussed further below.

It is apparent that the nature of the role adopted by the teacher as evaluator will be largely determined by reference to these classifications as to the *primary purpose* of the evaluation and the *level* at which it is to be conducted.

SOME THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Before attempting to begin an evaluation at any level and for any purpose within a school setting, the teacher/evaluator must make the attempt to come to grips with the various models which have been proposed in the literature over the past twenty years. As noted above, this is no easy task, with so many apparently conflicting and seemingly incompatible points of view. In rationalising the very real confusion induced by such diversity, writers such as Popham (1975) have attempted to group the various models under general descriptive classifications, which are not purported to be exhaustive or non-overlapping, such as that which follows:

- **Goal attainment** models, such as that of Tyler (1949);
- **Judgemental** models emphasising *intrinsic criteria*, such as the "accreditation" or "inspection" system in which representatives of some relevant body visit the school and judge the worth of its curricular offerings;
- **Judgemental** models emphasising *extrinsic criteria*, such as those of Scriven (1967) and Stake (1967); and
- **Decision-facilitation** models, such as Stufflebeam's Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) model (1969) and Provus' Discrepancy Evaluation model (1972).

More recently has seen the growth of models which view evaluation as stripped of its traditional "judgemental" component, and replaced with a descriptive, "illuminative" role; the task of the evaluator is to provide a rich and accurate *portrayal* of the object of the evaluation by which others may experience its strengths and weaknesses vicariously and hence make their own informed decisions regarding its effectiveness or worth (Parlett and Hamilton (1975), Stake (1975) and, more recently, Kemmis and McTaggert (1982)).

Simpler still, it is possible to recognise in the current state of the field of Curriculum Evaluation two extremes – that which Holt (1985) describes as *traditional* and the *modern* approaches to evaluation, which may be readily deduced from the outline above. Writers such as Worthen (1978) note that considerable time and effort has been spent distinguishing between and defending or opposing contrasting models of evaluation, when the most logical stance for the modern evaluator to take is the eclectic one – each of the models has something to commend it in various situations, and what is most required of the teacher seeking to undertake an evaluation is to determine the purpose of the evaluation and to see which approaches will best achieve this. It would appear to be the case that certain models and approaches may be better suited to particular needs and situations than others, and some attempt is made below to outline these.

PROBLEMS FOR THE INTERNAL EVALUATOR

While the problems associated with any undertaking as complex as an evaluation are numerous, certain major pitfalls await the teacher/evaluator and must be faced squarely in advance. These are the problems of *time, bias and error,* and *ethical considerations* (after Davis, 1980).

The greatest hurdle and, in many ways, the most difficult to overcome, is the problem of finding the time needed to conduct a worthwhile evaluation. Such an undertaking is going to take much patience and perseverance on the part of the individual or group seeking to carry it out effectively. While release time may be made available to the central figures conducting the evaluation (and even this cannot be assumed – many school-based evaluations are expected without the granting of any such consideration) it is most unlikely that time will be allowed to those who are to provide the data for the evaluation – in particular, the other teachers, but also students, parents and others who may be surveyed, interviewed and otherwise involved in the process. If such demands are more than minimal (and they may well be) then securing and maintaining the cooperation of such groups becomes a very real consideration for the evaluator.

It is almost impossible to conduct an evaluation of any depth without the possibility of errors occurring from a variety of sources – at the gathering of information, the processing of information, the drawing of conclusions, even the

presentation of results. The instruments used, the human element in answering and even understanding questions, even the directions of the evaluator all may contribute to the likelihood of error. Tenbrink (1974) suggests three useful steps by which this likelihood may be reduced:

1.   *Relate everything you do to your reason for evaluating.*

2.   *At every step in the process of evaluation, be clear, concise and consistent.*

3.   *Always obtain a representative sample of the information needed.*

(in Davis, 1980; 57)

The problem of error is, perhaps, even more of a threat to the teacher/evaluator who presumably is not a professional in this field and must be doubly cautious. Even more a problem for the internal evaluator is that of bias – certainly, the teacher must be prepared for accusations to this effect from others, and should take steps to be able to allay such fears. The three steps above provide a good defence against bias as well as error, and would be well coupled with tactics such as making public at the outset the values and biases of the evaluator(s) and, where possible, the use of a neutral "third party" who may act as "critic" or even as "adversary". Such an approach must be considered almost a necessity when it comes to evaluation of one's own goals in a programme. Such a perspective might be aided by general information gathered from parents, students and teachers concerning their perceived educational priorities – and then applying this information to the evaluation of a specific programme.

Any evaluator must come to terms with the ethical considerations inherent in any such value-based activity, but this is particularly relevant for the internal evaluator, who must continue to work with those affected by the eventual results of the evaluation, and yet presumably has a commitment to presenting results which are accurate and truthful. Inevitably, there will be those threatened by any form of evaluation, which impinges on their domain in some way. The steps outlined above are helpful in this context also, as would be some explicit recognition by the evaluator of the factors of *ownership* and *confidentiality* of the results. A very real measure of sensitivity is an essential requirement for anyone contemplating the role of teacher as evaluator.

A PROPOSED MODEL

With the above factors taken into consideration, it may be possible at this stage to identify and recommend some features, which may be helpful to the teacher who wishes to conduct an evaluation of some programme or project in which he has played a part. Most commonly in the context of school-based curriculum development, it is the actual course developer who is charged with the responsibility for the evaluation of her own programme; it is unlikely that the evaluator in this context will have been uninvolved in either the design or the implementation of the object of evaluation. Even at the school level, it must be reasoned that the teacher/evaluator will be conducting an evaluation of her own school.

As recommended above, a good place to start at either level is to attempt to make explicit as much as possible of the *learning milieu* (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972). This may be done by seeking to ascertain from all the major parties who have a stake in the school curriculum – whether in terms of the process or the product – what they see as the *educational priorities* of the school. Parents, teachers, students, potential employers, representatives of the system of which the school may be a part: all have varying perspectives, which need to be made explicit. This may feasibly be accomplished by some form of survey or questionnaire (preferably with responses which allow some degree of freedom in their results) and interviews with a sample of each group to enable clarification of some of the trends, which may appear to be significant from the initial survey. It has been noted that there are problems implicit in such a method of data collection. Russell (1984) points out that "…*the main method used by teachers to gain information is undoubtedly the questionnaire method. Even when the method is inappropriate for the information that is required, teachers seem to rush headlong into survey techniques.*" (in Skilbeck, 1984; 253) Valid and reliable survey instruments are extremely difficult to construct, and trends emanating from statistical analysis of such measures should be verified by more personal interview methods.

It is possible in this way, then, to produce some form of overview of the needs and demands of the school community, and such an overview may provide necessary criteria by which the effectiveness or appropriateness of programmes and their goals may be judged. The recognition of the value stances of the various audiences of an

evaluation is essential if it is to serve the purpose of providing them with the relevant data to enable effective decision-making.

The next factor to be considered in a teacher-based evaluation is undoubtedly the *process* of the programme or the curriculum in the school – in other words, how is it being implemented, and is this implementation effective? The early objectives-based models of evaluation were criticised for focussing only on the *product* of the curriculum, not on how this product was achieved; hence, they tended to be ineffective in providing more specific information for course improvement (Scriven, 1967; Parlett and Hamilton, 1972; Kliebard in Pinar, 1975). To use Scriven's (1967) term, the *formative* aspect of an evaluation is at least as important as its *summative* aspect. Obviously, the teacher as evaluator is in a particularly good position to conduct such an evaluation, far more so than the professional external evaluator who must rely on very limited experience of the classroom situation in the particular school. The use of *colleague consultation* strategies and the *clinical supervision* model (Goldhammer, 1969; Cagan, 1973; Smyth, 1983) provide effective and non-threatening ways in which the evaluator may observe and assess the actual classroom processes which contribute to the effectiveness or otherwise of a programme.

The process of the curriculum must also be evaluated by reference to the participants through informal discussion (individually and in groups) and formal interviews. Such methods contribute to the *portrayal* of the programme required by writers such as Stake (1973). Structure may be given to the gathering of such data by the use of any of the comprehensive models, such as Stake's earlier *Countenance* model (1967), although such an undertaking may well be too daunting for the amateur evaluator. Such a model has as an important feature the distinction between *intents* and *observations*, drawing to the evaluator's attention the fact that what was intended is often not that which results in course implementation. Further, it requires the *standards* by which judgement is to occur to be made explicit at the outset – another key point for the teacher as evaluator. Russell (1984) outlines a useful checklist for the internal evaluator, which would serve to guide the teacher in considering the type of information which should be collected, and possible ways in which this may be accomplished. Davis (1980) also presents a comprehensive "how-to-do-it" for all levels of teacher evaluation.

Although goal-achievement models, when used in isolation, have come in for considerable criticism since Tyler first proposed his model in 1949 (Scriven, 1967;

Parlett and Hamilton, 1972; Stenhouse, 1975; Kliebard in Pinar, 1975) the technique is still an effective measure of one aspect of the effectiveness of a course. In providing information on the extent to which a course is effective in achieving its pre-specified objectives, a range of audiences have at least some basis by which it may be appraised. When used in combination with the methods outlined above, measures of goal achievement can still be a valuable tool for the teacher as evaluator.

In the preceding section, we have considered such features as the "learning milieu", the evaluation of the goals of the programme, the implementation or "process" of the curriculum, and the extent to which a course achieves its goals, all in the context of the teacher as evaluator. The final factor to consider is that of the final *summative* aspect of the evaluation, and here again the teacher is placed in a very difficult role. In attempting to decide in any absolute sense the worth or success of a programme or course of instruction, any individual or single group is doomed to failure; the worth must be considered different for each of the different audiences of the evaluation – each with their own values and perspective. In this sense, then, the teacher as evaluator may at best aim to provide the various parties involved with accurate and clear information, which will aid in their decision-making regarding the course of study. The alternative is to identify the primary purpose of the evaluation and the judge the results in these terms.

It is worth noting in this respect that one of the most convincing arguments for the increasing involvement of teachers in the process of curriculum evaluation lies in the nature of the potential audiences of such evaluation. While there may be a diversity of interested parties, in many respects the most important audience of any school-based evaluation will be the teachers themselves. If the evaluation is to have any real worth, if it is to be utilised effectively, the one group which it must reach will be the teachers. It is they who must recognise the worth of the evaluation; it is they who must take action to implement these findings. Certainly there will be other interested and important parties, but if an evaluation does not reach the teachers then it will not reach the classroom. And what better way to ensure that it is accessible and relevant to the concerns and needs of teachers than to have been conducted by teachers?

TEACHER AS RESEARCHER

The evaluation models of the sixties and at least the early seventies were, in the main, of large scale and conducted by professional evaluators. Scriven (1967) was not alone in his belief that *"…the very idea that every school system, or every teacher, can today be regarded as capable of meaningful evaluation of his own performance is … absurd."* (Scriven, 1967; 53). Nonetheless, there were those even in those early years who opposed this notion, and proclaimed the role of the teacher as central to the task of curriculum evaluation. Most notable of these was Lawrence Stenhouse, who advocated what he termed a *research model* of curriculum development, in which *"…evaluation should lead development and be integrated with it"* (Stenhouse, 1975; 122) and the teacher's role is central. Stenhouse, however, envisaged the teacher's role as that of *researcher*, and the curriculum in the nature of an experiment to be tested and learned from: *"A curriculum without shortcomings has no prospect of improvement and has therefore been insufficiently ambitious."* (Stenhouse, 1975; 125)

It is in this context that we approach the second of the problems cited in the introduction – that of inducing teachers to accept that curriculum evaluation is not *"…something that somebody else did…"* (Russell, 1984; 245) but is quite definitely their responsibility. It is useful here to borrow another of Stenhouse's concepts, that of *extended professionalism*, defined as *"…a capacity for autonomous, professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom research procedures."* (Stenhouse, 1975; 144) Here in Australia this concept has been further developed in the notion of *action research* as proposed by Kemmis *et al* (1982) which places the teacher in the role of educational researcher and has been described as *"…an evaluation process at the individual-classroom level."* (Russell, 1984; 252) It seems clear that encouraging teachers to adopt a reflective stance concerning their own teaching is an essential pre-requisite for them to become evaluators of their own work. As a means of systematically introducing a programme or innovation, and collecting information about this process, Action research would appear to be the perfect tool for the teacher evaluator. The four "*action moments*" – *plan, act, observe, reflect* – when carried out in a cyclic fashion allow a dynamic study of the effects of an intervention, and so are superbly suited to the task of curriculum evaluation. Again, models such as

Stake's Countenance Model blend well with the Action research process in the context of intended and observed transactions.

In encouraging teachers to see themselves as evaluators, a useful approach has been taken by Dekkers *et al* (1984) who propose an *issues-based approach to school evaluation*, in which teachers base their evaluations, not upon political directives, but upon issues, which they regard as significant and important in their school situation. If teachers are encouraged to adopt an Action Research approach to their teaching then such an issues-based approach would lead them naturally into the role of school-based curriculum evaluators. While such a development in the professional responsibility of teachers would obviously be advantageous to all concerned with the educational process, it is a cause of some concern that, with the almost total removal of government-funded Inservice programmes over the past two years (since the demise of the National Inservice Education Committee in 1987) and the increasingly uncertain political climate surrounding education at the State level, teachers will neither be prepared nor encouraged to undertake such extended professionalism. Perhaps the current moves towards Award restructuring for teachers may provide some degree of incentive in this regard. While the professionalism of the majority of teachers has never been in doubt, many classroom practitioners remain to be convinced of the worth of both curriculum evaluation and curriculum research and, more importantly, of the nature of their own role in this regard.

CONCLUSION

We have observed that the role of teacher as evaluator is likely to remain the target for continued research and development in Australian schools, both for purposes of course improvement and accountability. The work of the Curriculum Development Centre through their *Teachers as Evaluators Project* (1978-) has ensured that teachers have well-presented and appropriate guidelines by which they may conduct such school-based evaluation. What remains problematic at the end of this decade is how to encourage teachers to accept the challenge that is offered to them – to see themselves as capable of conducting relevant educational research at their own classroom level, and as responsible for the evaluation of their own work in a truly professional sense.

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